

# P A T H S   O F   M I S S I O N

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There was a time when missionary endeavours were a corollary to colonization. Highways were prepared for missionaries by the colonizers. But today in Asian context missionaries need to discover their own pathways of mission. Paths are created by the 'foot walkers'. 'Highways' are constructed by powerful people with machines, valuable materials, etc. When I use the word 'paths', I also refer to the breakthrough that we need to make in our missionary initiatives. Breakthroughs are made in simple and humble ways by personal initiatives at the grass root level. Only those who wish to walk can use paths, and not those who want to drive fast and reach their destination as soon as possible. During this walk on the path, one may have to go slow, meet people on the way. There may be insecurity and harm arising from snakes, wild animals, and dust on the path. In other words, it will not be a triumphant Church marching with its army, but a pilgrim Church on her way dialoguing along with others while sharing their joys and sorrows, leading them to the Father with the help of the treasures that she has received from Christ and from other local sources under the guidance of the Spirit who inspires all irrespective of race, culture or religion. I will continue to use the word mission, not in the sense of mission *ad gentes*, but in the sense of mission *inter gentes*, which will be clarified later. Though some biased leaders in Asia may have the feeling that Christian mission is impossible but we are of the conviction that if the mission is of God, *missio Dei*, it cannot be impossible, although the paths may be difficult and the approach may be different, when we understand mission in the right sense of the word in today's pluralistic context. The Church does not have a mission of her own. The real mission is that of the Father, which the mission of Jesus is also. Can we honestly say today that the mission we are engaged in is of the Church, the mission of the Father and of Jesus, *missio Dei*? "If God is with us, who is against us?" "If the Lord does not build the house, the builders labour in vain".

The Church in Asia is entering into a new period in her life and history. The many events that take place both in our countries and in the Church point to this. Our image as a **community of disciples** sent out by the Lord to proclaim the Good News is challenged. The old institutional image of the Church is questioned by many both in the Church and outside the Church. "It is closely linked to a purely institutional and hierarchical model of the Church... It suggests that mission is one way activity taking little or no account of the prior presence and activity of God in the world, in the great world religions, in the primal religions, and in the secular world."<sup>1</sup> Pastoral responsibility demands that we must study this matter seriously. We need to **redefine the image** of the Church and her mission in this situation, both for ourselves and for the world around us. We will do this by going through a process of serious theological reflection and taking into account the reality of the world in which we live.

## A. THE CHANGED SITUATION:

We are here concerned with the **changed** situation of Asia and the world. Daily reports of various incidents round the world make many of **us feel hopeless and helpless**. “The Asian world is a wounded world lying at the edge of the highways of **modernisation and globalisation**. Everywhere and in many forms we find an utter disregard for human dignity.”<sup>2</sup> We wonder how we could possibly make a difference. Besides the various global issues that affect our country, there are matters that affect our Christian community. There are many factors inside and outside the Church that seek to impede her from carrying out the ministry. There is the **militant fundamentalism** of different brands, the resurgence of mono-cultural militant nationalism, which identifies itself with one culture and religion. Many have taken upon themselves the onus of exposing the real motives of Christian missionaries who, they claim, have done immense harm to this nation through their coercive tactics of converting, particularly the poor and the illiterate. If they continue to do so, then Asia, with its ancient cultures, traditions and religions may soon lose its identity and even its existence.

On the other hand, it is accepted that the literacy rate in some of our countries, where the Christian educational institutions are operating, is comparatively high. There is a qualitative difference in the health indices of those who receive health care from Christian institutions. Therefore, whatever may be wrong with our methods of work we are convinced that Christianity has been and will continue to play a significant role in the social transformation in Asia as well as in the other parts of the world.<sup>3</sup> The Church’s mission today must be carried out keeping in mind the three factors viz., **Globalization, Fundamentalism and Structures of the Church** that affect us very much.

## B. THE CHURCH’S RESPONSE – THE MISSION:

The Catholic Church has been responding periodically to the dilemmas, posed by the modern development, in the form of Catholic Social Teaching, the systematic doctrinal response from the Church. This tradition which was supposedly started with the Encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*” (1891) of Pope Leo XIII is marked by a number of Papal Encyclicals. This tradition has also been elaborated and expressed in the key documents of the II Vatican Council. Thus the doctrinal body of Catholic Church has been extending its teaching for more than hundred years covering a period of rapid transformation of the global economy under the impact of industrial capitalism. The Catholic Social Teaching has focussed in particular on the “social questions” which this transformation throws up, and its vision on globalization, the latest phase of that transformation. Beyond these, the Catholic Church’s teachings have been extended through pastoral letters, admonitions and addresses both from the Vatican and from many Bishops’ Conferences and individual Bishops all over the world. Fundamentalism, Globalization and Structures of the Church make us more and more aware of the necessity of our mission which is the response of the Church.

The earlier mission was understood to refer to the obligation on the part of Christians to proclaim the Good News to the people of other Faiths. “Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations...” (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47). A geographical reality called ‘Christendom’ was presupposed. According to this notion, the West was already Christendom, the evangelized area. For this purpose many of the missionary congregations were founded between 1860-1960.<sup>4</sup> This idea of mission of ‘planting the Gospel’ is reflected in their Constitutions. The means of achieving this goal was by preaching, instructing, baptising and developing new missions. ‘Mission’ thus meant establishing of structures which were Churchy that were geared towards preaching of the Good News. Reports on the missions meant statistics of THE numerical growth of Christians and institutions in the Church.<sup>5</sup>

Colonization came very handy to the missionaries on the basis ‘I scratch your back, you scratch my back’. With the II Vatican the idea of geography was changed to **culture** as the main criterion for defining the specific role.<sup>6</sup> *Nostra Aetate* makes it clear: The Church, sent to all peoples of every time and space, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to race or nation, nor to any particular way of life... she can enter into communion with various **cultural modes**, to her own enrichment and theirs too (# 32). *Ad Gentes* in this tone gives the picture of the Church as a communion of local Churches, each of which seeks to give life to the universal Church in accordance with the native genius and traditions of its members: “From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their **arts and sciences**, their Churches borrow all those things that can contribute to the glory of the Creator...” (# 22).

While the Church will remain missionary by her very nature, her *modus operandi* changes, i.e. she needs a paradigm shift from *missio ad gentes* to *missio inter gentes*. The ‘how’ of the mission, the approach and methodology need to be given prominence. In the context of religious pluralism it is the *missio inter gentes* approach that is more relevant. *Ad gentes* approach is perhaps suitable in the European context. Transferring the same to the Asian context of pluralism does not hold water, as we do not experience such ignorance or barbarianism. The pluralism will have to be viewed as part of God’s creative genius. Therefore, pluralism must not be confronted and overcome; it has to be approached with friendship and trust, dialogue and solidarity. FABC’s approach to mission focuses on the immersion of the Christian Gospel and local Churches in the Asian realities with its commitment and service to life in solidarity with the Asian people.<sup>7</sup> The salvation history did not begin with the coming of Christianity to Asia, the Father’s and Spirit’s presence and saving activity were experienced before that, through the Asian religious traditions, and will continue to be an integral part of the ongoing Asian religious history. We have to discern the hand of God in all their aspirations, movements and initiatives.

We, Asian Christians should be able to contribute to our culture, its socio-economic challenges and in this way promote what is already there even if we are not able to bring about a change institutionally. For this purpose we need to have a qualitative approach to heal the brokenness of our culture and realities.

### III. DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIONS, CULTURES AND THE POOR:

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) has proposed a threefold dialogue with religions, cultures and the poor of Asia. In practice what these stand for are: Inter-faith Dialogue, Inculturation and the Ministry of Liberation. The paths of mission have to be seen through these three windows.

**Dialogue** is the openness and attention to the mystery of God's action in the other believer. Such an approach is the life-line of any believer in India, whether he is a Christian or of some other faith. Christians in Asia are living permanently in the Assisi-type situation. For the Pope inviting the representatives of other faiths it may be a once-in-a-while situation. Asian Christians engage in a permanent Assisi-style dialogue of life with their fellow Indian neighbours. Though we are a tiny minority, we have a special contribution to make – that is our task.

Diversity and plurality of the Asian milieu and its peoples with their myriad religions, **cultures** and philosophies call for this threefold approach. The fact that we are  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the world population in Asia, and that Christians account for only 4%, in spite of its coming to some pockets of Asia 2000 years ago, should open our eyes to the fact that without dialogue with religions and cultures, Christian mission will remain like a frog in a well. The Church might have succeeded apparently in similar situations in other countries like Europe and America. But seeing the present situation of Christianity there, people may come to their own conclusion regarding the good influence of Christianity on their people.<sup>8</sup> They did not come into contact with the **living religions** like Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, etc. that have a great sway over their followers. Even the political situation was different. Above all the great consciousness that the people have today of their own religions and cultures in the context of the sweeping world culture which globalization has brought about threatens to annihilate and replace them with the global culture like a big giant.

Dialogues can be held when we understand not only the **religions and cultures** but also the **economic and social realities**. Urbanisation, migration and tourism which are concomitant with globalization have caused immense damage to the poorer section of the society. They are exploited in many ways. Women are the worst victims. Their number is swelling and their situation is deteriorating day after day. Our paths of mission will have to take into consideration this situation and address the issues arising out of it.

## **1. DEMOCRATISE THE (OPPRESSIVE) CHURCH STRUCTURES:**

The early Christian community was democratic. They shared all things in common. The order of *primus interparis* (the first among the equals) was usually followed, and not the patriarchal paternalism. It was later on that the pattern of the Jewish patriarchal society was conveniently adopted by the early Christians, thus deviating from the vision and mission of Jesus. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church organised herself utilising the genius of the Roman socio political structures and laws. This structure fitted in well when Christianity came to India as *Manu Smriti* which also promoted patriarchy. Power and wealth were in the hands of a few, and that too of male members. The male dominated structures still remain in the

Church. As a result it becomes difficult to put into practice the II Vatican theology in those structures. Giving each one's role to play according to one's gifts, will involve everyone, particularly the Laity. That will trigger their thinking and they will begin to share their views and opinions, and thus the hierarchical structures will have to accommodate the new wine.

*a) Participation in the decision-making process:*

Participation in the decision-making process is an essential element of human development. Today people would like to handle their own destiny. When such a dialogue takes place, people own the responsibility for whatever good or bad results that emerge. 'We are the Church' feeling comes about. God dialogued with Mary in the Gospel of Luke in the Infancy Narratives as different from that of Matthew, so that she could become a part of the decision-making process right from the very beginning. Just giving information or functional participation or participation in materialistic incentives is not enough.

Sociologists say that the present oppressive system cannot be challenged by 'social work' or 'development'. Small groups of people can challenge policies and put forward alternatives. They reform their own lives. At the same time they challenge the society. We need to empower such groups: tribal movement, fishermen's struggle, dalit revolts, feminine resistance. The leader involves her/himself with the people. Later on she/he involves the people in decision-making. These small groups can be thousands. They become like 'local Churches' in the market places of people's struggles. "Perhaps the only hope in today's India is that forces for social transformation will spring from below...from the enlightened and committed individuals, action groups, new social movements and class organizations... The main or only hope of shaping India lies in locating power among the people themselves".<sup>9</sup> Salt is appreciated when dissolved in the curry and not seen. Salt is no more nice to be seen. So also is light. It is at your service. It does not push or force. It gives freedom, assurance and grace.

A similar pattern needs to be followed in the Church for the involvement of Laity. To have a participatory Church, we need participatory structures. Our Small Christian Communities too function on a similar pattern. Since there are very few elections in the Church, the need to democratise has not been keenly felt by our leaders. Genuine democracy purifies all authority. The political parties know the pulse of the people at least at the time of elections. But we remain safe inside the ivory towers.

The first millennium is said to belong to Bishops and leaders, the second to the religious congregations and the third to the people (John Paul II). Some leaders in our Church talk most of the time and make the people silent and passive. In this way they kill their personality. The Final Statement of the fifth assembly of FABC is very assertive: "The Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities, where laity, religious and clergy recognise and accept each other as sisters and brothers... It is a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful – **lay, religious and cleric alike** – are recognised and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realised." There are committed competent lay persons, well respected by others,

but the Catholic Church has not been able to capitalise on it. Where the laity has been respected by the Church, people have stood by the Church in times of opposition.

However, a full democratic model may not be practical particularly for Asia, as we have experienced it in the elections of our political leaders. Where there is illiteracy and regionalism and casteism, a full democratic model may not work. We need to think of a model that incorporates the values of democracy, at the same time the weaknesses of democracy must be recognized and overcome. It is difficult to bring about the participatory culture, as we have throughout encouraged a culture of passivity. As the society at large becomes more and more democratic and participatory, if we do not promote the same in the Church, there will be anti-clericalism from within and fundamentalistic attack from the outside. In the recent years when there were attacks, we experienced three responses:

- i) The laity managed their own affairs and helped the priests and sisters in their struggle where participatory model was used.
- ii) The laity let the priests and nuns suffer their own fate where the patriarchal model was followed.
- iii) The priests and laity supported each other in their sufferings where some principles of democracy were employed and respected.

***b) Participation comes through Empowerment:***

Since we have made the people mute and passive, today we have to help them to discover the good in themselves and give expression to it. We have imposed our practices, customs, rules and beliefs on them. One of the groups that we have to empower is that of women. They are well-known for their creativity, practical sense and down to life attitudes. They are innovative also in their protest actions even against globalization. The GABRIELA Organisation in Philippines had protested very much on issues like price hikes, plight of the migrant Filipinos and the denunciation of the oppressive labour policies. They did it through marches. In the beginning they organised women – grassroots women – peasants, workers and urban poor dwellers. In India too the Chipko movement by women prevented the companies from cutting down the trees in the Himalayas.

For this purpose certain informal education needs to be imparted, to conscientise people, and to propose to them some workable alternatives:

- i) Turn to traditional herbal medicines (start herbal gardens, acupuncture, acupressure, reflexology and pranic healing) as the cost of medicines is high.
- ii) Make their studies in Colleges of Arts like dance, music, etc. in which they are generally very good at.

In purchasing the local goods women play an important role. They are the ones who buy the groceries for the whole household. Globalization tries to kill the local industry by reducing the cost of things, but for a while. Once the local industries are shut, they raise their prices. Women, if empowered, can play an important role to counteract the onslaught of globalization.<sup>10</sup> If the motherhood in God the Father which is already there in a hidden way in our Scriptures is brought to the forefront more and more, as the feminist theologians have done, there will be more empowerment of women and a

greater basis for active participation by women. Women in South India were primarily educated by Christian missionaries, even to the extent of making them wear the upper garment, due to which the missionaries have suffered opposition.

### ***c) Institutional Structure:***

Any movement, in order to grow and spread needs a structure, an organisation and thus becomes an institution. Similarly the Church, originally a movement, which later on got institutionalised because its organisation and structure began to enslave her mission and dictate terms. Consequently the mission *ad gentes* was on the decline. The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) Report on Evangelisation reads thus; “In such cases these centres and institutions become agents of counter witness and not instruments for spreading the Gospel values”.<sup>11</sup> These so-called ‘structures of salvation’ were imported from the West along with the colonial way of missionising. In the recent years these Christian institutions have been serving the middle class and that promotes the culture of globalization. They come to our institutions for good education (which means getting high marks), western style and a sound knowledge of English which will qualify them to get jobs abroad. The Church personnel like to believe that people come for the quality education and values they transmit. A good scientific evaluation will open their eyes, or if they go from the effect to the cause.<sup>12</sup> Our institutional presence must lead the people to intellectual interaction with the religious, political, economic and aesthetic mainstream of our community. Then they can become the backbone of *mission inter gentes*. They can help them throw away fundamentalism by creating a sense of harmony among people of various faiths. But, now these institutions sow seeds of discrimination and division in the early years of a child’s life by having some separate catechism classes for Catholics and moral science classes for children of other faiths. This separation continues beyond the school. If Catechism is taught in the parishes, can we not have some classes for children on the spirituality of religions where they appreciate the unity of each other’s faith and thus come close to each other? The spirituality of the community dimension of the celebration of the rites of passage is found to be very similar in different religions. Why should we wait to have inter-faith dialogue sessions when they become adults while the seeds of unity can be sown in our institutions much earlier?

## **2. INTER-RELIGIOSISE THE CHURCH**

To be a religious today is to be inter-religious. Reality is one but manifested as unity in diversity. Everyday life tells us how the divine plan for the universe is full of divinity and plurality. Therefore, there is no reason to reduce that diversity of religions into oneness. Pluralism is a value to be celebrated. The differences in languages, customs, traditions, etc. have to be prized. What is important here is to accept the individuality of the other. Asian religious traditions are not merely objects of our evangelization, to be “domesticated” to one’s way of belief.<sup>13</sup> One of the greatest Catholic sins, to date, has been to remain behind our Catholic walls, with our extreme reluctance to join hands

with others of different faiths, perspectives, and the large number of persons with good will and similar motives. “As long as we only think for our own religions, we are going to miss the spiritual mark.”<sup>14</sup> We should not absolutise or institutionalize our differences. Then it becomes a sin and a sinful structure. Israel was like that. Dialogue takes away sin.

***a) Live in harmony in spite of contradictions:***

Globalization, instead of bringing about global unity, has created more and more conflicts all over the world. Fundamentalism has given impetus to communalism and communalization of society. We actually need a harmony model. Early Church followed this model. Indians love to live in peace and harmony. There are different philosophical systems leading to the various ways of understanding God, the world and human life, yet there is a feeling of oneness at the heart level. It may be because for a Hindu the objective truth is not important but subjective attitude is the one that matters. Objective truth, what God is like, is decided by the head. Subjective attitude comes from the heart which unites people. We live in pluralistic societies, and our world-view differs from one to the other, as a result, there is a clash of civilizations. We have many opposites like – haves and have-nots, women and men, poor and affluent. Our society is torn by strife and terrorism. Healing and reconciliation are necessary because of the pain caused. People flock to sources of harmony: like nature, place of prayer, dance, music, etc. In this context the religious have an important role to play by becoming more and more a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony and by giving a sense of community to the broken world. The Small Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities are very good examples of harmony, creating communion of communities. Harmony that comes as a result of forgiveness, as in the case of Graham Staines (an Australian missionary who was burnt to death along with his two sons in jeep), will be a boon in the context of our plurality and differences. Christian harmony should be a ‘harmony of life’ which is the result of distributive justice. It is not a mere spiritual sentiment, but it is a participation in the liberative moment which Jesus began in order to establish the reign of the Divine.

***b) Mutual Discipleship:***

While committing ourselves fully to the person of Christ and to his mission, it is still possible to be open to listen to the spiritual Gurus of other faiths which only helps us to enhance our understanding of Christian faith. Some people from other faiths before us have already followed such paths by becoming fond of Jesus, e.g. Swami Vivekananda too admits being a disciple of Christ, “I am proud to be a disciple of Jesus, but I am not a Christian”. Gandhiji said: “I venerate Christ, but I do not want to become a Christian”. The Hindus have learnt a lot from Christ, Bible and Christianity. Similarly Christians are indebted to Hinduism and Indian culture that has enabled them to express their faith well. It is not syncretism which mixes indiscriminately symbols and other elements from two religions. It is more of symbiosis which integrates two religions in a meaningful and harmonious manner without losing their basic identities.<sup>15</sup> There is a lot of complementarity between the religions that emerged in India and in Palestine, as they are Asian religions. The religions of Palestine are characterized by their ‘prophetic

dynamism’, while the Indian religions have a ‘mystical world-view’.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Christianity and Hinduism have a lot to offer to each other. Hinduism has unconsciously imbibed many of the values of Christianity – the social dimension, humanism, democracy. Hinduism has taught us to emphasize the inner entry into the silence of the heart and union with the Divine Spirit (*Atman*), harmony with nature, compassion for all living beings, etc. That is why people of different faiths have to search together in their respective Scriptures, because their approach is based very much on the understanding of their Scriptures.

However, they are not exclusively prophetic or mystical. Every mystic is a prophet and every prophet is a mystic. Therefore, we need to continually inter-religiosise and live in a situation of dialogue. We need to have a global understanding of God’s plan and creation. Christ’s redemptive incarnation should help us overcome any compartmentalization and extend the scope to all realities, including religions. The Church should not disown them. We are expected “to learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a beautiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth” (AG 11d). After all no one knows the truth in its fullness. We have no right to impose on others the partial truth we possess. Only love can transcend all barriers. Jesus had the fullness of truth. He loved people and became one with their culture and religious expressions. Whatever was against the love of the Father he shunned away and was open towards all faiths. “Not even in Israel have I found such faith” he told the Centurion (Lk 7:1-10). Whatever was not in tune with the love of God in other faiths, viz., exercise of authority, loving only those who love us, etc., were rectified by Jesus.

The Christian countries have brought about a lot of material development. That alone is not enough for a peaceful living and well being. At times this material development has led to the evils of globalization like consumerism. It is the Asian asceticism, tolerance and harmony that can bring about the required balance. In the context of globalization the Church in Asia needs more prophetic voice as large majority of the people suffer from social injustice, while being aware that prophetism should be grounded in mysticism. Just as Christianity has enhanced other faiths, Asian cultures too have a lot of newness to offer to the universal Church and thus to make her grow. “It is through those that ‘I’ become truly I in encounter with the Hindu heritage, the Christian is enabled to discover the deeper dimensions of the mystery of Christ. In encounter with the Christian faith the Hindu is enabled to re-read his Sacred Scriptures... A Vedantic understanding of Christ on the one side and a social interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* on the other side are concrete fruits of this inter-religious encounter.”<sup>17</sup> The words of Pope John Paul II (1986), spoken in Madras are encouraging: “When we open ourselves in dialogue to the others, we open ourselves to God. Then through inter-religious dialogue we make God present in our midst.”

Inter-religiosising the Church is required not only in countries where there is plurality, but also in the once Christian-dominated West. Once I was surprised to read in the Tablet an announcement “Wanted a priest with multi-religious experience” to work in a parish in England. Now in many parishes all over England there are people of various faiths. The pastor has to be open to them and attend to their religious needs. Due to globalization and migration pluralism has become a fact of life.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. EVANGELISE THE CULTURES

Evangelising cultures is a two-way process. We accept whatever is good in a culture and while doing so for whatever is not in tune with the Gospel in that culture we must have a dialogue with it with the values of the Gospel. I am not identifying the Gospel with Christianity; neither am I accepting haphazard interpretations of the Gospel. The Gospel rightly understood as Good News of Salvation will have to counteract the bad news that is going on. Inculturation, therefore, is not a passive living of our faith in a cultural context or incorporating some elements from a culture but it is a process that animates, reshapes and profoundly renews that culture. In this process we are bound to come into contact with the religions that are connected with the culture with which we are operating since religion and culture are not independent or separate though they are distinct and autonomous.<sup>19</sup> Every religion requires cultural elements to give expression to its faith either in worship or in proclamation. When we touch the culture of a people, we are also coming into contact with the religion. Though there is the principle of continuity in culture, culture is dynamic. Accordingly religious expressions and practices may undergo change, while the religious principles remain the same. Therefore, I call inculturation a process, and not a product. It has to interact with life day after day as human life is a growth.

Christianity has come to Asia with a lot of Western (European) and Eastern (Syrian) culture, because it made use of the cultural elements of its context. If we have to grow in India then the Gospel has to interact with Asian culture, as it did with the Western culture in the West and Eastern cultures in the East. The people of Asia must dialogue with this Good News and with the respective cultures in a creative and relevant way. “The Kingdom of God which is proclaimed by the Gospel is put into practice by men who are imbued with their own particular culture, and in the building up of the Kingdom it is inevitable that some elements of these human cultures must be introduced” (*Ecclesia in Asia* # 24). In order to be fully inserted into the culture and ethos we need to study that culture and evangelize the culture and in turn be ready to be evangelized by that culture/religion.

#### ***a) Inculturation as a Process and not as a Product:***

We have generally considered inculturation as a product and culture as static; as a result we are stuck in many places and are not finding a creative solution, a way out of the blocks. At one time when inculturation was given a green signal, there was a tendency to imitate Hinduism but today the documents from the Vatican make it very clear that we should not imitate when we inculturate, particularly those symbols from other religions that are identified with them. Even though theoretically we may have a right over such religio-cultural elements and we may give our own Christian interpretation, certain tensions remain. It is because Indian religions are ‘Living’ religions. Moreover, Indian religions are not confined to the temples and *Gurudwaras*. Religion is a way of life – a *sanathana dharma*; one who lives it is called *Lokdharmi*, the equivalent of laity, but with an added connotation since he lives the *dharma* in this secular world. Imitating the symbols of such **living** religions will cause confusion both among the followers of that religion as well as that of Christianity. This is very true when we imitate some

symbols as they are very visible. E.g., we still use the saffron colour for our shawls. In itself it is very meaningful. We know that some Hindus feel uncomfortable when they see it on the shoulders of Christians. Can't we not evolve our own colour symbolism for Indian Christians? Today 'saffron' has got political overtones and we use such expressions as saffronisation of education. We see it on the shoulders of corrupt politicians. We see it wrapped around the forehead of perpetrators of violence. A cursory look at the pictures of violence committed in Gujarat will make this point clear. This is all because we have considered inculturation as a 'product' and not a 'process'. Accordingly some of our religio-cultural elements will have to be reconsidered particularly in those areas where we have imitated the practices of people of other faiths. This does not mean that we keep changing our signs and symbols as soon as someone else destroys the true meaning of it. What I am trying to say is that at one time out of need we imitated it from the Hindus; now it is time for us to evolve our own Indian Christian colour symbolism. We tried to do so for the Hindi belt. We chose golden yellow for our shawls which stands for the resurrection of Jesus as well as for the royal priesthood of Christ and this goes well at liturgical celebrations. The shape of it combines the breadth of the Indian shawl and the length of the Roman stole! So far the response has been positive. Moreover, there is a feeling in the country that we are following the *Sanskritic* values by imitating Hinduism. *Sanskritic* culture is associated with oppression which many tribals and dalits resent.

#### ***b) Art Forms as Alternatives:***

When there are blocks for inculturation, we need to be creative. Inculturation itself is a matter of creativity. Unfortunately we confine inculturation mainly to liturgy and that too to the celebration of the Eucharist. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* permits us to go ahead with whatever has been permitted in inculturation so far. Why don't we become creative with inculturation in other areas like proclamation, catechesis, dialogue, development, communication, etc? I have used Indian art form in these apostolates fairly successfully. Fine arts like music, painting, dance, particularly folk are found to be a new way of enhancing our apostolates.

I am happy to say that the documents of the Church encourage such ventures as they have a solid base in the Bible.<sup>20</sup> "At all times, therefore the Church seeks out the service of the **arts** and welcomes the **artistic** expressions of all peoples and regions. The Church is intent on keeping the works of **art** and the treasures handed down from the past and, when necessary, on adapting them to new needs in order that **art** may aid faith and devotion and be true to the reality it is to symbolize and the purpose it is to serve."<sup>21</sup> The IV Instruction for the right use of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy states particularly about dance: "Among some peoples, singing is instinctively accompanied by handclapping, rhythmic swaying and **dance-movements** on the part of the participants. Such forms of external expression can have a place in the liturgical actions of these peoples, on condition that they are always the expression of true communal prayer or adoration, praise, offering and supplication, and not simply a performance." (# 42) "The liturgical celebration is enriched by the presence of **art**, which helps the faithful to celebrate, meet God and pray. **Art** in the Church, which is made up of all peoples and nations, should enjoy the freedom of expression, as long as it enhances the beauty of the buildings and liturgical rites investing them with the respect

and honour which is their due. The **arts** should also be truly significant in the life and tradition of the people.” (# 43)

Even *Redemptionis Sacramentum* contained a ban on liturgical dance in its first draft which was deleted in its final formulation. This is a clear indication that the Church world-wide is open to include various art forms in its faith celebration of those people who consider them as help for a better union with God, concentration and devotion. The poor and ordinary people are very fond of such folk art forms. If our preferential option is for the poor, then we need to reach out to what appeals to them. “They seek the emotional; and the more fundamental forms of worship. Miracles, mysteries and myths still fill them with awe and wonder; **dance, dramas and songs** help them to give meaning to their empty and broken lives; and the community around them stands in their support. Neo-Pentecostalism which thrives on all these elements is a welcoming stream of Christianity for hundreds and thousands of seekers, who have been feeling deceived by modern scientific developments, as well as their own institutionalized Christian faiths.”<sup>22</sup>

We can make a breakthrough in this way, particularly in the present unfavourable situation of globalization, fundamentalism and patriarchy. Globalization is engulfing all the other cultures and creating its own culture. Many of its elements are definitely alien to our culture. By upholding and promoting our Indian cultural art forms we are counteracting the onslaught of globalization. Along with our culture we will also be upholding our values like asceticism, family ties, etc which globalization tries to sweep off. Then our society will not be madly driven by profit/market values. Globalization assures a good future for those who are qualified mainly in technology and business. Art forms are also sources of employment while preserving our culture.

Since art rises above religion and other manmade barriers, it will be possible to bring together various warring religious elements in our country. All these art forms are useful for all the Indian religions for their spirituality, promotion and propagation. Art forms help them to express their faith. That is the common ground where all can meet and function as in a *mandala* in the pluralistic context. Religious fundamentalism will gradually give way to harmony and reconciliation. Moreover, in the area of fine arts there is no male and female superiority. It is the quality of art that matters irrespective of gender. Art is the handiwork of one’s mind, heart, hands and fingers. Art is not based on muscle power. In fact more and more women are getting fond of art forms. They take active part in it and contribute to it. Men by and large go more for martial arts, while women generally for fine arts.

**c) Artists could be called as “lay missionaries” in the Third Millennium:**

“A good missionary is expected to be an efficient bridge-builder between two cultures, communities, ideologies and interests...”<sup>23</sup> Artists often do it as art is not confined to any religion or ideology.

Seminaries were the places where the missionaries were earlier formed. Today, I can say that within the walls of art colleges, missionaries and evangelizers are formed. They

cannot possibly convey a message unless they have experienced it in their life. Art is a holistic activity. Because of its multi-sensory, emotional and symbolic capacity to communicate it has a vital role in their spiritual life. It helps them acquire the wholeness they need. Unless they are in tune or harmony with themselves they will not be able to effectively communicate themselves, for authentic communication arises from 'being' and affects 'being'. The apostolate of proclamation can be done very well by them through art forms. As they earn their daily bread while serving art forms, they will also enhance our various apostolates. Today the pulpit is very much assisted by modern means of communication. As the genuine vocations for religious life are on the decline, we will be able to induct our laity into Church ministries which will be a new way of being the Church.

### **C o n c l u s i o n :**

I would like to conclude this paper drawing your attention to the following street lights of hope which will certainly enlighten us on our way to fulfill the mission of Christ in the changed situation of our country. We, the community of Jesus' disciples have to keep in our minds the three factors that affect the Church in Asia today, viz., globalization, fundamentalism and structures of the Church.

1. The approach and methodology of our mission must be given prominence. The pluralistic nature of our country has to be approached with friendship, trust, dialogue and solidarity. A qualitative approach is needed to heal the broken cultures and realities. We look forward to that day when we meet one another, our first curiosity will not be to ask which religion he/she belongs to.
  2. Democratization of the oppressive Church structures is an urgent need of the day. The laity, the religious and the clergy must have participation in the decision-making. This participation comes only through the empowerment of the laity, particularly of women. For this purpose we should have a definite plan as to how we will financially support a lay person when we send him/her for training. We need to have a fairly clear idea in what way the trained person could be of help to the community. Classes for children on the spirituality of religions will enable them to throw away fundamentalism which the institutionalized Church is capable of inculcating in them.
  3. Inter-religiosing the Church and evangelising the cultures will enable the people to live in harmony in spite of contradictions and dissimilarities. This will be possible when we are joyful to see large numbers of followers of other faiths in our midst and not considering their presence as a threat. Through mutual discipleship, inculturation and art forms we can make a breakthrough inspite of the unfavourable situation of globalization, fundamentalism and patriarchy which blocks the mission of the Church.
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- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 318
- <sup>18</sup> AMALADOSS, M., 'From Syncretism to Harmony', *Chakana* 2 (2004) 4, 59.
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<sup>23</sup> MENAMPARAMPIL, Dialogue in Troubled Times, *VJTR*, May 65(2001)335.