

# Culture, Faith and Liberation

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Our age is marked by two prominent features: on the one hand there is the ever-growing globalization of technology, economy and communication media creating a techno-culture with all its consequences, and on the other hand there is a relentless search for the preservation of cultural identities and the consequent regional tensions. This phenomenon brings into focus a new agenda for theology in the form of a debate on the inter-relatedness of culture, faith and liberation.

It is commonly accepted today that theological talk, specially in the Asian-Indian context, forms part of the quest of the human being for the ultimate. Knowledge is sought for the sake of and in self-realization.<sup>1</sup> In Asian culture God-talk is made relative to God-experience. Theology is not primarily an act of illuminating the mind as it is a committed listening to, deciphering of and realizing God's word. From the Indian view-point, religious quest, theological search and way of life belong to one 'ultimate human attitude'. One cannot make watertight compartments of science, culture and theology. They form one holistic perspective. Asian theology is therefore 'our way of sensing and doing things as revealed in our people's struggle for spiritual and social emancipation'.<sup>2</sup> It involves faith-listening to all possible words spoken by God<sup>3</sup> in order to give meaning to this earth and its people. The quest for salvation is a cultural and religious act; similarly various cultural and religious traditions do not render themselves meaningful unless viewed from the perspective of this quest.

However in Christian theology today, experts have drawn out an international theological defence strategy according to which the African continent should engage itself in inculturation, the Asian countries in dialogue with other religions, and the Latin Americans with liberation theology. The so-called first world theology shall concern itself with more complex issues of further technologising theology. Such 'foreign policy model theology' is not only artificial but is alien to Asian perspectives. In this paper we shall argue that, apart from the Asian holistic perspective, the present state of debate on culture, religion and development

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highlights the need for an integral approach. We shall begin by explaining the political and ethical implications of the concept of culture. This will be followed by an analysis of the cultural implications of developmental theories: The assumptions and consequences of modern high-tech-culture call for an alternate model. In our search for an alternate model, we cannot ignore our cultural past nor the role of religion. The Catholic Church's teachings on culture and development, though often runs parallel, provide us with a significant contribution towards an integral approach. We shall then draw up a general framework for an inculcated-liberation for Asia that takes into account its religiosity and its cultures.

### **1. Culture : Its Political and Ethical Overtones :**

Culture is, according to C. Geertz,

...a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and their attitudes towards life.<sup>4</sup>

However over the centuries there has been a metamorphosis of the word 'culture' which is very revealing indicator in our discussion. In the middle ages culture meant 'highbrow culture' of fine arts, opera, poetry and education. Such a classicist approach gave way to an ethnologist approach in the wake of colonial adventures. Culture then was referred to the cumulative achievements of peoples in knowledge, beliefs, customs and other capabilities over a period of time.<sup>5</sup> The Western imperialist expansion into the Americas, Africa and Asia brought about a new awareness of cultural pluralism. This resulted in the study and research in cultural anthropology. This new-found science categorized certain cultures as primitive and others civilized and certain areas or countries as advanced and others backward. This sort of 'temporal and spatial' application of the term culture, assumed unquestionably that Europe was the point of reference with a highly cultured people and place. The socio-political philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Hume in general adopted a classicist and universal view of cultures. However with the emergence of social sciences, the understanding of culture received a significant turn. The Marxian analysis popularized the idea that a dominant culture is the product of a dominant class.

The idea of the dominating class are, in all epochs, dominating ideas. That means that the class which is the material

dominating power in the society is, at the same time, its spiritual dominating power. The class which disposes of the means of material production disposes therefore, at the same time, of the means of intellectual production, in such a way that, generally speaking, the ideas of those who are deprived of the means of intellectual production are subjected to that dominating class.<sup>6</sup>

Marx might have been biased towards a deterministic role of the economic factor and so could concede only a one way process of the dominant class influencing the subordinate classes. However one cannot ignore the fact the owners of the means of production do influence the values and cultures of the subordinate classes and that social being influence the consciousness of the society. The collapse of the communist regimes and near total hegemony of one super-power over the international institutions today, only substantiate this theory.

The various liberation movements of the post-Second W.War period have changed the map of the world. These *liberation movements* were, political and social in nature but beneath them were the deeper aspirations of affirming cultural identity and emancipation. We shall refer to only two representatives in this regard. Julius Nyrere said from an African context:

Of all the crimes of colonialism there is one worse than the attempt to make us believe we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that what we did have, was worthless—something of which we should be ashamed, instead of a source of pride.<sup>7</sup>

Already in 1905 Gandhi had formulated the blueprint of his vision for India, portraying a new concept of culture and a new method for cultural emancipation. “Civilization”, he said, “is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.”<sup>8</sup> Here the word ‘duty’ is to be understood in the wider sense of *dharma* which has ontological and ontic significance in the Hindu theology.

Even as the neo-colonial thought reluctantly acknowledged the fact of cultural pluralism and even as the Marxist analysis brought about the economic and political implications of culture, both neo-colonial countries and the Marxists failed to recognize a more radical cultural metamorphosis that had been ushered in by industry and technology which would have far reaching repercussions on people’s culture. The seers like Henry Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi had warned the world and the emerging independent nations of the impact of technology. Though the industrial-technological culture has come to stay with

us, and has undeniably increased the comforts of life, its assumptions are being seriously questioned today.

## **2. Culture and Development :**

If culture represents the symbolic system of our knowledge about and attitude towards life, development of peoples comes under its purview. Nonetheless by the linkage between culture and development has not been always recognized by the protagonists of cultures and by the liberators of peoples. The debate on 'culture and development' seems to revolve around a distorted understanding of development. The distortion originates from an 'epistemological error' of converting the spatial category into the temporal category and the temporal into the spatial.<sup>9</sup> The geo-cultural differences of non-Western nations are interpreted as stages in their development towards the present 'Modern West'. The ancient culture and civilizations of the non-West are evaluated as primitive in terms of their distance from the 'developed West'. The right model, both spatial and temporal, that emerges is the Western technological development. The underlying criterion is a technology centred economic development. Epistemologically viewing, one finds a dialectical relationship between one's understanding of culture and that of development.

Various questions arise from this nexus between culture and development. Can we attribute massive poverty to cultural factors? Or is it a particular type of development itself that is causing massive poverty and degradation of cultures? The problems of mass poverty and persisting 'underdevelopment' have been attributed to lack of motivation among the people, regional, linguistic and ethnic divisions, increase in population, defence spending etc. However going by these criteria of development, one finds that the so-called developed countries are equally if not more divided linguistically and ethnically and that they spend enough of their resources on defence purposes. The search for the causes for the massive poverty cannot stop at these factors nor can it ignore the historical reasons for such a situation today. George Soarge Prabhu says it succinctly :

It is the result of centuries of colonial depredation which bled the Third world countries white (think of the gold plundered from Latin America, the millions of slaves hijacked out of Africa, the vast quantities of raw materials drained out of India and China at give away prices), and which deliberately prevented industrial growth.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps it is these historical factors, combined with the particular type of development that is causing and perpetuating mass poverty.

The post-war and the post-colonial period witnessed an unprecedented concern for development of the war-torn countries and the newly liberated nations. The development model proposed depended on the GNP (Gross National Product) and per capita income for measuring growth. With unequal ownership of resources and uneven distribution of income prevailing both at the national and international level with a colonial or neo-colonial market system, the development model is not only unscientific but came to be suspected by most of the countries. The relevant question was: whose growth, per capita income and development are we talking about? More and more social thinkers are of the opinion that development issues are necessarily linked to questions of justice, liberation and culture.<sup>11</sup> Besides, the development theory relies heavily on industrial economy. It is arguable whether industrial economy has helped solving mass poverty or it has aggravated poverty. As Jessica Mathews writes in *The Guardian Weekly*: "After decades of rapid growth in agricultural productivity, including the Green Revolution and steady expansion of cropland at the expense of forest and wilderness, there are more hungry people on the planet now than ever in history."<sup>12</sup> Can this be attributed to the very nature of a technology-centred life? Technology has an innate urge to maximize production for which an indefinite multiplication of wants is created, and an ideology is established that '...progress lies in an indefinite multiplication of wants, and happiness lies in an endless gratification of these wants by material means.'<sup>13</sup> This lust for material goods in turn strengthens the spirit of competition. The magnitude of technology has reached such a proportion that it determines the political and economic powers, at once centralizing and globalizing them. Such technological globalization when allied with the huge armament factories cause multi-pronged violence, dependent economy and lingering mass poverty. Besides, the techno-culture manipulates, overpowers and erodes indigenous and ancient cultures and threatens human survival with ecological disaster.<sup>14</sup> However it is to be admitted that technology has come to stay and it has its benefits for humankind. Precisely because of its benefits for human progress and in order to humanize it further we shall call into question some of its assumptions.

### 3. Assumptions and Consequences of High-tech culture :

Technology has come to be identified with science. Science means in this context 'objective and true' knowledge, and the control and predictability that go with it. Such 'true' knowledge is achieved when a person isolates or splits off his cognition from his feelings, ethics and from the subjects of his enquiry. This type of objective knowledge also wards off 'transcendence' as un-scientific as it is not observable.<sup>15</sup> Such assumed scientific objectivity of technology is nothing but a system without soul. Emotion-free, hard-headed and performance-minded truism of technology naturally glorifies 'masculinity and hyper-adulthood' as its natural ally and devalues emotions, non-rational self and feels embarrassed at humanness and femininity.

Modern technology can at best be called technicism because it assumes that all technological problems should be resolved by technology and poses itself as problem solver to modern man. The symbolic dimension of human life is ruled out as primitive and the transcendence bracketed out as un-scientific.

These technological assumptions cause a division and opposition between the person and the natural world (the ecological crisis), between man and woman (man against woman), between person and human nature itself (human life issues such as child abuse, abortion, euthanasia etc).<sup>16</sup>

In a techono-culture progress is measured by the level of consumption. Eric Fromm sums up the attitude of modern consumerist society thus :

[...] to consume is one form of having, and perhaps the most important one for today's affluent industrial societies. Consuming has ambiguous qualities. It relieves anxiety because what one has cannot be taken away; but it also requires one to consume ever more, because previous consumption soon loses its satisfactory character. Modern consumers may identify themselves by the formula: I am = what I have and what I consume.<sup>17</sup>

The production and sale of deadly armaments in the gigantic armament factories in so called First World countries and the resultant escalation of violence and cultural conflicts in the so called Third World countries have reached a tragic stage.

The displacement of peoples who are traditionally dependent upon the land and the sea—the dalits and the tribals in India—due to decisions shaped by technology-oriented consumerist economy is another drama of our times. Consequently people

crowd into major industrial cities turning them into inhuman locations.

Technology has posed itself as modern progressive culture and its over- powering, multi-national character and its hold on the media has found its way into the privacy of each home. It dandles modernism in front of the poor and the poor nations, as the thing to be desired and the poor try to imitate it and the inevitable failure leads to frustration and violence. The high-tech media culture pretends to create a world culture which is nothing but a 'monoculture' undermining the plurality of the existing traditions and cultures, symbols and arts. As R. Kothari says :

[...] the world is becoming too uniform, too standardized, too dominated by a single conception of life and its meaning, with little scope for other available cultural and historical propensities and potentialities ; and that such a domination of a single conception has led to political and cultural domination by a single region of the world over the others.<sup>18</sup>

Three factors stand out clearly: a technology-based development makes unlimited demands on the limited supplies of the resources of the world ; secondly technological culture has political, moral, religious and ethnological implications. Developmental questions are cultural issues. Thirdly the problems of technological culture are not merely of the third world. It is a human and global problem. "Every threat to the earth is a threat to ourselves ; every wound inflicted on the Earth is our own wound."<sup>19</sup>

#### **4. Culture and Religion :**

In this debate on culture and development what would be the role of religion ? Already it was noted that a transcendental point of reference is an issue for theory of knowledge. Besides, in the Indian context religion is acquiring potential roles that can no more be ignored.

Culture is a social phenomenon and its symbols are the product of society and its ways of life. The symbolic level is expressive of the cognitive level that includes the values, the world-views, and thus the totality of human experience. Religion as 'the ultimate concern' is a significant part of this totality and is at the root of culture providing it a transcendental, critical dimension. Thanks to its ultimate concern, religion plays a significant role in relativizing the given modalities of a particular culture. Religious symbols have long lasting motivating power and critical edge. In this context some would argue that we should distinguish between

religion and faith where faith plays this critical function whereas religion turns manipulative and oppressive. However faith does not exist in a vacuum but always in a religio-cultural context.

A particular religion may be co-terminus with a given culture or a culture may accommodate several religions where religion becomes a sub-culture of the host-culture reinforcing its essential values in its own way. Similarly a given religion may accommodate different cultures. Theoretically religion may enjoy an independent status with regard to cultures. At the same time religion needs culture because it requires the mediation of culture in order to articulate its experience and embody it through meaningful symbols, values and world-views. There is therefore some sort of mutuality existing between culture and religion with the potential for liberation or enslavement.

The role of religion in changing and shaping cultures is not too obvious in history. Millions have been killed as enemies of Christianity for example, or enslaved so that they get Christian civilization or accused of paganism and heresy and thus denied their human rights and wounded their cultural psyche for ever.

Likewise Hinduism has justified the oppressive caste system and untouchability in the name of religion.<sup>20</sup> Religion seems to have enforced an oppressive social system by providing it with religious sanction. On the other hand the transcendental referent in religions have enabled them either to legitimize genuine social structures or to challenge and relativize oppressive socio-cultural systems, and thus helped transform them.<sup>21</sup> Structural change, if it has to be effective and lasting, should be accompanied by the transformation of values, change in thinking patterns, removal of negative self-image and the injection of self-confidence. Faith and religion seem to have such a transforming and integrating capacity in-built in them.

With regard to culture changing religion, the transformation can be due to the various socio-economic and political developments which in turn challenge religious belief systems and practices. A typical example may be the on-going secularization and marginalization of religion itself in the Western societies due to the influence of technological culture. As Peter Berger submits, the contemporary high-tech culture has very subtly yet very effectively marginalised religious values and is denying religion a role in creating society's priorities.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the encounter of European culture with Hinduism effected changes in its religious practices in the early nineteenth century. Incidentally study of Gandhian struggle has revealed that the Satyagraha method with its deep roots in Indian culture and traditions caused significant



transformations in the religious practices in Hinduism such as untouchability, temple entry for the Harijans etc. Besides, the genuinely religious base of the movement (I name it *satyagraha* religiousness) has helped the multi-cultural and pluri-religious people, including women) to be organized, made fearless and prepared to stand for justice. The Gandhian experiment has shown how religiosity and holistic culture can be truly liberating forces.<sup>23</sup>

Psycho-anthropological theories abound in explaining the inter-relationship between culture and religion. Durkheim pointed out the social functions of religious taboos and symbols; Marx could envisage only an opiating function for religion in the society. Of late R. Girard has enunciated a more complex theory showing how the basic desire in the humans follow a mimetic course and end up in rivalry and violence. From anthropological and literary sources he concludes that the cultural and religious symbols and rituals are human means to contain, to divert and if possible to eliminate social violence projecting a sacred figure in the process. Religion has thus a mediating function of containing violence and diverting it to a third object, and often in the process siding with the victim. His theories on desire and mimesis seem to be true with regard to the role played by the high-tech culture that manipulates human desire by projecting its modernism as the thing to be imitated.<sup>24</sup> Girard's study has made it clear that culture and religion are related to the very inner structure of the Humans. Hence transformation of peoples in terms of development can never be envisaged ignoring culture and religion, as modern technocrats tend to do.

### 5. Culture-Development Debate in the Catholic Church :

Apart from the cultural and social blossoming of the Church's teaching during the patristic age, cultural issues remained rather dormant until fairly recently. A survey of the recent papal teachings could indicate the state of debate and the tensions in this issues in the Catholic church. Pope Leo XIII seems to have unwittingly anticipated the present debate. In the compendium on *The Christian Faith*, the section on 'Social Doctrine of the Church' begins with *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps a similar collection of the Church's teachings on culture in modern times could also begin with Leo XIII who insisted on promoting indigenous clergy. However it might be said that his insistence on indigenous clergy did not initiate the kind of fresh thinking in the Church similar to that of his social teachings. Two reasons

may be stated : the insistence on local clergy was motivated strictly by 'evangelization' and not out of a recognition of local cultures. The notion of culture remained largely 'classicist high-brow culture' in the papal teachings, at least till the time of Pius XII. Secondly the papal teachings seem to be unaware of the historic link between colonial political hegemony and the cultural exploitation, although they are quick to point out the cultural exploitation by the Marxist ideology.<sup>26</sup>

With John XXIII the social agenda was extended to include causes of justice, peace, women, agricultural workers, and the new nations (cf. *Mater et Magistra, Pacem in Terris*), while culture was regarded as a genuine expression of the common spiritual heritage of human society (*Pacem in Terris*, 36). The Second Vatican Council in itself can be considered a 'CULTURAL EVENT' of historic importance.<sup>27</sup> The very title of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (henceforth cited as GS) as "The Church in the World Today" (*Ecclesia in Mundo Hujus Temporis*) does not render itself as 'modern times' as is often translated) refers to a contextualising activity of the Church into the 'here and now'. The contribution of the pastoral constitution (GS) lies in its broader, dynamic and historical description of culture as humanizing, self-expressive, self-communicating acts of human beings symbolized in various behavioural, religious and civic ways (No. 53) ; it manifests peoples' ways of thinking and feeling (No. 59). The documents also refers to the need of cultural enfleshment of the Gospel with critical discernment (Nos. 42 & 58). In general GS indicates a definite departure from a Euro-centred, high-brow, civilizational understanding of culture.

Parallel to cultural issues, GS speaks of economic development and justice. 'Technical progress' is rated high in the advancement of agricultural and industrial production, the fundamental aim of which is not profit or domination but the service of man (No. 64). In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI takes the debate further with his insistence on integral development of the human being and of all human kind. "We do not believe in separating the economic from the human, nor development from the civilizations in which it exists. What we hold important is man, each man and each group of men, and we even include the whole of humanity." (No. 14). Though Paul VI shares the lopsided optimism of GS that holds that industrial growth means greater development, the linking up of development to civilization is vital. Similarly in his *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI mentions of the permeating relation between culture and the kingdom and admits : "The split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time,

just as it was of other times''. (No. 20). The questions such as who brought about this split and how and why it occurred, are not pursued. Is it not due a partial, Euro-centred understanding of culture and as a result of the historical imposition of a particular culture on the church and on the rest of the cultures ?

The culture-development debate reaches a dynamic stage in *Justice in the World*, the document of the Second Synod of Bishops in 1971. It accepts 'action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world... as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel' (No. 6) and reminds that development, modernization and justice should not be at the expense of the true cultural identity and heritage (No. 19). Justice is a problem of culture and vice versa. Similarly in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* John Paul II finds himself up against a form of 'superdevelopment' which consists of 'excessive availability of every kind of material goods' for certain social groups which make people slaves of possession creating a civilization of 'consumerism and crass materialism'. (No. 28). Such a wasteful culture is inventend by certain form of 'modern imperialism' which is part of the 'structures of sin' characterized by an 'all consuming desire for profit' and 'thirst for power'. The idols of our time are money, ideology, class and technology (No. 370). Only a 'solidarity' of the human family based on our common patrimony of 'religiosity' (reference is to the Assissi Meet in 1987) can vouch for true justice that includes cultural identity (No. 47).

The debate on development and culture in the Catholic documents has very much been sharpened with the arrival of the Latin American Theology of Liberation, The latter has helped relativize the monopoly of the European theology, appropriate genuine 'secular' concerns into theology and has definitely influenced the recent papal teachings. The questions of 'culture and religiosity' did not figure prominently in the early theology of liberation. In fact even in the revised edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, culture is not indexed. However the recent writings in Liberation theology recognizes the overarching and manipulating role of technology and its impact on cultures.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps no one else other than Aloysius Pieris has brought out creative and serious reflection on the three questions of culture, faiths and liberation in their integrity.<sup>29</sup>

## 6. Search for New Models :

Culture, faith and liberation are so related issues that any search for new models will have to intergrate them. Gandhi's experiments

acquire new significance in this context. He defined culture in terms of its goodness and not in terms of one-sided happiness; he suggested a style of life based on needs and not on wants; he promoted integrity of creation and never its destruction; he struggled to bring the spirit of faith to inform every branch of knowledge and organize society in terms of self-realization.<sup>30</sup> He believed that the ancient Indian culture had all the potentials for an alternate model. In fact he was also attracted by the genuine European medieval culture that is largely neglected by modern technological bias.

As we have noted, a theory of knowledge plays an important role in the development of culture. Crucial to modern technological 'alienation is the alienation of knowledge as rationality from the larger reality this occurred spatially in W. Europe where modern science and technology flourished, and temporally in the 17th and 18th century when religion gave way to the onslaught of 'protestantism' and the emergence of a mercantile, technocratic and economic man. Knowledge limited itself to a utilitarian view and was no more a part of a larger process of self-realization, self-awareness and self-transcendence.

True, there have been other traditions of knowledge. Though unnoticed they still persist and provide alternate models. First, in China, India, Persia, the Arab countries, and later in medieval Europe there were alternate models of knowledge. These traditions had certain common features: knowledge was a search for truth and a basis for human enlightenment and liberation, and not just a means for domination. Knowledge was holistic in which science and culture were not separate; the act of making and the pursuit of truth were inseparable. These alternate models had a pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach. Knowledge as scientism did not have an imperialistic, false universalism. Secondly, these ancient traditions witness to the fact science and technology were not the monopoly of the West. As J. Needham and C. Alvares have pointed out Chinese and Indian traditions had their technology. The three inventions which Bacon considered so basic to the development of the world—namely printing (in the area of culture), gunpowder (in the political and military sphere), and magnet (in navigation and hence in commerce)—were Chinese in origin.<sup>31</sup> Thirdly, these traditions had not only invented their own technology but had placed it within their knowledge system, without giving an undue dominating role to technology. As Ashis Nandy points out technology was deemed as inferior form of activity; so much so he reminds us:

In Hindu society, despite the Vedic sacrificial rituals being

a basic prototype of technology, the social status of Brahmans, concerned with interpretation of the macro- and micro- cosmos of nature, was higher than the status of the artisan castes often seen as lowly makers or manipulators of things. Theogonically, too, the Hindu goddess of learning, Saraswati was a first-order deity, whereas the god of technology, Viswakarma, was a minor second-order deity.<sup>32</sup>

The ancient cultures like Indian and China not only encountered 'modernism' of technology but had devised ways and means of integrating it into the larger culture. The culture-religion-development debate invites us to search for alternate models to modern technicism, not from the blue as it were, but in a continuum with the past. We, with all our modernism, need to dialogue with traditions, ancient cultures and meaning system in order to evolve a holistic way of life.

### **7. Towards a Theology of Incultured Liberation :**

At least in the Catholic circles, the debate on inculturation and liberation ran parallel, creating artificial division in theological thinking. The arguments in this paper indicated that justice is very much a cultural issue and that cultural issue is very much a religious concern. The new model could therefore be an incultured liberation with the following features.

#### **(a) Culture as God's Dwelling Place :**

That the word of God took flesh in Jesus, in time and space, here and now, in a particular culture and a particular historic time, speaking a particular language and sharing in the customs and habits of his people means that there is a salvific value to time, space, history, earth, culture, traditions, customs and habits. They are 'habitable realities' for the divine. In fact every self-gift and self-disclosure of God has an incarnational pattern. Nature and man represent God's self-revelation and self-communication and therefore are the term, embodiment and enfleshment of the creative Word of His love. Today we recognize that care for the earth is ultimately care for humankind and respect for God's design. The religious culture of the Asian people visible in their cultural and social ways of living is the 'dwelling place' of God. It is where God has pitched his tent in Asia.

The ultimate embodiment and definitive communication of God's love in Jesus remains both the basis and challenge for inculturated-liberation.

He was a deeply historical, densely human reality, a sharer in our bodily existence and earthly conditions, flesh of our flesh, man among men, like us in all things though never sinning, never closing himself to God. ... [his] body sprang from the depths of our earth and from the depth of a woman, a dear sister of ours.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus was not so inculturating as he was being himself in his own country and among his people. This rootedness in his culture was itself a saving act. As creation is the first saving act, being born in and being rooted in the 'here and now' is the continuation of the creative, saving act of God. To belong to one's culture and tradition is an act of appreciation of God's design and plan, the opposite of suspicion which was the root of sin in the garden.

Jesus was critical of the unjust, oppressive and dehumanizing elements in the customs, traditions and behaviour of his people and culture. This salvific judgement of the sinful structures forms part of this incarnational pattern, which calls for a continuous dying and being born again.<sup>34</sup> Such a kenosis involves that faith (which always comes in a cultural form) becomes critical of the sinful elements in a given culture and demands a mutual dying and being again. In this context it is better to speak of faith being incarnated rather than the Gospel encountering cultures. Faith implies that the Gospel (already in a cultural form) passes through a human mediation and critique. It is the human-culture mediated faith that compenetrates with a given culture and not the Gospel in the abstract. The latter might mean that anyone sitting abroad can apply Gospel and pass judgement on the cultures. The given faith (as distinguished from religion as a social structure) with its transcendent reference encounters the dehumanizing factors in a given culture. The present technological culture with its implied epistemology and world-view (in spite of its achievements and potentials), ignores the salvific dimension of a given culture and violates the religiosity of the people by bracketing out transcendence all-together.

The two axioms of Jesus' religiosity were : an attitude of absolute and exclusive relatedness to and confidence in the Father, and a total obedience to his mission of proclaiming and enacting the kingdom here and now and beyond. As his life and history unfolded, precisely because of his being rooted in the 'here and now' Jesus discovered that there are historical and social forces that are antagonistic to his Father. His religiosity relativizes all

the worldly realities, and unmask the entrenched positions and legal prejudices of his society which were overarching themselves as archetypes of knowledge and belief. Jesus reasserted the kingdom-religiosity through a process of affirmations and negations. Through such a process of discernment he becomes

[...] a man free from preconceived ideas, whose eyes are open to essentials, who gives himself to others, especially those that are abandoned physically and morally. By doing this he shows that established order cannot be the location of the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:50) It must suffer a restructuring of its very foundations A...U to create conditions for a breakthrough of the kingdom of God and total transfiguration of human and cosmic existence.<sup>35</sup>

Such a discernment forms the WAY of Jesus which is illustrated in the attitude of the Sermon on the Mount. The concern of the kingdom takes primacy over everything else and directs the ordering of life of the individual and the society. Asian religiosity can resonate with that of Jesus in his absolute commitment to the Father and in his relativization of all in terms of that fidelity.

### **(b) Poverty and Incultured Liberation :**

Aloysius Pieris has argued that the vital nucleus of the Gospel message as expanded in the Sermon on the Mount shows a growing intimacy of Jesus with the Father and a constant repudiation of Mammon. According to him, poverty, considered in the dynamic sense of a spiritual struggle, rather than a static 'virtue', is the most comprehensive term to describe the 'ethos' of Jesus event showing his attitudes, options, and pattern of behaviour.<sup>36</sup> The dynamic character of poverty can be seen only when contrasted with Mammon. Mammon is more than wealth or money; it is the subtle force operating within me, an acquisitive instinct driving me to be the rich fool (Lk 12:13-21); Mammon is what I do with money and what it does to me: security, power and prestige. Nicknamed as capital, it

[...] interferes with God's kingdom not merely as psychological drive but as a gigantic sociological force alienating us not only from God but from one another in and through a social order that can thrive only on the co-existence of waste and want.<sup>7</sup> It makes for institutionalized greed.<sup>38</sup>

Poverty reflects the ethos of Jesus in that it was a spirituality of struggle with Mammon, in undivided attention to God. The universal practice of voluntary poverty in struggle with Mammon leads to the elimination of enforced poverty. Boff's observation

that 'poverty' can be cured by poverty' has deep resonance in the Biblical and the Asian traditions. Poverty is the means by which God gathers his people.

For God in God's very self having *opted* to be *born* in Jesus the Son (2 cor. 8:9 : Phil 2:6-8), has gathered as God's body a new people comprising these two categories of the poor, the poor by 'option' who are *followers of Jesus* (Mt. 19:21), and the poor by 'birth' who are *proxies of Christ* (Mt. 25:31-46).<sup>39</sup>

An incultured liberation should evolve a strategy whereby the religious poverty of the Asian people is harnessed towards the elimination of the enforced poverty and the worship of Mammon, perpetuated especially by hightech culture.

### (c) Anti/non-violence and Pluralism :

The relentless struggle with the Mammon and the on-going embodiment of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount finally led Jesus to the death on the cross. The style of Jesus had a genuinely anti/non-violent dimension to it. We shall refer to only two sample studies in this regard. In his booklet *Option for the Poor*, N. Lohfink argues that the concept of the poor has undergone certain nuances in the course of biblical history. From the Exodus story where the poor are seen as the under-class, through Prophet Zephaniah who is considered as the father of the Anawim movement when it reaches Dt- Isaiah, the poor are the persecuted ones who are ready to offer their backs to the oppressors, relying only on God and with whom they have a special relationship.<sup>40</sup> Though Lohfink's findings have to be further nuanced, the uninterrupted theology of the poor in the Bible and its anti/non-violent development should interest us in the context of the enforced and religious poverty in Asia.

One may notice a similar pattern in the Sermon on the Mount. One such findings maintains :

Christ's love must so awaken in me his thirst for justice that independently of others' self-seeking ethics and the sinful structures of the world that will avenge themselves on me, I will lay down my life for the sister or brother, with only faith in Jesus' resurrection that will be a step to the conversion of enemies and the whole world. This love, then, is salvation, (i) for me personally, (ii) for communities and institutions, and (iii) for our world.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from the problematic whether the programme of the Beatitudes starts with the individual and then seeps into the society



or vice versa, there is a very evident anti/non-violent dimension in the Beatitudes. The death of Jesus manifests on the one hand the magnitude of violence of the humans, and on the other unfolds the divine pedagogy of unmasking that violence by letting it fall on His Son, and not allowing it fall back on the humans.<sup>42</sup> This anti/non-violent divine pedagogy is constitutive of the faith in the Gospel and essential for true liberation.

In the Asian context this pedagogy has special significance to counter the violence of enforced poverty and to engage the plurality of cultures and religions. Let us elaborate on the features of this pedagogy. Firstly, it is not 'a passive non-violence of the weak', unable to oppose injustice and so bearing it up patiently; but an **ACTIVE, FAITH-INSPIRED STAND** of unmasking every injustice and oppression. In the process the evil of injustice is not allowed to fall back on the unjust, but the poor of God takes it upon himself/herself, on a faith-guarantee that God who raised Jesus from dead is the reward. However the rich and the violent have no right to impose this pedagogy on the poor. Rather, the poor of God take it upon themselves. Secondly the anti/non-violence of an incultured liberation is not one of practical stand of tolerance; nor of human limitedness but a **CONTEMPLATIVE STAND**, because the reality is pluralistic and it manifests God's creativity. Faith-response to created and creative pluralism including that of cultures and religions, is genuine non-violence and positive love. Such pluralism may be better understood in terms of trinitarian theology (kenotic love) and may be better explained in the non-dualism in Indian thinking.<sup>43</sup> The anti/non-violent pluralistic approach of incultured-liberation implies a faith-affirmation that at Babel the Lord confused man's dream of a monolithic and totalitarian vision of reality. As Panikkar warns:

'Once upon a time' [...] and time and again it is repeated over and over; the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Romans, the Greeks, the Alexanders the great and all the rest, the Spaniards, and the French and the British, and the Americans and the technocrats of modern times, they all thought themselves to be alone bearers of a flag with absolute standards.<sup>44</sup>

This is equally applicable to all the fundamentalists of all religions. Thirdly the lamb that was slain, the scapegoat that was sacrificed on neutral grounds and the self-suffering love that spends itself out, are not individual heroes or heroic acts. They unfold the divine pedagogy ratified in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Such a pedagogy implies a political love that seeks to

unmask violent, oppressive, monolithic, sinful structures and in the event and invariably suffers martyrdom. Jon Sobrino nuances it further: "Not all Christians, (we might add not all religious believers) but *political* Christians are attacked, vilified, threatened, expelled, arrested, tortured, and murdered."<sup>45</sup> Kenotic love is at once a judgement on un-love and un-truth, and a self-gift to the point of dying. Fourthly, the anti/non-violence involves a transference of power. It is to deny power to violence, oppressive poverty, monolithic cultures and religious fundamentalism. Power is discovered in the power of God, entering into God's politics.

The transposition of power with its basis in God's truth is therefore a most revolutionary kind of politics. It is a *radical* politics. [...] It is the invasion of God's politics into humanity's politics. It is the confrontation of God's truth with the sham truth held by the rulers, leaders, [technocrats] and politicians of the nations [and religious fundamentalists].<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, an anti/non-violent transference of power calls for attentiveness to the multiplicity of cultures and religions. In the Indian context it would mean a shift from the Brahminic techno-centred, fundamentalist culture to that of dalit, tribal and popular cultures in order to release their liberative potentials implanted in them by God.

Thus religiosity, poverty and anti/non-violence are political means and spiritual attitudes to counter religious fundamentalism, enforced poverty and monolithic cultures. Incultured-liberation is a spirituality of protest against the idols of wealth, pleasure, power and fanaticism; it includes a politics of poverty that finds power in the powerlessness of God. It unmasks cultural, religious and technological domination, and advocates attentiveness to the manifold reality.

Unfortunately, today it is the poor and the poor nations that advocate poverty in order to counter enforced-poverty, and not the rich who live on wasteful culture; it is the violated that advocate anti/non-violence and not the violent and the fundamentalists who mask violence. Isn't there something more than a paradox here? Isn't it part of the divine pedagogy itself that it is the poor and the anti/violent (phill 2:6-11) who bring about redemption, including that of the rich and the violent?

Where do we find ourselves and the Church in this drama? Are we also agents of a high-tech culture that claims false universalism? Do we cause fragmentation of peoples and cultures by exploiting the local cultures for a market-economy? Do our religious claims beget false superiority and exclusivism? Hasn't

our liturgy oriented inculturation died 'the death of a thousand qualifications' as it was far removed from concerns of justice ?

To conclude : we have argued that the understanding of culture has evolved over the centuries bringing into focus its political and ethical implications. The contemporary techno-culture, in spite of its benefits, has usurped for itself a role in the society that surpasses all other institutions. Its epistemological assumptions and socio-political presuppositions have to be seriously questioned. Religion and faith have been over the centuries agents of liberation as well as oppression. Its transcendental function is vital in criticizing the assumptions of cultures. True development of peoples therefore will have to adopt an integral approach taking into account culture, faith and justice. Such an integrated approach can be arrived at in and through a dialogue between modernity and tradition. The teachings of the Catholic Church on culture and development, though often lob-sided and running parallel, points out towards a genuine and integral approach. Compartmentalization of culture, faith and development is untenable, specially in the Asian context.

Jesus and his WAY substantiate an incultured-liberative approach. The two poles of that pedagogy are poverty (spirituality of protest) and anti/non-violence (politics of the power of kenotic love). Both have deep resonance in Asian lives. Culture, faith and development form one basic human attitude. Theology and spirituality are inseparable. Gandhi's experiments with *satyagraha* with its *swadeshi-swaraj* articles were paradigms of incultured-liberation. Perhaps recourse to such paradigms from the past will provide us with a genuinely Asian way of being religious with an Asian testament for the nations.

## References :

1. Cf. K.L. Seshagiri, "On Truth : A Hindu Perspective", In *Philosophy East & West*, XX, IV, 1970, p. 380 ; Also D.M. Datta, "Epistemological Methods in Indian Philosophy", in *The Indian Mind*, (Ed). Charles Moore, Honolulu : University of Hawaii, '67, p. 134.
2. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, NY: Orbis, '88, p. 85.
3. R. Panikkar, "Indian Theology: A Theological Mutation", In *Theologizing in India*, Amaladoss (Ed.), Bangalore: TPI, '81, p. 25.'
4. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, NY: Basic Bks, '73, p. 89.
5. Edward Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, London: John Murray, 1871. p.1.
6. Marx on *The German Ideology*, as quoted by Herve Carrier, "Understanding Culture : The Ultimate Challenge of the World-Church ?", in *The Church and Culture Since Vat II*, Ed, Joseph Gremillion, Indiana : University of Notre Dame, '85, p. 15.

7. Julius Nyrere, *Ujama*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 66.
8. M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1938, p. 60.
9. Ashis Nandy states that in the Western intellectual tradition there have been two tendencies: one converting space into time (the geo-cultural differences into historical stages), and other, time into space (stages into types), Cf. *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987. p. 146.
10. Gerge Soares-Prabhu, *Inculturation, Liberation, Dialogue*, Pune: Inana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1984, p. 6.
11. Cf. C.T. Kurien, "Widening Our Perspective on Development", in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol, XIX, 3, July-Sept, 1987, pp. 135-138; The humanistic perspective of development is distinguished from developmentalism. The latter is "...synonymous with timid measures, really ineffective in the long run and counterproductive to achieving a real transformation. The poor countries are becoming ever more clearly aware that their underdevelopment is only the by-product of the development of other countries, because of the kind of relationship which exists between the rich and the poor countries. Moreover, they are realizing that their development will come about only with a struggle to break the domination of the rich countries." G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press, '88 (Rev. ed), p. 17; J. Dunn, *Missionary Theology: Education in development*, Washington DC: The Catholic University Press, 1986, pp. 9-36; David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace and Human Rights*, NY: Crossroads, 1988.
12. J. Mathews, "Poverty is the Greatest Threat", In *The Guradian Weekly*, Vol. 146, 12. March 22, '92, p. 17; also L. Boff, "The poor as the Centre of a Possible World of Politics", In *The Third World Theologies in Dialogue*, Ed. J.R. Chandran, Bangalore: EATWOT, '91, pp. 120-22.
13. Amlan Datta, *The Gandhian Way*, Shillong: The North-Eastern Hill University, 1986, p. 10.
14. For an in-depth analysis of the technological malaise, cf. J. Porritt, *Seeing Green*, London: Basil Blackwell, '84, pp. 25-115.
15. Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, pp. 130-131.
16. The consequences of the technological ideology can be appalling and more oppressive than any totalitarianism as R.J. Light has shown. "The estimated 1000 children who die every year at the hands of their parents in Britain—or the estimated casualty rate in the U.S. ranging between 200,000 and 500,000 for physical abuse and between another 465,000 and 1,175,000 for severe neglect and sexual abuse—are not victims of mystification, black magic or false religious values (as in ritual child sacrifice or indirect female infanticide in India) or of poverty leading to neglect and murder." Cf. "Abused and Neglected Children in America: A Study of Alternate Policies", In *Harvard Educational Review*, XLIII, '73, pp. 566-7 quoted in Gilbert Y. Steiner, *The Children's Cause*, Washington D.C, Brookings Institute, '76, pp. 85-89. Nandy's Comments on this phenomena are very pertinent to our discussion: "They are victims of meaninglessness, the collapse of intergenerational mutuality, unlimited individualism and a system which views children as intrusions into what is increasingly considered the only

legitimate dyad in the family namely the conjugal unit. They are the victims of a world-view which sees the child as an inferior, weak but usable version of the fully productive, fully performing, human being who owns the modern world." *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias* p.61.

17. E. Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, London: Abacus Bks, 1976, p. 36.
18. Rajani Kothari, *Rethinking Development*, N. Delhi: Ajantha Publications, '88, p. 5.
19. J. Porritt, *Seeing Green*, P. 111.
20. Though it is from a Marxian angle, Paul N. Siegal has studied religion and power across the world and points out the oppressive and liberative role of the major religions of the world. *The Meek and the Militant*, London: Ued Bks, 1986.
21. According to Amaladoss this relativizing capacity of religions in itself does not necessarily work towards the transformation of evil structures. This seems to be the case with regard to non-semitic religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. Instead of transforming the structures, the more radical elements in these religions opt out for renunciation. Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Changing Culture and Religion", in *Jeevadhara*, XXII, 127, '92, p. 16.
22. as cited by John McDade in the editorial comment in *The Month*, April 1991, p. 136.
23. George Pattery s.j. "Satyagraha Religiousness: A Dialogal Way of Liberation", *Vidyajyoti*, 55: 1, '91, pp. 7-21.
24. Cf. R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, London: The John Hopkins University Press. '86; Also Andre Orlean, "Money and Mimetic Speculation", in *Violence and the Truth*, ed. P. Dumouchel. London: The Athlone Press, '88, pp. 101-112.
25. Neuner, J. & Dupuis, J. *The Christian Faith*, Glasgow: Collins, 1983, p. 616.
26. This is especially true of Pius XII. In his *Evangelii Praecones* (Nos. 49-52) he condemns the State control leading to the cultural exploitation but ignores the colonial exploitation. Cf. Paul Surlis, "The Relation between social justice and inculturation in the Papal Magisterium", in *Creative Inculturation and the Unity of Faith*, A.R. Crollius et al, Rome: Gregorian University Press, '86, pp. 15-16.
27. Herve Carrier, "The Contribution of the Council to Culture", in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Ed. R. Latourelle, NY: Paulist Press, '89, p. 442; As Rahner said the Council brought the European culture and the cultures of Asia and Africa face to face so as to initiate a world-church. K. Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Vat. II", *Theolo. Investigations*, XX, '81 pp. 85-86.
28. Cf. Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, NY: Orbis Bks, 1990, pp. 25-30; also L.Boff, "The Poor as the Centre of a Possible World Politics", pp. 126-8.
29. Cf. his *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, NY: Orbis Bks, 1988.
30. George Pattery, "Satyagraha-religiousness: A Dialogal way of liberation", pp. 7-11.
31. Joseph Needham et al, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge: 1984, vols.1-7; Claude Alvares, *Homo Faber*, Technology and culture in India, China and the West from 1500 B.C. to the Present Day, Bombay: Allied Pub, 1979, as cited by F. Wilfred, in "The Politics of Culture", in *Jeevadhara*,

- XXII, 127, pp. 73-75.
32. Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, p. 86.
  33. S. Rayan, "Flesh of Our Flesh", *Jeevadhara*, 33, '76, pp.259-60; also cf. G. Soares Prabhu, "New Testament as a Model of Inculturation", *Jeevadhara*, 33, '76, pp.279-282; M. Amaladoss, *Making All Things New*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, '90, p.62-64.
  34. Gregory Baum, "Faith and Culture", *The Ecumenist*, Vol.24, 1, '85, pp.9-13
  35. L. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator, A Critical Christology for Our Time*, NY: Orbis, 1987, pp.75-76.
  36. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.15-16.
  37. *Ibid.*, p.20.
  38. *Ibid.*, p.22.
  39. *Ibid.*, p.21.
  40. N. Lohfink, *Option for the Poor*, California: Bibal Press, '87, pp.5, 59, 72.
  41. John Topel, *The Way to Peace, Liberation through the Bible*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd; 1980, pp.140-1.
  42. Following R. Girard's study of violence in the humans, R. Schwager has analyzed biblical literature and shows the significance of Jesus as the suffering servant substantiating the non-violent dimension of liberation, Cf. *Must There be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, NY: Harper & Row, 1987.
  43. M. Amaladoss, *Mission Today*, Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualis, 1988, p. 112.
  44. R. Panikkar "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel— A Meditation on Non-Violence", *Cross-Currents*, XXIX, 1979, p. 198.
  45. Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, NY: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 82.
  46. C.S. Song, *Third Eye Theology*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1980, p. 241. Brackets added.