RELEVANCE OF THE RESURRECTION IN HINDU – CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

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RELEVANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

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INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of practicing Christians are creedal. They profess belief in the resurrection of Jesus and in the coming resurrection, as do millions of evangelicals who accept the "fundamentals". The writer's experience as an adult Christian and of ten years as an ordained Minister informs him that this profession of belief is not without considerable disbelief.

Whilst some Christians doggedly recite the Church's formularies and try not to think about it, others do what the Church does and say what the Church says only because being a Christian is very important to them. However, they harbor a personal scepticism about the resurrection event. They hope that the resurrection is not too important to the faith, and of course it is. There are yet others who believe naively even though in other sectors of their intellectual life they are quite sophisticated, whilst others are persistent inquirers, always asking and probing, sometimes believing, sometimes doubting. Many have arrived at an understanding of the resurrection and maybe a few of them who understand the importance of the resurrection are comfortable. They are truly blessed, but who knows what sermon or article or experience may come to shake their comfort?

A topic like the relevance of the resurrection in Hindu-Christian dialogue also attracts a great deal of debate dialogue and discussion amongst scholars and theologians of all religions. In this context the discussion generates tremendous interest among ordinary Christian believers who seek for more clarity. In this process some begin to doubt the resurrection of Christ whilst some strengthen their views. As this creates an impact upon the church and the gospel, the church is challenged to offer a response.

Religious freedom and the proliferation of religious material are a reality today because of the scientific and technological advancements. People are being educated about their faiths. It is within this context that many questions are raised about the fundamental beliefs of particular religions, eg. Reincarnation, miracles, healing, creation, resurrection, etc which are fundamental to the Christian belief. Central to the Christian faith is the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the resurrection event were not true and its importance watered down then the Christians will have no gospel to preach. Because Christianity is mission orientated, with an evangelistic thrust, the resurrection event becomes crucial to the dialogue and the transformation process.

The writer who is an ordained Minister in the Reformed Church of Africa (RCA) and whose ministry is predominantly amongst the Indian community feels a deep obligation to portray a correct biblical perspective on the resurrection event in relation to other religious perspectives, and opinion especially that of in Hinduism. The writer agrees with the following statement of the apostle Paul, Küng (Rom. 10:9) and bases this as the corner stone of the Christian faith.

Whilst many ethical and moral issues, eg. abortion, aids, poverty, exploitation, etc can be shared and agreed upon a common platform, however the main concern in this study is to show the point of departure that the resurrection event cannot be compromised or made lesser. "If Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe" (ICor. 15:14).

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE OF THIS WORK

The topic of the resurrection is not altogether new, as it is as old as Christianity itself, however the theme of this study "The Relevance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in Hindu-Christian Dialogue" has gained new importance and urgency in today's context of religious pluralism.

The writer will attempt to examine the "unbound" Christ as "recognised" by Hinduism. The writer will therefore set out his chapters as follows:

- **Chapter 1**

  This furnishes elements for dialogue and poses questions to theology.

- **Chapter 2**

  Will deal with the quest for the Historical Jesus and the Christological debates surrounding the person of Jesus Christ. As Christianity claims to be a historical religion the following questions are asked, can history allow of such a pronounced deviation as the event of the resurrection and can it be verified, or must it simply be accepted as an object of faith?

- **Chapter 3**

  Will cover an overview of the Pluralism of Religion and the Significance of Christ. A growing positive attitude to the possibility of salvation in and through other religions seems to undermine traditional faith in Christ as the unique and universal Saviour. The writer will show that in dealing with his topic, Christocenticism and theocentricism go hand in hand and that they're inseparable.

- **Chapter 4**

  Will be an inquiry into the Easter narratives, those mysterious, enigmatic stories of the resurrection appearances among the disciples of Jesus, risen and re-created as Lord and Christ. The writer attempts to very take these stories very seriously, as every detail and utterance is special. All this will be based on a conviction that the meaning of the resurrection and the earliest encounters with the Living Lord illuminates the meaning of our encounters with Him and other faiths.

CHAPTER 1

1. JESUS CHRIST AT THE ENCOUNTER OF HINDUISM

1.1 EAST MEETS WEST

It is important to consider eastern religious philosophical thought and western religious philosophical thought.

A Hindu Professor of modern history in South India College said "My study of modern history has shown me that there is a Moral Pivot in the world today, and that the best life of both East and West is more and more revolving about that centre – that Moral pivot is the person of Jesus Christ" (Jones 1929:246).

When the Christian faith first made contact with the Indian sub- continent, the people of that area and time had a long experience of life- political, intellectual and religious. It is interesting to note that in every confrontation of religions there will be elements of attraction and repulsion. The Christian Missionaries, with their invarying emphasis on the unity of God, could not but be repelled by what they understood as polytheism in all its forms. As they became aware of the pre-occupation of the Hindu mind with the One and the monotheism that seemed to be striving to come to birth, and still more as they became aware of the deep

Hindu longing for fellowship with the unseen, of the striving of the Bhakta for oneness with the divine, they could not but be attracted, and feel the possibility of dialogue in place of denunciation all the time.

The writer suggests that the history of Christian Missions and the recipients of the gospel were not simple. There were periods of mutual misunderstanding, making anything more than a rather uneasy co-existence impossible. The natural tendency of the mind to reject the strange and new made difficult any ready acceptance by India of the alien ideas of the Gospel. Indifference sometimes turned into hostility, hostility occasionally to active persecution, but Christianity has maintained itself in India through the centuries, and has established its right to be regarded as one of the faiths amongst the Indians.

1.2 THE "UNBOUND" CHRIST ACKNOWLEDGED IN HINDUISM

The writer observes that Christianity and Hinduism have had an unprecedented encounter during what has become customary to refer to as the Indian Renaissance, or the age of Neo-Hinduism. The nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century are shot through with various movements and individual personalities who, at varying depths, entered into contact with Jesus Christ and His message. It is true that most

often this contact was established by the inter-mediary of Christian groups not under Catholic obedience, whether of an evangelical cast, or on the contrary, of a liberal tendency. The writer suggests that this must be taken into account in any analysis and evaluation of the fruits of the encounter.

M.M. Thomas has spoken of the acknowledgement of Christ by the Indian Renaissance – while being careful to specify in each case and for each author the particular tenor of this acknowledgement (Thomas 1969). S. J. Samartha describes the Christ acknowledged by Neo-Hinduism as an "unbound" Christ (Samartha 1974). Samartha's understanding is that, while many attached themselves to the person of Jesus Christ, they usually detach that person from the institutional church, which, in their eyes, screens the Christian message from view. If they are willing to recognise a Church made up of disciples of Jesus, then the highly organised hierarchical form historically taken by that group, as well as its covenant with Western culture (that is, with the Colonial powers) and the foreign character it has adopted, present an obstacle to the Hindu "response".

The writer's opinion is that the Christ acknowledged by Hinduism is often a Churchless Christ. For that matter, the Christ acknowledged by Hinduism is often a Christ delivered from the incumbrances of numerous "bonds" with which He is laden by traditional Christianity – whether it be

a matter of applauding His message while rejecting the Christian claim to His person, or of receiving Him as one divine manifestation among others in a catalogue of divine descents (avatara) as varied as it is extensive. One realises from the outset that the encounter between Christ and Hinduism, viewed in its historicity, has raised ecclesiological and christological problems that are stumbling blocks even today.

The purpose of this chapter is first to take account, in their main lines of the principle currents that have marked the historical encounter between Jesus Christ and Neo-Hinduism. Here the writer shall distinguish a number of different categories characterising various attitudes or "responses" to the person of Jesus Christ (Thomas 1969 – Samartha 1974). The second step will be to sketch a rapid outline of the various models of the personhood of Jesus as developed by the protagonists of Neo-Hinduism. This will be a question of setting forth the most characteristic approaches to that personhood that the encounter with Jesus Christ has occasioned among them.

The writer will not directly examine, except by way of exception, Indian Christian theologians such as P. Chenchiah (1886 – 1959), V. Chakkarai (1880- 1958) and A. J. Appelsamy (1891 – 1976), who, during the period under examination, have for their own part sought to respond to the

questions posed, suggesting with varying felicitousness, and Indian ecclesiology and christology.

The challenge posed by the encounter of Neo-Hinduism with the person of Jesus Christ will serve as our particular but concrete basis for the theological and especially christological problems raised by religious pluralism and the inter-religious dialogue.

1.3 VARIOUS RESPONSES TO THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

"Response", wrote S.J. Samartha, "is a complex attitude involving cultural, psychological and theological factors, and in trying to describe [the Hindu response to Jesus Christ] one should be careful to avoid generalisations and over simplification of the issues" (Samartha 1974: 117). Nevertheless, he thinks general attitudes can be ranged under 3 broad categories:

(i) Firstly there are those who respond to Christ without a commitment to Him. Difference in meaning vary here, but according to the writer this is the most widespread attitude. It is usually accompanied by a thoroughgoing disregard for the Church.

(ii) Secondly there are those who respond to Christ with a commitment to Him, but to Him alone, and in the context of Hinduism itself, while they either remain indifferent to the Church or entirely reject.

(iii) Thirdly there are those whose response to and commitment to Christ lead them to enter the Church openly through baptism, but who, within the communion of the Church, address it severe criticisms. (Samartha 1974:117)

H. Staffner likewise distinguishes three categories, which, without coinciding precisely with those of Samartha, are nonetheless rather closely related to them. They are the following and they correspond to the respective parts of our study.

(i) There are Hindus for whom the social teachings of Christ serve as an inspiration, but without involving a personal commitment to Him. Mahatma Gandhi is an eminent, but not solitary example.

(ii) There are Hindus who are intensely committed to Christ, but to whom it seems impossible to enter any of the existing churches, such as Keshub Chaunder Sen.

(iii) Finally, there are Hindus who have become Christians but insist that they have remained Hindus. That is, they continue to lay claim to Hinduism as well. The best known case is that of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (Staffner 1985:3).

The above categories assert something fundamental about the realty of the encounter between Jesus Christ and Hinduism. It is perfectly possible for Hinduism to integrate Jesus into its vision of the world and realty – to assimilate Him – without necessarily involving faith in Jesus Christ as Christianity understands that faith. It is equally easy for Hinduism to separate faith in Jesus Christ, as a profession of being His disciple, from commitment to or acknowledgement of the community of disciples that is the church. In this basic sense, the categories listed above are themselves revelatory of theological problems – christological and ecclesiological problems – raised by the encounter of Jesus Christ and the protagonists of Neo-Hinduism.

1.4 HINDU MODELS OF JESUS CHRIST

It scarcely comes, as a surprise that during that period of the encounter between Jesus Christ and Hinduism with which the writer is concerned, Hindu partners should have constructed a number of different models of the object of their encounter. Various hermeneutics were at play, with

different authors building their respective interpretations of Jesus on the basis of their own personal experience, but also in function of their pre-suppositions of their personal viewpoints and the limits of their sources of information. There are a variety of Hindu christological models, whose most typical and most important traits the writer shall now attempt to highlight.

1.4.1 CHRIST OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ MOVEMENT

The question 'what think ye of Christ?' if addressed to members of the Brahmo Samaj will elicit different answers. The leaders of this Movement irresistibly were drawn to Jesus Christ and they made no secret of it. The founder of this Movement was Ram Rammohun Roy. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Ram Rammohun Roy was in the remarkable position which no other Hindu had ever attained before him, nor has anyone else even after him inspite of his example, and which perhaps few in the whole world have attained before or since, that is, of having made a thorough, comprehensive and comparative study of three of the greatest religions of the world, namely, Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. For Ram Rammohun Roy, Christianity stood above the others.

Ram Rammohun Roy was convinced of the moral superiority of the Christian precepts over all others, and hence he wanted to lay them before his countrymen, for whose moral and spiritual upliftment he was working all those years. He had set out as a religious seeker and inquirer, and whatever new truths he found he laid them before his people. After his study of the Christian religion was ripe, he collected the precepts, parables, etc together and published them in the year 1820 with the title "THE PRECEPTS OF JESUS, THE GUIDE TO PEACE AND HAPPINESS". This collection has a very small introduction and at the end of the introduction he says the following:

"I feel persuaded that by separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral principles found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding ... " (GROVER 1992:32).

It is in words such as these that the introduction sets forth the moral teaching or precepts of Jesus Christ as the most perfect exposition of that law which he elsewhere had called "that grand and comprehensive moral principle" (Grover 1992:32) was, therefore, quite in keeping with this plan of his to show Jesus Christ as the pre-eminent moral teacher that Ram

Mohun omitted not only that part of the Gospels which relates to His birth but also the account of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, all which, to say the least was like acting the play of Hamlet without the part of Hamlet, and hence was tantamount to taking away its life and soul. It was His Crucifixion and Resurrection that explained His life and teaching, and to omit it was to miss the entire meaning of both. He also excluded all the miracles that are related in the Gospels. The Gospels thus shorn of all those miracles of mercy with Jesus performed out of the infinite abundance of His love for the miserable, sick, sorrowing and sinning, and of the account of His death and Resurrection, all of which in themselves from the supreme miracle of mercy wrought by the Almighty Father for the salvation of mankind, have no more their character as Gospels, which means good tidings, for now there is no good news of the mercy of God for sinful mankind left in them, but they are reduced only to an entirely unconnected record of His Precepts or sayings which this compilation was, it being strictly to its name. Whatever the effects on the Hindu side were, a thing about which is known very little, it was from another and least expected direction that a serious objection was taken to this publication, and that was from the Christian Missionaries. The most important Christian Missionaries in the country then were Doctors Carey and Marshman, who had started their work of preaching the Gospel as early as 1799. It was not to be expected that such people who, staking everything

that they held dear, were preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its naked simplicity, as involving necessarily an immense amount of personal sacrifice, labour and expense, should be altogether silent at what they considered to be an unwarrantable mutilation of the Gospel on the part of Ram Rammohun Roy.

The Christian Missionaries criticised the publication of the 'Precepts of Jesus' very severely. In response to the question of atonement or forgiveness of sins (for the scope of our study), which had found no place in his Precepts so far, Ram Rammohun Roy says:

"These precepts separated from the mysterious dogmas and historical records appear, on the contrary, to the compiler to contain not only the essence of all that is necessary to instruct mankind in their civil duties, but also the best and only means of obtaining the forgiveness of sins, the favour of God, and strength to overcome our passions and to keep His commandments. I, therefore, extract from the same compilation a few passages of that greatest of all Prophets who has sent to call sinners to repentance" (Grover, 1992:37).

Ram Rammohun Roy in these passages and others, does not hesitate to call Jesus "the Saviour", "the greatest of all Prophets", "Our gracious Saviour"

and to call his message "the divine message of Jesus of Nazareth", without attempting to elaborate their meaning. That he had the highest respect for the Person and Precepts of Jesus cannot be questioned but tired as he was of any forms of Polytheism, he could not accept the concept of a Triune God.

The publication of the Precepts of Jesus commends itself easily and spontaneously to the mind of unsophisticated humanity as no other system of morality does. One of the outstanding instances of this is that of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), has received much inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount and especially the Beatitudes (Matt5:1-12), influenced the thought and activity, even the political activity, of the Mahatma in the two essential components of that activity : *Satyagraha* (the search for truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence).

As for the person of Jesus, while the Mahatma was deeply attracted to Him, his attachment never became a personal commitment of faith as a Christian understands this commitment. For Gandhi, Jesus was a model to imitate and an inspiration with which to be fired. In other words, Jesus was one of those singular human beings (among others) in whom one inescapably recognizes a manifestation of the Truth that is very God.

For Gandhi, the Sermon on the Mount contains the whole of Jesus's teaching, which is summed up in the principle of non-violence. Jesus's own life and His suffering inspired by love, is the perfect example of this, and yet the principle contained in the gospel teaching matters more than the historical person of Jesus Christ who incarnates it. It would be true without Him. Gandhi writes: "The message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in His Sermon on the Mount. The Spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the Bhagavadgita for the domination of my heart. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me" (Gandhi 1963:198).

Against this background any idea of a unique place, for the Person of work of Jesus Christ in the moral and spiritual progress of mankind is ruled out. Gandhi is prepared to consider Jesus Christ as one of the many names and incarnations of God, but without giving his divine nature, his atoning deed or his mediation between God and mankind any uniqueness (Thomas 1969:201).

Gandhi's theology of religions goes hand in hand with his Hinduizing interpretation of Jesus Christ. Its basic principle is the equality of all religions. This equality flows the unfathomable character of the one God, who, even when self-revealed in an indefinite number of varied forms,

remains beyond all manifestations. He says the soul of religion is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms (Gandhi 1963:33-34). Gandhi is convinced, then, that he may render equal homage to Jesus, Muhammad, Krishna and Buddha, and others.

At the end of his study, Thomas refers to the way in which certain Christians, more or less familiar with Gandhi, have reacted to his interpretation of Jesus and Christianity. The opinion, at once sympathetic and critical, of E. Stanley Jones, the evangelist and theologian who had known Gandhi personally, is particular enlightening. In the book that he devotes to him, Jones writes that Gandhi "was a Hindu by allegiance and a Christian by affinity", and adds: "The Mahatma was a natural Christian rather than an orthodox one" (Jones 1948:76, 79).

He explains his precise meaning by stating that Mahatma was influenced and moulded by Christian principles, particularly the Sermon on the Mount and in the practice of those principles he discovered and lived by the person of Christ, however dimly and unconsciously ... but he never seemed to get to Christ as a person (Jones 1948:80, 105).

And to Gandhi himself Jones writes: "You have grasped the principle but you missed the Person ... May I suggest that you penetrate through the

principles to the Person and then come back and tell us what you have found" (Jones 1948: 80-81). Thus in concentrating on the ethics of the Sermon on Mount, the very essence of Christianity, Gandhi had missed the Christian sense of the person of Jesus as God's decisive revelation and redemptive deed, which is at the centre of Christianity.

1.4.2 KESHUB CHUNDER SEN'S CHRIST OF BHAKTI

Keshub Chunder Sen (1838 –1884) went far beyond Raja Mohun Roy's standpoint. He is overwhelmed by the glory of the character of Christ as he is with his own sense of sinfulness. He must be regarded as being mainly under the sign of bhakti, personal devotion. Of all the religious reformers of Neo-Hinduism, none has placed such fervent, emotional accents on an understanding of the person of Jesus, as has Keshub. Enthusiastically he reminds his readers that Jesus is an Asian, a fact calculated to recommend him to the affection of his Indian compatriots and to enable them to understand him better than the West, which has dressed him up in European clothing. He writes: "Was not Jesus Christ an Asiatic? Yes, and his disciples were Asiatics. In fact, Christianity was founded and developed by Asiatics and in Asia. When I recollect on this, my love for Jesus becomes hundred fold intensified; I feel him nearer to my heart and deeper in my national sympathies" (Scott 1979:64). Keshub Chandra

Sen's appreciation of Jesus Christ grew with time and experience. Beginning in 1869 he accepted Jesus as a great man and a reformer. He recognized in him the ideal humanity and speaking at last in 1882 as the second Person of, what to Ram Rammohun Roy was the mysterious doctrine, the Trinity. He has his own interpretation of the Trinity. He experiences the throes of the Christological controversies of the early Christian centuries, fighting vehemently any idea of Christ being God the Father. "Christ is not, never was, never will be God, the Father. He is humanity pure and simple, in which divinity dwells. In Him we see human nature perfected by true affiliation to divine nature. And in this affiliation we realise fully the purpose of Christ's life and ministry. He shows us not how God can become man, nor how man can become God, but how we can exalt our humanity by making it more and more divine, how while retaining our humanity we may still partake more and more of the divine characters" (Mozoomdar 1933:29). Keshub Chundra Sen comes nearly to accept the adoptionist theory. He speaks of the distinction between Man-God and God-Man. "A Man-God is not intelligible. It is untrue and absurd. It is a lie and a fiction. A God-Man is quite intelligible, a possibility in the nature of things. Here man remains man and God is only super-added to his nature" (Religion and Society).

He explains the Trinity with the help of a triangle. The apex is the very God Jehovah, the supreme Brahama of the Vedas. Alone, in his own eternal glory, He dwells. From him comes down the Son in a direct line, an emanation from Divinity. Thus God descends and touches one end of the base, permeates the world, and then by the power of the Holy Ghost drags up regenerated humanity to Himself. Divinity coming down to humanity is the Son; Divinity carrying up humanity to heaven is the Holy Ghost (Farquhar 1915:63).

This understanding of Christ in one section of the Brahmo Samaj may not come quite up to the Christian understanding of Him. But this is the highest by comparison with others who have set out in the search of Jesus Christ in the Samaj.

A cursory look at the beliefs of the three branches, that is, Brahmo Samaj, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and the Naba Bidhan (Farquhar 1915:71) will show how their difference range from a complete denial of the incarnation and the rejection of all scriptures as authoritative in the Adi Brahmo Samaj to an acceptance of scriptures in the Church of the New Dispensation as inspired. None of the creeds mentions Christ as Saviour, but all speak of God as Saviour. It is certain that Christ is not looked upon as mediator through whom men come to the Father. It would seem that with the

exception of Keshub Chandra Sen and a few others the attitude of Brahmo Samaj as a whole continues to be that of Raja Ram Rammohun Roy: an attitude where Christ is looked upon as one whose precepts all must follow as the guide to peace and happiness. It is an attitude, which affords the highest reverence to the Christ of history but goes happily unaffected by His life and work as Saviour and Redeemer of mankind. In all Brahmo Samaj literature Christ is repeatedly referred to as a created being.

What Ram Rammohun Roy, Gandhi and Keshub Chunder Sen have felt with regard to those Precepts, innumerable men and women have felt more or less in India just as they have done all over the world ever since the days of Christ Jesus. But the main question is whether this is the whole of Christianity. From the very first, whether it was due to these unsurpassable or unequalled 'words' of his, or to his 'works', those miracles or mercy which he performed as a part of his daily life, or to the manner of his speaking his 'words' and doing his 'works' that 'authority' with which he spoke, and that 'grace and truth' with which this Person was full, or whether it was due to all these combined, each contributing its share to the general result, there is not the least doubt that the question as to his Person has been the very first inextricably involved in that of His Precepts. The one could not be separated from the other. The question continually forced itself upon the mind of both his friends and enemies as

to who he was, as we learn from not one but all the four Gospels. It was on this question that this disciples staked their all and followed him and that Jesus himself staked His all, even His life as well as the future of His work.

He sealed the Precepts with His blood and through His Resurrection, that He thus showed, invested them with not only that authority but even divine power, without which the Precepts would have been but a dead letter.

1.4.3 THE CHRIST OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT

"I pity the Hindu who does not see the beauty in Jesus Christ's character".

"I pity the Christian who does not reverence the Hindu Christ".

(SWAMI VIVEKANANDA)

Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church never challenged Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. This is because when they thought about Jesus Christ, it was not as seekers yearning for salvation, but as those who had attained the goal of their spiritual quest. They tuned to Christianity only to enrich their spiritual experience and they viewed Jesus Christ from a standpoint fundamentally different from that of the Church. It is

significant that Sri Ramakrishna was introduced to Christ by a Hindu, Shambu Nath Mallick and to Islam by Govind Ray, a Hindu interested in Sufi mysticism. Nowhere in the Gospels of Ramakrishna do we find a sustained discussion of the Person of Christ. The claim "I am the way, the Truth and the Life", never challenges him with a decisive either – or. Swami Vivekananda also had the certainity of mystic experience. Whenever he speaks of Christ, it is from his own point of view. The Kerygma of the Church never reaches him. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda interpreted their mystic experience in vedantic terms.

Although Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda accepted Jesus Christ as an avatara, the Ramakrishna Movement does not in any significant way look to Jesus Christ for inspiration. The movement stands rooted in the ancient Vedanta as experienced and transmitted by its leaders. Keshub's New Dispensation, on the other hand, includes the Spirit of Jesus. It was the Ramakrishna Movement that made available to all India the spiritual resources in ancient Vedanta and demonstrated powerfully that it was not necessary to go outside Hinduism – to Christianity or to the Brahmo Samaj – to find a basis for social reform.

1.4.4 THE CHRIST OF NEO-VEDANTINE PHILOSOPHY

The clearest example of this model of Hindu interpretation of Jesus Christ is that of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975). A Philosopher by profession, Radhakrishnan strove to construct a synthesis of western philosophy with Eastern thought, especially as found in the Vedanta which he interpreted in a modernizing fashion not entirely free of the influence of various currents of Western thought.

Radhakrishnan is the symbol of a philosophical approach to the mystery of Christ. That doctrine is rethought in function not only of a Neo-Vedantine interpretation of Hindu advaita, but also of an evolutionistic humanism having connections with Western idealism. The teaching of the avatara, or divine manisfestations, then becomes a symbolic expression of humanity's faith in the power of the spirit that penetrates both itself and the entire cosmos. Radhakrishnan rejects the popular notion of personal, individual "incarnations" (avatara), replacing it with that of an evolutive process through which humanity gradually realises its potentialities: God is not born as a human being once in time; rather, humanity gradually gives birth to God in its midst by a process of self-realisation. He says that (the avatara) are the moulds into which the seeking soul tries to cast itself, that it might grow towards God. What one man, a Christ or a Buddha, has

achieved, may be repeated in the lives of other men (Radhakrishnan 1929:545-546).

The important thing to remember is that of the Neo-Vedantine interpretation of Christ presented by Radhakrishnan rests in the matrix of a cosmic evolution, according to which "the germ of divinity is in each of us". "Salvation" consists in delivering oneself from all ties to the real values that dominate us, by contemplation of the mystery of the divinity present within us.

In this framework, Jesus is best understood as "a mystic who believes in the inner light, ... ignores ritual and is indifferent to legalistic piety" (Schilpp 1952:807). As for the "secret of the cross", whose realistic morbid Christian view is rejected by this author, here must see "the abandonment of the ego, identification with a fuller life and consciousness. The soul is raised to a sense of its universality" (Radhakrishnan 1939:97). Thus Christ becomes one symbol among others of evolution toward the spirit for which humanity is destined. The "resurrection", the "Reign of God", the "eternal life" that, in the Christian schema, are regarded as the human beings destiny, must be reinterpreted in terms of Hindu faith before they can deliver their spiritual reality. All human beings are destined for a passage "from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of

universal spirit, ... from slavery to the world to the liberty of the eternal" (Radhakrishnan 1939:47).

The life of Jesus has a symbolic value: It is not interpreted as a simple historical event. What is important is not the historical person of Jesus but the "Christhood" symbolized by that person: Christ is born in the depths of Spirit: we say that he passes through life, dies on the cross and rises again. Those are not so much historical events which occurred once upon a time as universal processes of spiritual life, which are being continually accomplished in the souls of men ...Christhood is an attainment of the soul, a state of inward glorious illumination in which the divine wisdom has become the heritage of the soul (Schilpp 1952:79).

On the basis of this idealistic, dehistoricizing view of the mystery of Christ, drawn from advaitine Vedantism, Radhakrishnan interprets both history and development of primitive Christianity and the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism. His interpretation of the Jesus of the New Testament is shot through with Gnostic and Neoplatonic views that display a kinship with the teaching of the Upanishads and primitive Buddhism.

The insistence on the neo-platonic idea of the "Logos is so great as to reduce the human life of Jesus to a mere illusive appearance." Paul especially "warns us against over-estimating the historical instead of looking upon it as the symbol of metaphysical truth ..." (Radhakrishnan 1939:220-221).

Radhakrishnan rejects that which constitutes the essence of Christianity and the basis of its universality: The Jesus Christ event understood as God's decisive intervention in human history and universal redemptive act. Christian universalism is based on the unity of \Jesus Christ. By contrast, Vedantine universalism is founded on a spiritual experience, which is actually an individual matter.

Radhakrishnan steadfastly refuses to accept any claim for the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ as revealer of God and redeemer of man.

He believes that it is an importation of the Jewish idea of a 'Jealous God' into the simple, tolerant, universal religion of Jesus. He states that the claim to the possession of a unique, revealed truth, which declines to be classified as one among the many, is ruinous for men. It is dangerous both in its motive and its consequences. He also boldly says that because Christians believed that they had only one avatar, Christian history has

been disgraced by more and bloodier crusades ... than has the history of Hinduism or Buddhism (Radhakrishnan 1952:810).

This refusal by Radhakrishnan to recognise the Christian claim of the uniqueness of Christ is because of several reasons. First, because of the belief that there cannot be a complete manifestation of the Absolute in the world of relativity. Second, because God is infinite, His manisfestations, the avataras cannot be limited to a particular place or a particular time. The possibility of many avataras has, therefore, to be recognised. Third, because of the striking similarities between Jesus, the Buddha and Krishna. The claim of uniqueness for any particular one loses content. And fourth, because the Christian claim cannot be substantiated, either by its own scriptures or by an unanimity of opinion among the Christian theologians. Radhakrishnan goes on to say that every guru is a 'Saviour'.

As to the moral teachings of Jesus Christ, the similarities are so noticeable, says Radhakrishnan, that an outstanding Western scholar on Buddhism remarks that it is not too much to say that almost the whole of the moral teaching of the Gospels as distinct from its dogmatic teachings will be found in Buddhist writings, several centuries older than the Gospels. (Religion and Society 48). Tactfully Radhakrishnan discards any theory, which might suggest that Christianity borrowed from Hinduism or

Buddhuism even though the Buddha lived and taught about 600 years before Christ.

In his later writings there is hardly any mention made of the cross, and the Resurrection of Christ. But in his earlier work, Radhakrishnan attaches some significance to both. The idea of atonement is rejected, but the value of the suffering as 'a warning against evil and incentive to good' is commended. The idea of voluntary suffering has special value because it is undertaken for the welfare of others or for the spiritual progress of ones own self. It is from this point of view that the suffering and the death of Jesus Christ are meaningful. He mentions that the cross is not an offence or a stumbling block to the Hindu, but it is the great symbol of the redemptive activity of God.

So too, the Resurrection of Christ is an illustration of a universal principle. Dying with Christ and rising again with Him is a symbol of new birth, a spiritual rebirth that the Hindu also recognises as very essential. The resurrection of Christ is understood as a symbol of spiritual illumination, leading to new life of realisation and union with God. In view of all this, Radhakrishnan firmly rejects the claim on the part of any religion that it alone is the bearer of final salvation.

The writer will now make some conclusive remarks or observations concerning Jesus Christ at the encounter of Hinduism. Although he would focus his observations on Radhakrishnan's encounter with Jesus Christ, but this will also suffice for the other leaders of the Indian Renaissance.

Firstly, his interpretation of the origin and developments of Christianity takes into account more seriously the historical factors involved. He attempts to fit Jesus into the pattern of Neo-Vedantian understanding of man and his destiny. Some questions naturally arise, both with regard to the method and the content of Radhakrishnan's interpretation of Christ and Christianity.

Granting that one should go to the source to have an understanding of the beginnings of the Christian faith, how is one to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith? Without proper theological criteria how is it possible to draw the line of demarcation except on the basis of individual preference? One of the important lessons of New Testament criticism through long years of scholarly work is the recognition that the Person and work of Christ cannot be properly understood apart from the life and faith of the Christian community in which the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament were written. While some kind of 'demythologisation' may be necessary, the Church's beliefs about Christ cannot be so easily dismissed

as later additions or unwarranted interpretations of the fact of Christ. To do so is to ignore the witness of the New Testament and forget the impact of the personality of Jesus on the early Christian community.

Secondly, Radhakrishnan's description of the Incarnation as 'a demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity and of Jesus Christ as an example of a man who has become God' contradicts the witness of the New Testament. In its attempt to describe the mystery of the Incarnation, the New Testament always gives priority to God. 'God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son ...' (Jn 3:16). 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself'. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14). To ignore this is to disturb the integrity of the Biblical faith in God and Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the impressive list of similarities between the Buddha, Krishna and Jesus should be taken with a certain amount of caution. Even while acknowledging that Radhakrishnan himself does not draw any conclusion except by implication, the chronological sequence needs much more careful examination. While it is true that historically Jesus was born later, quite a few similarities are later than the Christian era. Edward J Thomas, after making a careful study of sixteen parallels in furnishing evidence for the incorporation of Buddhists legends in the Gospels has sometimes been

judged merely by the amount of resemblance to be found between them, and the different conclusions drawn show how very subjective are the results (Thomas 1927:246).

Fourthly, there is the difficult question of the 'uniqueness' of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ on which it is unlikely that there will be any agreement between the Hindu and the Christian beliefs. It is probably true that in the formulation of the Christian faith and in the way the Church's message of the Good News has been proclaimed, people have noted a certain 'exclusiveness' and sensed what is sometimes described as a piece of 'occidental arrogance'. It should perhaps be possible to avoid giving offence to others in explaining this belief in Christ. Nevertheless, one should not forget that there is an element of 'exclusiveness' in every religion without which there would be no justification for the historical existence of particular religions.

What makes Christianity unique and exclusive and shows the point of departure as mentioned in the introduction between Christianity and Hinduism, is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It cannot be compromised or made lesser. The Hindu reformers have latched onto the Principles of the Bible and missed out the Person of the Bible.

It was not the morality of the Sermon on the Mount, which enabled Christians to conquer Roman paganism, but the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead. In an age when Roman Senators vied to see who could get the most blood of a steer on their togas – thinking that would prevent death – Christianity was in competition for eternal life, not morality (Woodward 1996:73).

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLURALISM OF RELIGIONS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST

A growing positive attitude to the possibility of salvation in and through other Religions seems to undermine traditional faith in Christ as the unique and universal Saviour. If we are helping Hindus and Muslims to grow in their own faith, are we not being disloyal to our mission to proclaim Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Who is Christ for us? The writer is asking these questions not in the abstract, a priori, but in the context of our experience of other religions in our community. We are living in a situation of religious pluralism (Amaladoss 1988:115-138). There is a wide acceptance today of the idea that people are saved not only, in spite of, but in and through their religions, because God has reached out to them in the context of their life, community and history. This realisation is not so much the conclusion of an argument as born out of a living experience of other believers. The question is how we are to reconcile this universal salvific will of God with an individual act of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus in the midst of religious pluralism.

In trying to answer the question and in relation to the title of this chapter, two issues in the form of two questions need to be addressed. The first issue is 'Is Religious Pluralism within God's purpose?' The second is 'Are "uniqueness" and "finality" appropriate theological categories for understanding the significance of Christ?' which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.1 IS RELIGIOUS PLURALISM WITHIN GOD'S PURPOSE? – (ISSUE 1)

The underlying issue in all ecumenical discussions thus far can be reduced to the question of Christian attitude to religious plurality itself. Is religious plurality within God's purpose? Is pluralism a blessing or a curse? Should the Christian attitude to other faiths, however humble, loving and open, aim primarily at supplanting them?

Religious plurality was not itself the subject of discussion, rather all positions taken could be shown ultimately to take one side or the other on the issue of plurality. The discussions were primarily about the validity of specific religious traditions, often wondering whether God was revealingly active in their history, or whether the religious experiences to which the adherents of different faiths itself could have any ultimate meaning (Focus of Jerusalem 1928 & Tambaran 1938 meetings).

Both at Edinburgh (1910) and Jerusalem (1928) some people wanted to affirm plurality, at least partially. Edinburgh's Commission IV had pleaded that the religious experience of the Hindu should not be set aside. It had argued that the depth of understanding of Reality as seen in Hinduism and the testimony of those who were in contact with devout Hindus witnessed to a 'two-way communication' between God and man that should be a challenge to any Christian exclusivism that would consider Hindu religious experience as 'false' or 'invalid'.

One of the difficulties of Christians relating to Hinduism is its complex nature. It is described as 'not one religion but many' and the fact that it has no formulated creed or body of doctrine makes it possible for it to hold within its embrace a number of religious views and doctrines that are apparently inconsistent and even contradictory to each other. J.N. Farquhar claimed that undue criticism of the Hindu faiths should be stopped. "Christ's own attitude to Judaism ought to be our attitude to other faiths, even if the gap is far greater and the historical connection absent" (Ariarjah 1991:21). The positions taken by Devanandan, Niles and M M Thomas implicitly affirmed plurality, but these were based on the conviction that the whole of religious life was renewed and redeemed by the risen Christ (Thomas 1975:129).

It is important to note that it was only at Tambaram that actually worked out a theologically argued position on other religions and their theological 'status' in relation to the gospel. Hendrik Kraemer had analysed all major religious traditions of the world and drawn conclusion that the gospel was in discontinuity with them. Kraemer's concept of biblical realism, his interpretation of Hinduism and his views on the Christian attitude to other faiths were subjected to much debate, during and after the Tambaran Conference.

All the discussions, which have taken place within the World Council of Churches since its formation, have never radically challenged Tambaran's position on religious plurality. Indeed, the emphasis on 'dialogue' avoided the question of religious plurality by concentrating on the issue of relationships. The theological issues that had to do with plurality were stated with a question mark behind them. The Nairobi Controversy was thus the necessary consequence of the fundamental theological inadequacy of the discussions within the World Council of Churches. At the World Council of Churches Sixth Assembly at Vancouver (1983), the section on "Witnessing in a Divided World" dealing with the questions of Christian relations with people of other faiths, aroused much controversy. The report presented to the Vancouver plenary read as follows: "While

affirming the uniqueness of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus to which we bear witness, we recognise God's creative work in the religious experience of people of other faiths" (Ariarajah 1991:170).

A number of interventions raised serious objection to the recognition of 'God's creative work ' in the religious experience of the people of other faiths. The deep disagreement induced the majority of the Assembly to vote to refer the report back to the drafting committee. Finally, the following formulation was arrived upon: "While affirming the uniqueness of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, to which we bear witness, we recognise God's creative work in the seeking for religious truth among people of other faiths" (Ariarjah 1991:170).

To sharpen the issue, we must observe that the real controversy centred much more on the theological assumptions behind the dialogue than on the dialogical relationships itself. It is indeed significant that the World Council of Churches assembly in 1983 could not agree to speak of "God's creative work in the religious experience of people of other faiths" but could only "recognise God's creative work in the seeking for religious truth" among people of other faiths. It is our contention that the root of the problem lies in the absence from the ecumenical movement of a considered theological position on religious plurality, and this argument is aptly

illustrated by the close similarity between the last Vancouver formulation and the position taken at Tambaram in 1938: "We believe that Christ is the way for all, that He alone is adequate for the world's needs ... Men have long been seeking Him all through the ages. Often this seeking and longing have been misdirected. But we see glimpses of God's light in the world of religions, showing that His yearning after His erring children has not been without response" (Ariarajah 1991:171).

Had the theological understanding of Christian relationships with other faiths not moved since 1938? Studies of the developments since Tambaram does show that it had. But the reluctance of the World Council of Churches discussions to take a more explicit stand on the theological significance of religious plurality has plagued, and will continue to plague, any serious ecumenical consideration of these relationships. We are convinced that the time is ripe for the ecumenical movement and Churches to develop a set of theological convictions about religious plurality along the same lines, which it has already followed in relation to mission and evangelism, and to dialogical relations between Christians and people of other faiths. Without a contemporary theological response to religious plurality, future discussions on the issue are bound to result in the selfsame stalemate as at Nairobi and Vancouver, and yet again concerned Christians

will have to fall back on Tambaram, which adopted the only clear position vis-à-vis other faiths and a theology of mission to sustain it.

During the last decade there has been enormous soul-searching among theologians of religion on the whole issue of pluralism and relationships between religious communities. So we must now turn our attention to the contemporary discussion of the theology of religions in order to assess its contribution to the issue we have indicated.

2.2 SEARCH FOR A NEW PARADIGM

In recent years, there have been a number of attempts to analyse contemporary discussions of the theology of religions. Authors who have studied this problem in recent times are accustomed to speak of three broad paradigms that classify the answers usually given by theologians. In a useful volume, Alan Race has typified patterns of Christian theology of religions as tending towards 'exclusivism', 'inclusivism' or 'pluralism' (Race 1983:172). A similar classification is also used by the Church of England Study –book, Towards a Theology for Interfaith Dialogue, while Gavin D'Costas' Theology and Religious Pluralism refers to Pluralists (illustrated by John Hick), Exclusivists (represented by H Kramer) and Inclusivist (of which Karl Rahner serves as Protagonist) paradigms. (D Costa 1986) As there are many excellent surveys of these trends, it is

enough for me here to present them schematically in order to provide a context for our reflection.

The exclusivists (ecclesiocentric) say that no one will be saved unless that person confesses explicit faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour. Other religions may have many good things in them as the best fruit of human reflections and effort. They however do not mediate salvation. The Church is the only way to salvation.

The inclusivists (christocentic) accept that there may be grace and revelation in other religions, so that they may mediate salvation to those who believe in them. But the salvation they mediate is salvation in Jesus Christ. Even if the other believers may not be aware of the fact, they are "anonymous" Christians, related to the Church in some hidden way. Jesus Christ and the Church are then considered the fulfilment of other religions and Jesus Christ is the centre of the history of salvation.

The Pluralists (theocentric) find this inclusive attitude a patronizing one.

They prefer to say that all religions are ways to the ultimate, each in its own manner. As Christ is the way for the Christians, so is Buddha the way

for Buddhists and Krishna or Rama for Hindus. They opt for a "theocentric" as opposed to a "christocentric" perspective of history.

In order to solve the problem of the various religions, exclusivism applies the dialectical theology of Karl Barth, according to which the only valid knowledge of God is the Christian knowledge received by human beings in Jesus Christ. The God of others is an idol. It will not be superfluous to observe that the exclusivistic thesis, which postulates membership in the Church as a condition of salvation, and in that Church, the explicit profession of Jesus Christ has been officially rejected by the ecclesial magesterium.

It seems difficult to conceive how the salvific mediation of the Church beyond its own frontiers might be understood. As essentially sacramental, the salvific mediation of the Church is exercised by proclamation of the Word and the sacraments. While reaching the Church's members, and to some extent its future members, it does not reach the members of other religions tradition. Hence, the Church, as derived mystery, as utterly relative to the mystery of Christ, cannot be the yardstick by which the salvation of others is measured.

Once we have admitted this premise, however, the aforementioned paradigms poses a serious challenge to the traditional christocentric

outlook. To inclusive christocentrism is opposed a theocentric view, that is pluralism. A number of recent authors support this 'paradigm change' – this shift from christocentrism to theocentrism, from inclusivism to pluralism. Their reasoning, broadly speaking is as follows: If Christianity sincerely seeks a dialogue with the other religious traditions, which it can only seek on a footing of equality – it must first of all renounce any claim to uniqueness for the person and work of Jesus Christ as a universal constitutive element of salvation. To be sure, this position is open to various understandings in terms of radicality. There are two divergent interpretations by J P Schinellar, according to which the person of Jesus Christ, understood as nonconstitutive of salvation, is nonetheless normative for some, while for others it is neither constitutive nor normative (Schineller 1976:545-566). If we must give examples, we might cite, for the normative Jesus, Ernst Troeltsch and Paul Tillich; and for the non-normative Jesus, John Hick, whose representative position deserves some attention here.

The authors who advocate a theocentric pluralism, however, differ from one another in various respects, which we need not detail here. Let us simply note, that, while for some of these authors, such as Alan Rice, Christianity renunciation of its christological claims must be irrevocable,

(Race 1983:106-148), others propound it as a workable hypothesis, along the lines of a methodological doubt or as an at least temporary "bracketing" necessary in order for the dialogue with others to be established honestly and authentically. The very practice of dialogue may well re-establish the validity of Christian claims would rest ultimately on the sole foundation that can establish them with solidity: the test of encounter.

John Hick's position is so representative of a theological pluralism understood in a radical sense that it may well be worthwhile to pause a moment to consider it. Hick advocates a "Copernican revolution" in Christology, a revolution that must specifically consist of a shift in paradigms, a movement from the traditional christocentric perspective to a new theocentric perspective. Copernican revolution, an expression we frequently meet in other areas of theological discussions today, is indeed an appropriate term for what is underway here. Originally it designated the passage from one system for explaining the cosmos, now passé and overthrown, to another system that actually corresponds to reality. The Ptolemaic system was replaced by the Copernican. Having believed for centuries that the sun revolves around the earth actually, we finally discovered, with Galileo and Copernicus that the earth actually revolves

around the sun. Just so, having believed for centuries that the other religions traditions revolved around Christianity as their centre, today we must acknowledge that the centre around which all religions traditions revolve (including Christianity) is actually God. Such a paradigm switch necessarily entails the abandonment of any claim to a unique meaning not only for Christianity, but for Jesus Christ himself. (Hick 1973:107).

The price to be paid by the traditional Christian faith in terms of the mystery of the person and work of Jesus Christ is, as we see, is considerable. Meanwhile let us be content to observe that some recent authors not only reject Hick's dilemma, but also show his position to be untenable. In Gavin D' Costas' book, entitled Theology and Religious Pluralism, the author recalls two basic axioms of the Christian faith : the universal salvific will of God and the necessary mediation of Jesus Christ (and the role of the Church) in easy salvation mystery.

While exclusivism relies on the second axiom, neglecting the first, and pluralism on the first, to the detriment of the second, it seems inclusivism alone succeeds in accounting for and holding both at once. Exposing first the pluralistic theory, the author shows that despite its seeming liberalism,

Hicks either / or dilemma actually represents a rigid, self-contradictory position. Its theocentric view imposes on the encounter of religions a divine model that corresponds exclusively to the God of the so-called monotheistic religions. It is not universal.

Kraemer's exclusivism stands in the diametrically opposite corner but is equally rigid, it, too, being based on a dialectical of either / or. It too, is untenable from a biblical and theological point of view, and actually involves internal contradictions. An exclusive emphasis on merely one of the pair of crucial axioms that ought to govern a Christian theology of religions leads to insoluble theological problems.

There remains the inclusive paradigm of which Karl Rahner is the foremost representative. Does this paradigm solve the problems left unsolved by the other two while preserving whatever measure of validity may reside in the two extreme positions? Gavin D' Costa shows that this is indeed the case, and that the inclusivistic position alone is capable of holding together and harmonizing the two axioms of Christian faith that are obligatory for any Christian theology of religions. On the one side, Jesus Christ is clearly asserted to be God's definitive revelation and the

absolute Saviour. On the other side, the door is open to a sincere acknowledgement of divine manifestations in the history of humanity in various cultures and of efficacious "elements of grace" to be found in other religious traditions; elements that are salvific for their members. Revealed definitively in Jesus Christ, God (and the mystery of Christ) is nonetheless present and at work in other religious traditions. How?

Referring to the stimulating, open theological and phenomenological tasks confronting the Christian in religious pluralism, he writes: "The form of inclusivism I have argued for tries to do full justice to (the) two most important Christian axioms: that salvation comes through God in Christ alone, and that God's salvific will is truly universal. By maintaining these two axioms in fruitful tension, the inclusivist paradigm can be characterized by an openness that seeks to explore the many and various ways in which God has spoken to all his children in the non-christian religions and an openness that will lead to the positive fruit of this exploration transforming, enriching and fulfilling Christianity, so much so that its future shape may be very different from the Church we know today!" (D'Costa 1986:136)

Thus, in broad strokes, we have surveyed the current debate on religious pluralism. If there is one important conclusion that is already certain, it is

that the christological problem constitutes the nub of this debate. The decisive question that governs everything else is whether a theology of religions that means to be Christian has any real choice between a christocentric perspective, which acknowledges the Jesus Christ event as constitutive of universal salvation, and a theocentric perspective, which, is one fashion or another, places in doubt or explicitly rejects this central datum of traditional faith. In other words can theocentrisim that is not at the same time christocentric be a Christian theocentrism.

In the foregoing pages the writer has dealt with the ways in which some contemporary scholars have addressed the subject of religious pluralism. This list was by no means exhaustive, for we could also have mentioned such well known theologians as Raimundo Panikkar, Hans Kung and Aloysius Pieris, of whom, along with many others, have been seeking a meaningful theological framework for understanding the Christian faith in a multi-faith milieu. The writer has not discussed some of these because he will consider their views later, when he comes to the implications of pluralism for the discussion of Christology.

We should of course recognize that religious plurality is not a new experience for the Church. The church was born into a Jewish milieu and had soon to come to terms with the Roman world. Graeco-Roman cults, Hellenistic philosophy and the many religions with which Christianity came into contact each exerted some influence on the development of the Christian faith and its attitude to other faiths. The early church fathers had themselves taken sides for more exclusivists or inclusivist ways of understanding religious plurality (Coward 1985:15-22).

2.3 DIALOGUE IN A RELIGIOUSLY PLURAL SOCIETY

Religious pluralism today is not just an academic issue to be discussed, but a fact of experience to be acknowledged, said Samartha. Noting that religions have traditionally been "moats of separation rather than bridges of understanding between people", he asked: "How can men and women, committed to different faiths, live together in multi-religious societies? In a world that is becoming a smaller and smaller neighbourhood, what are the alternatives between shallow friendliness and intolerant fanaticism? What is the Christian obligation in the quest for human community in a pluralist situation? (Samartha 1971:129)

There are many reasons why, in this matter of inter-religious encounter, Christians are unwilling to move beyond the positions they have already taken, that is of exclusivism. Sometimes, political and economic factors influence the attitude of one religious community toward others. Quite often, unexamined ideological assumptions prevent Christians from critically examining their traditional positions, but the major reason for the present impasse is the unresolved theological tension within the consciousness of the church about other religions.

Hinduism approached Christianity with a dialogical spirit in a big way during the period of the Hindu Renaissance. Confronted with the Christian west and Christian values expressed in religion and social life many Hindu thinkers came forward with a critical review of Christianity and their own religion. The spirit of the movement was, in general, dialogical. Hinduism looked ready for dialogue in spite of counter self defensive movements such as Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, etc., but about hundred years ago, at the beginnings of Hindu Renaissance, Christian attitude to dialogue was very much different. The then dominant missionary outlook largely led by an exclusivist attitude could not appreciate the Hindu initiative in this field. This was mainly because the Hindu understanding of Christ

according to many missionaries was seen from the Christian perspective, not genuinely Christian, but a Hindu interpretation of Christ.

2.4 POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR THE DIALOGUE

Where will the dialogue begin? What will its agenda be? We cannot, of course, fix its program in advance, since the Spirit blows where it will. One question however, can be asked: What will be its point of departure? Where will a common ground be found on which Christians and others can carry on a theological conversation?

It has been suggested that the point of encounter is the Christic mystery, universally present and active, even though its activity reaches Christians and as the 'inclusivists' and 'pluralists' believe, others in different ways. The starting point for the theological dialogue must not be sought in any doctrine. Doctrines, while they may partially coincide in their profound intent - such as the Christian doctrine of Incarnation and that of the avatara in Hindu bhakti – nonetheless profoundly differ as well. The Christic mystery, however, is common to all. Raimundo Panikkar puts it this way: "Christianity and Hinduism encounter one another in Christ. Christ is their

point for encounter, and the real union of the two can take place only in Christ; for they meet only in Him" (Panikkar 1966:137).

Let us notice, however, that the universal active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ represents the theological foundation of the inter-religious encounter and dialogue, rather than being the concrete point of departure of the dialogue itself in its theological aspect. It is clear that, as Panikkar agrees, the mystery of Jesus Christ as Christian faith understands it cannot serve as a point of departure upon which to agree in advance of the dialogue. We must therefore look elsewhere.

One possible point is the experience of the divine mystery in the spirit. A spiritual exchange and a communion in the Spirit are necessary conditions for a fruitful theological dialogue. They can also serve as its immediate object. However, this raises a difficult question: Is the experience of God basically identical in the various religious traditions, so that divergences in expression are due solely to cultural differences. Or rather does the experience itself differ in content, although, as we must say, the same God is present, consciously or unconsciously, in any authentic religious experience?

A more humble but no less valid, and more accessible point of departure consists in the fundamental questions asked by every religious human being, of whatever tradition in the depth of the heart: Where do we come from, and where are we headed? What is the meaning of human existence, of sufferings and death? What is the source of this movement within us – experienced and shared by both partners in the dialogue – which urges us to emerge from ourselves in friendship, fellowship and communion with others, thrusts us beyond ourselves to respond to a divine Absolute that ever precedes us? The writer is sure that these most basic questions are asked today by a growing number of people, and felt by them with a new urgency.

The question of the human being leads to the question of God. Thus it will serve as a good starting point for the theological dialogue. For the rest, the agenda of this dialogue should be left to the Spirit who animates the partners. Certainly, the Spirit will blow over the importance of the Resurrection in Hindu/Christian dialogue, thus showing the point of departure that the resurrection event cannot be compromised or made lesser.

Chapter 3

The Christ of Faith and the Historical Jesus

In Christian faith, the Jesus Christ event is at the centre of the divine plan of humanity, as it is at the centre of the salvation history in which that divine plan is executed. Accordingly, the religious traditions of humanity are ordered to it throughout the cause of history. It is in their relationship with the Christ event that even today these traditions have salvific value for their members. In particular, the sacred books of these traditions may contain words of God addressed to them and awaiting fulfilment in the decisive Word uttered by God in Jesus Christ.

In all that has been said thus far, we have been dealing with the event of Jesus Christ: with the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, constituted by God as Christ in his resurrection. Christian faith does not permit the separation of Jesus from Christ. That faith professes both the personal identity of Jesus with the Christ, and the real transformation of his human existence in virtue of the resurrection by which he is established as the Christ. The object of the apostolic faith is not simply Jesus or simply Christ, but Jesus the Christ (cf. Acts 2:36).

Here, however, Christian faith finds itself confronted with questions too crucial to be ignored. Now as before, Jesus lives in controversy. The questioning could not be more basic, more subversive, or more relevant to believers and professional critics alike. What can be known about the real Jesus? Can the historical Jesus be separated from the Risen Christ of faith? Does Christianity owe its origins to the Resurrection? What do Christians mean when they claim that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven?

We shall address the one that seem most decisive for this study. It bears on the relationship, apparently indissociable for faith, between Jesus and the Christ. This by no means a new one – of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

3.1 STATE OF THE QUESTION

It must be stated from the outset that, old as it is, the problem of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith is posed in a context of the encounter of the religious not only in partly difficult terms, but in a more radical way. It may seem paradoxical that, in this precise context, what

should cause a problem is not primarily the Christ of faith but the Jesus of history. And yet this is the case. We have already seen the problem as posed in chapter One, by certain Hindu interpretations of Jesus, example, S. Radhakrishnan. The problem, as it arises in a context of religious pluralism in general and the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism in particular, is not new.

In order to grasp how radically it is posed in the context in which we are working here, it will be useful to draw up a brief sketch of its roots in exegetical and theological discussion in the West. We will limit ourselves to what is strictly necessary for an understanding of the problem.

The exegetical discussions begins with the obvious fact that all the writings of the New Testament, being composed after, and in the light of, the Paschal experiences, reflect that experience as they report the historical event of Jesus and the facts of his life. These writings transmit to us not a history of Jesus, but a faith interpretation of Jesus. What they convey directly is not the historical Jesus, but the Christ of faith. The problem is whether (and how) from a point of departure in this faith datum concerning

the person of Jesus, on can retrieve or rediscover the actual pre-Paschal Jesus.

Is the Jesus of history accessible to historical criticism? If so, how? Rudolf Bultmann (Moltmann 1990) can serve as our point here, in view of his key place in modern exegesis and the development of the historical – critical method. There is surely no need to elucidate here the methods set in motion by Bultmann. Suffice it to recall the general conclusions, which he thought necessary to draw. According to Bultmann nothing certain can be said of the historical Jesus other that that someone by that name lived in a certain place in a certain time and died on the cross. The reasons for his too – pessimistic position are of little importance for our purposes here: a Lutheran conception of faith; the influence of existential philosophy, especially that of Heidegger; a rationalism that scouts the supernatural and the preternatural.

The important thing is that, for Bultmann, our all – but – complete ignorance of this historical Jesus has no implications whatever for Christian faith. Christian faith is not dependent on history, Bultmann held. Christian faith, essentially, is God's appeal, God's challenge, through the

word. God can challenge us, can call us to account, and in fact does so, through the word of the New Testament, independently of any historical foundation. We must rid the faith of its pretended historicity. Such is this thinker; Christian faith is indifferent to the historical Jesus.

Bultmann drove a dangerous wedge between Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. The separation is highly prejudicial to the content of faith. Rudolf Bultmann's followers saw this very well. While employing the methods established by their teacher, they refused to adopt his conclusions, which they regarded as neither proven nor acceptable.

Ernst Käseman (1954:125-53) in his celebrated address at Marburg on October 20, 1953, marked the turning point (Dupuis 1991:180). Contradicting Bultmann's insistence on demythologisation, Käseman declared that, if the bond between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history is severed, Christ himself becomes a myth. For faith requires certitude of the identity between the pre-Paschal Jesus and the glorified Christ. Faith cannot dispense itself from a solid foundation in the Jesus of history.

Why would the gospels have been written in the first place, even in the light of Easter, unless the primitive church had thought that the history of Jesus was of interest and ultimately of importance for its own faith? Indeed, as the post-Bultamannians have shown, the method known as historical criticism, provided we employ it in unprejudiced fashion of Jesus, at least to discover the essential traits of his person and the principal moments of his career. Thus modern exegesis can hold its head up again; confident once more that it can reach the historical Jesus through the gospel accounts. Witness the many books about Jesus written by eminent exegetes over the last decades like Dodd (1970); BornKamm (1960); Schweizer (1978); Conzelmann (1973) and Jeremias (1971).

The writer firmly believes that this is a major importance for Christology. Christology – if it would follow an inductive, non-deductive, genetic, non-dogmatic method – most commence with the historical Jesus. It must consist in following the route traversed by the disciples themselves in their gradual discovery of who Jesus was, the meanings of his life, his death, his resurrection and the meaning of the salvation event accomplished in him.

The Paschal experience was the decisive step in this gradual discovery. The road must be traversed once more from "below". It will rest on the self – consciousness of the historical Jesus as manifested in his actions and his words, his options and his claims, his demands and his promises. From Jesus' own implicit Christology, and from the pre-Paschal experience of the disciples, it will move on to the explicit Christology of the New Testament: the interpretation of the person and event of Jesus Christ in the light of the Paschal experience, such as the faith of the apostolic church, delivers it to us. Here, according to EFD Moule (1997) it will take up the task of showing the long maturation of the intelligence of the faith, leading from the Christology "from below" of the first apostolic Kerygma to the Christology "from above" of the later writings of the New Testament.

In all of this, its essential task will be to demonstrate the continuity between the pre-Paschal Jesus and the Christ of Easter – to show that there is no breach between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, but on the contrary, clear continuity and personal identity. The identity will be a differentiated one, of course. According to Oscar Cullmann (1967), the post-Baschal Christ, while personally identical with the pre-Paschal Jesus, was genuinely transformed in his human existence by his resurrection. Between the two, then, there is at once the Continuity of personal identity

and the discontinuity of a human condition first brought low, then glorified. Jesus is the Christ, having become that Christ by his resurrection from the dead. This is the faith of the apostolic church (Acts 2:36). It is the task of Christology to show that this is the case. Thus Christology today is characterized by a return to the historical Jesus as its starting point (Dupius 1991).

There are two extreme positions, mutually opposed, both failing to manifest and account for the continuity, necessary for a valid Christology, between the pre-Paschal Jesus and the Christ of Easter. One is the Bultmannian position, which retains only, the Christ of faith. Faith is the human beings existential calling-to-account by they work of God. It is said to have no need of the encumbrance of a mythical, or at least uncertain, historical datum. On the other side, we have a Jesus without Christ, but this Jesus is empty. In either case, the fault lies with the methodology. We have lost real real continuity in real discontinuity between Jesus and the Christ – personal identity of both and the genuine transformation of the pre-Paschal Jesus into the Easter Christ.

Of these two enviable extremes, it is the former that sometimes presents a danger for the theological reflection in the encounter of the religions, especially that between Hinduism and Christianity. But in this new context, there is a difference. The question is not only what New Testament material can be relied upon as representing the Jesus of history; now it is the historical Jesus Christ event itself, across the board, that is called in question.

The writer is of the opinion that we are no longer dealing merely with historical criticism. With the Hindu-Christian dialogue, we have a criticism of history. What is being challenged is the absolute, transhistorical meaning ascribed to the Jesus Christ event by Christian faith. After all, like any other particular historical occurrence, this event is circumscribed in time and space. It could not have been otherwise. How can a particular occurrence have an absolute meaning in the order of relationships between God and humanity, in the order of salvation?

3.2 CHRIST WITH OR WITHOUT JESUS?

There are various possible ways of loosening the ties between the mystery of Jesus Christ and the mystery of salvation. One consists in undoing the

knot between the Christic mystery and the Jesus of history. Then the pluralistic model is applied to the manifestations of the Christic mystery. The centrality and obligatory presence of this mystery in any experience of salvation is maintained, as constituting that salvation; but instead of claiming salvation to be inseparable from Jesus of Nazareth, author in favour of pluralism eg. SJ Samartha, it is suggested that Jesus is only one particular historical manifestation of it among others (Samartha 1971). "Christ" is still the "sacrament of the encounter with God" – God turning to the human being in self-revelation and personal communication. But Jesus is no longer essentially linked to this mystery. He is one symbol of it among others, a manifestation or expression – perhaps special, perhaps eminent somehow, but surely not unique. Krishna, for example, or Gautama, the Buddha, are also historical manifestations of the mystery of Christ. While the Christic mystery is obligatory for salvation, Jesus is optional.

This position according to Paul Tillich (1963) is akin to the model of "normative Christology", in that it professes – perhaps gratuitously, since it denies a Jesus Christ "constitutive" of salvation – a relative superiority, indeed, even the normative character, of the manifestation of the Christic mystery in Jesus of Nazareth.

The declaration of the theological conference held in Nagpur, India, in 1971 devotes a section to a "theological understanding of the religious traditions of humankind" (Dhavamony 1972:pp1-15). This section declares: "An ineffable mystery, the centre and ground of reality and human life, is in different forms and manners active among all peoples of the world and gives ultimate meaning to human existence and aspirations. This mystery, which is called by different names, but which no name can adequately represent, is definitively disclosed and communicated in Jesus of Nazareth" [no.13](Dhavamony 1972:4).

The professed intent of the declaration, in its own terms, is to recognise "the positive relation of the religious traditions of mankind to Christ" (no.17). The salvation of human beings – as the Christian knows by faith – consists in "union with Christ, his liberator and saviour" (no.15). While "men who are saved attain their salvation in the context of their religious tradition" nevertheless "this in no way undermines the uniqueness of the Christian economy, to which has been entrusted the decisive word spoken by Christ to the world and the means of salvation instituted by Him" (no. 16) (Dhavamony 1972:5).

In other words, salvation, in all circumstances involves contact with the Christic mystery; but this mystery, which the Christian encounters in and through the Christian economy, in the case of other persons is conveyed by a different mediation – one available through their own respective religious traditions. This viewpoint coincides with the outlook as that of the presence of Christ in the religious traditions. There is nothing in this theory that could provide a pretext for any loosening of the bond between the Christic mystery and the Jesus of history.

Raimundo Panikkar (1964) has been one of the protagonists of the theory of the "presence of Christ". There is no reason to suspect here, in Panikkar's view either, any loosening of the bond between Christ and Jesus of Nazareth. Clearly, it is the mystery of Jesus Christ that is present in a hidden way, perceptible to Christian faith alone, in the religious traditions, and Hinduism in particular.

The situation changes, however, with some of Panikkar's more recent writings. In his book 'The Unknown Christ of Hinduism' (1981), has goes on to explain that the thesis of his book is mystical. Then he continues: "The Christ of whom this book speaks is the living and loving reality of

the truly believing Christian in whatever form the person may formulate or conceptualise this reality.

What, then, does Christ represent? Panikkar explains that, for him, Christ is the most powerful living symbol – but not one limited to the historical Jesus – of the fully human, divine, and cosmic reality that he calls the mystery (Panikkar 1981:26-27). This symbol can have other names: for example, Rama, Krishna, Ishvara or Purusha (Panikkar 1981:27). Christians call him "Christ", because it is in and through Jesus that they themselves have arrived at faith in the decisive reality. Each name, however, expresses the individual Mystery, each being an unknown dimension of Christ (Panikkar 1981:30).

In the introduction to the new edition of the book in question, Panikkar remarks that in order to do justice to his current thinking, many more changes would have to be introduced than would be possible in a new edition. It seems, indeed, that his actual though on the subject appears more clearly in The Intra – religious Dialogue (1978), published shortly before the new edition of The Unknown Christ of Hinduism. From the viewpoint with which we are here concerned, we are constrained to call

attention to the distinction Panikkar introduces here between faith and belief. The distinction is not new: It has been made often enough since Barth. We must observe what is meant by faith, as contradistinguished from belief.

Faith, Panikkar explains, is one's basic religious attitude; belief is the expression adopted by this fundamental human attitude in any given tradition. The content of faith, which he calls "the Mystery", is the lived relationship to a transcendence, which seizes the human being. It is common to all religions. Panikkar calls this "Mystery" cosmotheandric, to denote a transcendence experienced by the human being in the cosmos. The content of beliefs, on the other hand, consists in the various religious myths in which faith takes concrete expression. In Christianity, we have the Jesus myth. All of these myths have equal value. Christianity gives the Mystery the name of Christ, but it can assume other names. While the various religious traditions differ on the level of belief, they are all seen to coincide on that of faith. The intrareligious dialogue cannot require a bracketing (epoch) of faith; but it can demand a bracketing of beliefs. Panikkar hopes for a cross-fertilization of the beliefs of the various traditions – a syncretion that he is careful o distinguish from eclecticism.

If this too – rapid description gives a faithful account of Panikkar's thought, which is complex, it is easy to see that the place held in Christian faith by the Jesus of history is again a problem. For the first Christians, as the apostolic Kerygma testifies (Acts 2:36), the Jesus of history was the Christ of faith. He had become that Christ in his raising (Resurrection) by the Father. He was also the very Mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:4; Col. 4:3, 2:2; 1Tim. 3:16) preached by Paul. Thus Jesus is part of the actual object of faith. He is inseparable from Christ, on whom he bestows historical concretion.

3.3 UNIQUENESS AND UNIVERSALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

We could not have dealt with the problem of the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history, as it arises in the context of the encounter of the religious, without thereby addressing at least indirectly the implied problems of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is the second issue mentioned in chapter two which will be answered now.

The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation represent the cardinal, key question of every Christian theology of religions. As old as Christology itself, and reappearing in recent times, it

is becoming more urgent and more radical in the current context of religious pluralism and the blending of the various traditions.

The first thing to do is clarify our terms. The uniqueness in question here is not the "relative" uniqueness that the science of comparative religion may very well assert apropos of every religious tradition simply in virtue of its specificity, its singularity, and its resulting differences from the others. Such a relative uniqueness is accessible to scientific observation. Faith, however, and the theology that rests on faith, goes beyond this. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation, as traditionally understood by Christian faith, is an absolute uniqueness. Ineluctably, Jesus Christ in constitutive of the salvation of all human being and he is the universal Saviour so long as people confess Jesus Christ is Lord and God raised him from dead (Rom. 10:9).

Let us also note that some authors prefer to replace the term uniqueness with "finality", or "centrality".

The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ still raise difficult questions especially in the current context of religious pluralism. In what does this uniqueness consist, and how is it to be understood? Further, what is its theological foundation? In all events, the various theological opinions concerning the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ as the Saviour will reflect (as we should expect) their respective authors' fundamental options and basic positions in Christology itself.

Hans Küng in his book On Being a Christian (Küng 1976) reflects an unsatisfying and quite negative evaluation of the other religions. In the section of the volume entitled, "The Challenge of the World Religions", he summarizes as follows the concrete questions that Christianity has the right to pose to these religions: "Unhistoricity, circular thinking, fatalism, unworldliness, pessimism, passivity, caste spirit, social disinterestedness: the concrete questions to be put to the world religions in order to provide a diagnosis, so far as this is possible here, may be summed up under these headings" (Küng 1976:110).

To suppose on all these points a negative balance would be to make it too easy a task to establish, as the author purports to do, the credibility and

superiority of Christianity Küng recommends to Christians, with regard to other religions, an attitude of openness to a mutual critique and a honest confrontation from a point of departure in faith. He rejects and "exclusivistic particularism" and a "syncretistic indifferentism" (Küng 1986).

Be this as it may, it is upon the person of Jesus Christ that Küng intends, altogether correctly, to establish the specificity and originality of Christianity. To this end he examines, from the historical viewpoint and according to the method of historical criticism, Jesus' project or "program". Jesus appears different in every way. He fits into none of the established categories of his time.

From a point of departure in Jesus' program and values, Küng attempts to establish his difference and thereby justify the Christian assertion of his "uniqueness", which he enunciates as follows: "The special feature, the most fundamental characteristic of Christianity is that it considers this Jesus as ultimately decisive, definitive, archetypal" for human beings in their relation with God, with their fellows, and with society (Küng 1976:123).

Under the pen of Hans Küng, we find the terms according to which Jesus Christ is the eminent model, the most perfect symbol of humano-divine relationships. The human and divine values that he proposes, however, the sublime morality that he proclaims, the perspectives on a new life that he presents – are these enough to establish, beyond all doubt, this normativity. In Hinduism, might they not wonder whether other figures have defended analogous, or even the same, values? Did not Mohandas K. Gandhi, for example, as mentioned in chapter two, promote the same values as Jesus did in the proclamation of the Reign of God: justice, freedom and a communion of brothers and sisters. And did he not also give his life for the cause of God and that of human beings, the causes that he made his own, as Hans Küng believes? (Küng 1976:409-10). Gautama, the Buddha, also preached a complete renouncement of self to the death, in view of a new existence.

Doubtless there are differences between Jesus and these others (Sugirtharajah 1993:9), and Küng is right to insist on them, finally resting his case on Jesus' resurrection. The ultimate distinction, the one that establishes Jesus' "determining, normative" character in the area of divino-human relationships, is his resurrection from the dead: Easter-after-Good-

Friday. Jesus' resurrection stamps his entire life with the absolute seal of divine approval.

Chapter 4

THE CENTRALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

4.1 NO RESURRECTION, NO FAITH

There is no Christian faith without the resurrection. There may be a fine ethical religion with Jesus of Nazareth at the centre, but it is not the biblical faith without the resurrection. The creeds of the church reflect quite accurately the preaching of the early church found throughout the New Testament and put most succinctly by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. In the fifteenth chapter he reminded the church at Corinth of the good news he had preached to them: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures ..." (vv. 3-4). The Corinthians, while they accepted the resurrection of Jesus, were questioning the resurrection of the dead (the general resurrection at the end of time). To them Paul wrote these emphatic words: "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (vv. 12-14).

Paul's writings are consistent with the preaching of other early Christians as reflected in the New Testament. They proclaimed that God had raised Jesus from the dead, and they looked forward to participation in the resurrection at the close of the age (or the end of time). If Christ has not been raised, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then faith is empty. This is what the new community of Christians proclaimed, and that is what the early church councils set down in the creeds. No longer can we dodge the issue by distinguishing between a religion of Jesus and a religion of Saint Paul. Twentieth century biblical scholarship has closed that door. The writer firmly believes that if we want to believe what the early church proclaimed, then we cannot dispense or water down the resurrection.

4.2 BUT CAN WE BELIEVE? HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONSIDERATIONS.

But what is it that we are being asked to believe? What does it mean to say that Jesus rose from the dead? It is common place to say that modern science, natural and historical, has eroded our belief in the resurrection of Jesus. From the time of the Enlightenment many scholars and common folk have publicly questioned the truth of the resurrection.

Many scholars wrestling with questions inherited from the past have concluded that one "can't" go beyond the faith of the church, or that one

"shouldn't" go beyond it or one "don't need to" go beyond it (Perry 1986:2). Instead one should have faith in the Easter proclamation and not bother with the question of what actually happened to give rise to the Easter faith. In their view, the Easter narratives are so layered with the myth and legend that they are of little historical value (Perry 1986:3).

New Testament scholar J.A.T. Robinson in his book CAN WE TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT (Robinson 1977:128-29) says: "If the resurrection story has a foot in public history (and to abandon that claim is to abandon something that has been central to the entire Christian tradition), then it must be open and vulnerable to the historians scrutiny ... And through the historian can neither give nor directly take away the faith, he can indirectly render the credibility-gap so wide that in fact men cease believing. My trust in the New Testament accepts that risk. This is why as a New Testament scholar I am convinced that it is important to be a good historian as well as a man of faith and not to confuse the two by giving answers of faith where historical evidence alone is relevant."

So let us proceed with the relevance of the resurrection. Even the most sceptical historians would agree that something happened in the first century of our era sufficient to cause a small band of Jews in Palestine of modest education and status to proclaim, in the face of great odds, what

was heresy to the Jews, and to initiate a major schism within Judaism. If we accept the crucifixion of their leader Jesus as a fact (and even most sceptics do) the small band of followers of the Rabbi from Nazareth had every reason to flee in fear (and that is what the biblical record says: Jn 20:19; Mark 14:50; Matt. 26:56b). There is a little challenge to the conclusion that something drastic happened in the lives of Jesus' followers after his death and burial.

The question is, what happened and how can we know that it happened? The first Christian accounted for their radically changed behaviour by saying, "Jesus is Lord" and "God has raised Jesus." John H. Hick, in his book, Death and Eternal Life (1976), comments: "So long as we do not insist upon any dogmatic definition of its precise nature, we can assert that beyond all reasonable doubt what has come to be called 'the resurrection of Jesus' was a real occurrence. For it can hardly be questioned that something immensely impressive, and in that sense undeniably real, happened shortly after Jesus' death to restore and enhance his disciples faith in him as their living Lord and Master. If their life situation had not been transformed by some powerfully moving event it seems very unlikely that the tiny Jesus-movement within Judaism would long have survived the execution of its leader and that there would today, nearly two thousand years later, be a Christian community numbering hundreds of millions.

Many theologians and commentators want to stop right here. The only historical data, they say, is the faith of the early church, and one doesn't have to go beyond it. Karl Barth would say on dogmatic grounds that Jesus really rose from the dead but that historical investigation cannot add anything to the proclamation of the church (Niebuhr 1957:42-51). John Hick (1976:177) says that we don't need to go beyond the faith of the church. For John Hick the resurrection many have been a bodily event, and the body may have mysteriously materialised and dematerialised; there may have been angels, earthquakes and guards fainting; there may have been lengthy discourses by the risen Christ to his disciples, terminated after some weeks by his ascension into the air. But the gospel that Jesus lives exalted by God to a glorious role in the process of man's salvation, does not depend upon the historicity of any of these problematic elements of the New Testament tradition.

The writer agrees with John Robinson that "the resurrection story has a foot in public history" and disagrees with Hick on this point. But immediately a distinction must be made, a distinction between the resurrection of Jesus and the appearances of the Risen One to the disciples. The New Testament mentions no eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. Whatever happened to Jesus between the burial and the appearances of the exalted Lord is not described in the canonical, Gospels. It is only inferred

from the disciples' encounters with the Risen One and from the empty tomb. Therefore Kenneth L. Woodward (1996) says that the post-resurrection narratives are ambiguous stories allowing ample room for historians to imagine what really took place.

Walter Kunneth (1965:72-78), a German theologian writing in The Theology of the Resurrection, says that the resurrection of Jesus could not have been witnessed because it is a "primal miracle" or act of God comparable and parallel to God's act of creation. For him it is unique and beyond historical investigation.

I think that this distinction is tenable: the resurrection of Jesus per se is beyond history and therefore beyond historical investigation, but the appearances of the Risen One are within history and therefore subject to historical judgements of probability.

Kunneth (1965:62) believes that the word "reality" is appropriately used of the resurrection of Jesus and this order or dimension of reality is not comprehended by the concept of myth, as so many commentators believe. C.H. Dodd (1968:133) has investigated the appearance narratives and is in basic agreement with Kunneth regarding the use of the term "myth". It has been not unusual to apply the term 'myth' somewhat loosely to the

resurrection narratives of the gospel as a whole. The foregoing investigation will have shown that, so far as the narratives of the appearances of the risen Christ are concerned, form criticism offers no ground to justify the use of the term. So the concept of "myth" does not apply to the reality of the resurrection, nor does science rule out the resurrection.

A Theologian who agrees with Kunneth that natural science doesn't rule out the reality of the resurrection is Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg (1968:88ff) goes further than Kunneth, believing that the resurrection is a historical event subject to historical investigation. However, Pannenberg believes with Kunneth that the actual resurrection of Jesus occurred outside the Ken of human observation, and that since we have no empirical experience of resurrection per se, we can speak of it only metaphorically (Pannenberg 1968:74).

4.3 EXPLORING THE EVIDENCE

Eleven appearances of Jesus to his followers, in the forty days from his resurrection to his ascension, are recorded in the New Testament. Later he appeared to Stephen at his stoning, Paul on the road to Damascus and John on the Island of Patmos. As far as the resurrection appearances are

concerned this is particularly evident in the stories reported in Luke 24, and John 20,21.

One is the unvarnished reporting of the weaknesses and unbelief of the apostles in the face of what happened. Wouldn't we expect them, as the first witnesses, and founders of the church, to be idealised in an invented story? Notice, too, the prominence given to the testimony of the women in an age when women were not considered proper witnesses in either Jewish or Gentile law. These things were reported simply because that was the way they happened. C.H. Dodd has pointed out that the gospel narratives are free from the legendary embellishments of later apocryphal accounts. They simply recount the surprise of the empty tomb and the way Jesus' followers only gradually realised its significance after encounters with the risen Christ.

4.3.1 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DISCIPLES

It would be hard to imagine a group of people so changed in their goals and outlook as the disciples were in the 50 days between the two Jewish feasts of Passover (when Jesus was crucified), and Pentecost (when the message of the crucified and risen Lord was first preached by them). The picture we have of the disciples before the momentous events of Passover Sunday is that of a fearful, dispirited and defeated group of men and

women. The one they loved, and in whom they placed all their hopes for the future of Israel, had been brutally executed. The few who had the courage to venture out had seen the grisly details and some of them had buried him. They kept their doors locked, fully expecting that they would be next on the list. Luke captures their despair vividly in the picture he gives of Cleopas and his companion in Luke 24:13-24.

Fifty days later the picture is dramatically changed. The disciples have been transformed from a rabble into an effective team for leading the fledgling and fast-growing church. Peter, who denied and forsook his Master when the crunch came, is now fearless, and publicly faces the crowds of Jerusalem proclaiming that Jesus is the promised Messiah and risen Lord. Questioned twice before the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the land, he cannot be cowed by threats imprisonment, beating or death sentence. Thomas the doubter is now fully convinced that Jesus is both risen from the dead and is God. James, Jesus' brother, who had previously been sceptical about his brothers' claims, is now identified with the believers. Later he will become leader of the church in Jerusalem. Mary, who had watched her son's agonising death, instead of retreating into mourning, is now praying with the disciples as they await his promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Nothing could stop them, not even the violent persecution launched by the hostile rabbi, Saul of Tarsus.

What made the difference? They did not change because their circumstances had changed. The situation looked just as desperate at Pentecost as it had at Passover. The Jewish authorities were still adamant in their opposition to Jesus' message. And yet is obvious that something had happened.

Luke who spend two years in Judea from AD 57 to 59, and who would have know many of the persons involved in these dramatic events, records the reasons the apostles themselves gave for this transformation.

Peter to the crowds at Pentecost: Men of Israel, listen... Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourself know... you with the help of wicked men, put him to death...God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact (Acts 2:22-32).

Peter in the temple: You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this (Acts 3:15).

Peter before the High Court: Rulers and elders...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from

the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed...we cannot help speaking what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:8-10,20).

Peter again before the High Court: The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree...We are witnesses of these things (Acts 5:30-32).

Peter to Cornelius' household: God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:40,41).

Paul in the synagogue at Antioch: God raised him from the dead, and for many days those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem saw him. They are now his witnesses to our people (Acts 13:30,31).

Accusing the Jewish rulers of murdering the promised Messiah would hardly have won friends for the disciples! That they would have so risked their lives for what they knew was a lie is unimaginable. They believed that Jesus had risen and that they had met with him.

One thing is clear. The disciples hadn't expected Jesus to rise from the dead, though he had told them several times that he would. Some Jewish beliefs at the time accommodated a view of resurrection, but this idea was of a general resurrection of all the righteous in the future, when God's people would be vindicated. The idea of a single individual, in whom all the prophecies of old were centred, rising from the dead as the guarantee of a future resurrection, was not part of their world-view. And yet it is equally clear that they were convinced that this had indeed happened.

4.3.2 THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

Perhaps even more startling evidence for the truth of the resurrection is the earthquake that took place in the life of Paul of Tarsus. What transformed a zealous and merciless persecutor of the church into an ardent preacher of Jesus Christ and possibly the greatest Christian missionary of all time? Paul tells us himself: a personal encounter with the risen Jesus.

Before his conversion Paul was a scrupulously faithful Jewish rabbi, a trained theologian, and a rising star in the political world of Palestinian Judaism. He belonged to the strict sect of Pharisees. He calls himself "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6). That a man who had been executed as a common criminal could be proclaimed as the promised

Messiah was both folly and blasphemy to Paul. He says, "I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison" (Acts 22:4). According to Luke, he "devastated" the church (Acts 8:3). The word here is used in Greek literature of the ruin and devastation caused by an army, and in the Greek Old Testament of a wild boar ravaging a vineyard (Psalm 80:13)! And yet Paul could later describe himself as "a skilled master builder" laying the foundations of churches around the Roman empire by his preaching of Christ (1Cor 3:10).

How was it that one reared in strict Jewish monotheism would come to unhesitatingly call Jesus "Lord" in the same sense in which that title is used for God in the Greek Old Testament? What would persuade someone immersed in the Jewish culture of his day to reject circumcision as the sign of their covenant relationship with God, to eat with Gentiles, to eat non-kosher food, or to write, "There is neither Jew nor Greed, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 2:3-5, 11-16; 3:28; 6:12-15; Rom. 14:2,3)?

The personal hostility that Paul's new stand aroused among former Jewish colleagues was intense. His former career was in ruins. He had to flee for his life on two occasions, first from Damascus and then from Jerusalem

itself. And, tirelessly, at great personal cost, he poured himself into the work of preaching this astounding message. To try to explain all this without reference to the resurrection, as someone has put it, is like trying to explain Roman history without reference to Julius Caesar.

Paul's confidence in the reality of the resurrection was twofold. First, he had personally met the risen Christ. Luke, who became on of Paul's closest friends and travelled with him on several of his journeys, tells the story of that encounter in Acts chapter nine. Later in the book he repeats it twice in Paul's own words (Acts 22 & 26). It was an event that marked Paul for life.

But his faith was not built solely upon a personal experience, marvellous as it may have been. The testimony of other reliable eyewitnesses was also of the utmost importance to Paul. Scholars are unanimous that Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, written in AD 53 or 54 is genuine. Paul concludes this letter with a long discussion about the resurrection of Jesus, and then that of all believers at the end of human history when Jesus comes again. He gives a list of some of the people to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. "He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living…Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

and the last of all he appeared to me..." (1Cor.15:5-8). Peter and James were personally known to Paul, as no doubt many of the 500 would have been. William Lillie, head of the Department of Biblical Study at the University of Aberdeen, wrote of these 500 witnesses: St. Paul says in effect, "If you do not believe me, you can ask them." Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event, is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago.

Interestingly, Paul's experience of Jesus was the reverse of the other disciples' experience. Whereas they had known him as a human friend, then had seen him crucified and then experienced him in his resurrected body, Paul began with the resurrected Jesus. From that he worked backwards. His subsequent thinking about the meaning of Jesus' death and the significance of his human life was coloured by his experience of him as the risen Lord.

4.3.3 THE CONTENT OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

A further powerful testimony to the reality of the resurrection is the very content of the Christian message itself. It is significant that after the resurrection, in spite of persecution, hardship and martyrdom, there is not a pessimistic note in the New Testament. A dominant theme is that death

has been conquered once for ally by the resurrection of Christ. Paul, facing possible execution in a Roman prison, cannot decide whether he would rather live or die, "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (Phil. 1:23,24). Writing to Christians in Thessalonica who have lost friends who have died, he urges them not to "grieve like other people, who have no hope. We believe Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess. 4:13,14). As far as Paul is concerned, Jesus has "destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

The writer of Hebrews declares that Jesus came to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death", and commends those who "joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions" (Heb. 2:15; 10:34). And the apostle Peter says that Jesus has given us "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and … an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fad – kept in heaven for you"
(1 Pet. 1:3,4).

Such confidence comes on page after page of the New Testament. The history of the Roman Empire for the next 250 years abounds with incredible stories of heroism and even joy, in the face of suffering and often martyrdom. They believed that death, "the last enemy" had been defeated in the death and resurrection of their Saviour.

Altogether there are about 630 references to resurrection and eternal life in the New Testament. It is the theme that undergirds everything else in the Christian gospel: the forgiveness of sin and guilt; the possibility of living a genuinely human life that is pleasing to God; the ultimate triumph of good over evil; the eternal destiny beyond death for those who trust in Christ.

The ultimate triumph of good over evil is a confident theme of the New Testament. It is in the light of Christ's resurrection that Paul urged the Christians at Corinth to "always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). By his resurrection Christ had conquered death, and therefore evil, which is the cause of death. His ultimate victory when he would come again to judge the world was thus guaranteed. All that had been done sincerely in his name would be rewarded. There are something like 300

references to this event in the New Testament – when he would eliminate evil and establish God's reign of justice and truth.

The New Testament writers saw all these things as the fulfilment of all that the prophets of the Old Testament had been seeking. Peter tells how the prophets "searched intently and with the greatest card, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Pet. 1:10,11). Without the resurrection, the work that God had begun in calling Abraham and Moses, as well as in leading and teaching his people over the centuries, would have been like a great unfinished symphony. Archbishop William Ramsey reminds us: It must not be forgotten that the teaching and ministry of Jesus (alone) did not provide the disciples with a Gospel, and led them from puzzle to paradox until the Resurrection gave them the key.

That the early Christians should have been so confident in proclaiming this message without the absolute certainty that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, goes against all the canons of sound reason.

Simon Greenleaf was the Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University. His famous work entitled A Treatise on the Law of Evidence, written in

1842, is still considered one of the greatest authorities on evidence in the entire literature of legal procedure. In his book An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice, written while at Harvard, he reviews the motives the writers of the gospels would have had for not proclaiming these truths if Jesus had not risen from the dead and they had not known the fact as certainly as they knew any other fact. He concludes: And their writings show them to have been men of vigorous understandings. If their testimony was not true, there was no possible motive for its fabrication.

4.3.4 THE RAPID GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

That there was a church at all is also remarkable testimony to the truth of the resurrection. Luke, who was closely associated with people involved in the events he describes, documents the rapid spread of Christianity in the very earliest period. On the day of Pentecost he mentions 3,000 believers and shortly after, 5,000 (Acts 2:41; 4:4). "More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number" (Acts 5:14). "The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large numbers of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). All this was happening within walking distance of the place where the crucified and discredited Jesus had been buried, an unlikely place to start a new religion that was based on his resurrection, if indeed it was not true.

From Jerusalem the gospel spread outwards through Samaria and Syria to what is now Turkey, and on to Macedonia, Greece and Rome. The Roman author Tacitus (who regarded Christianity as a harmful superstition wrote of "a great multitude" of Christ's followers who gave their lives in Nero's persecution in Rome only 34 years after Jesus' death. Around the city of Rome itself there are about 600 miles of catacombs where, during the first three centuries, something like 4 million Christians were buried. There is evidence also that within a generation of Jesus' death and resurrection the gospel had spread to Egypt and westwards to India and Mesopotamia. And the growth continued. For example, in a letter to the Emperor Trajan about AD 112, Pliny the Roman governor of Bythinia (on the south coast of the Black Sea), expressed his concern at the growing number of Christians in his territory.

The birth and growth of the Christian Church from a tiny band of frightened men and women to a worldwide movement is remarkable. Without the resurrection it is inexplicable. It is even more remarkable when you consider that this was a religion that demanded the highest standard of morality and social awareness, as well as a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. This kind of commitment was unknown in other religions. It might also involve social ostracism, imprisonment, torture and death.

If we don't accept the truth of the resurrection, what are we going to put in its place? Tom Wright, one of Britain's leading New Testament scholars today says: We know of several Jewish movements of revolt in the first century. In most cases, they ended with the death of the leader. Where such groups carried on, it was because a new leader emerged. No new leader, no continuing movement. Without the resurrection, there is a gaping hole in the middle of the first-century history that nothing else can plug.

The continued life and growth of the church, and the impact of the gospel on the lives of people over nearly two thousand years, is also a strong pointer to the truth of the resurrection. Professor C.E.B. Cranfield of Durban sums this up well: Last of all must be mentioned the continuance of the Christian church through nineteen and a half centuries, in spite of bitter and often prolonged persecution, in spite of all its own terrible unworthiness and incredible follies, in spite of its divisions, and in spite of all the changes which the passing years and centuries have brought. The fact that the church still produces today (as it has produced in all the past centuries of its existence) human beings, who, trusting in Jesus Christ crucified, risen and exalted, show in their lives, for all their frailty, a recognisable beginning of being freed from self for God and neighbour, is an impressive pointer to the truth of the Resurrection.

4.3.5 SUMMARY

Sceptics have always been able to come up with alternative theories to the resurrection. For example, it has been suggested that Jesus wasn't really dead and revived in the cool of the tomb. He then managed to remove the stone, evade the guards and convince the disciples that he had conquered death once and for all! Another explanation offered is that the disciples stole the body and spread the story that he had risen. (Amazingly, they managed to turn society upside down and face persecution and death without any one of them letting the cat out of the bag!) A third idea put forward is that the disciples went back to the wrong tomb, found it empty and thought he must have risen. For some unknown reason even the authorities couldn't find the right tomb and produce the body! Or maybe this varied group of men and women all had hallucinations of a similar sort which convinced them that Jesus had risen.

I suggest that, in view of the evidence, such theories look rather ridiculous. Whatever changed the disciples must have been something both clear and powerful. Clear, to make it felt to people who were in no way predisposed to accept it. Powerful, to remould once and forever their ideas of what Messiah had come to achieve. Only the resurrection satisfies both conditions.

The Jewish scholar, J. Jeremias (1971) has demonstrated that the Jews venerated about fifty tombs before the time of Jesus. In view of such interest in the tombs of holy men, J. Delorme asks: In these circumstances, is it possible that the original community of Jerusalem could have been completely uninterested in the tomb where Jesus was laid after his death?

The disciples were not interested simply because Jesus was not there. The Bible teacher R.A. Torrey summed it up: The bodily resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of Christianity, the Waterloo of infidelity, the Gibraltar of Christian evidences.

Contemporary theologians continue to probe the meanings of the Resurrection. Their insights can help us claim its truth anew. Here are four.

(a) THE RESURECTION IS A HISTORICAL REALITY, NOT JUST THE BELIEVERS' SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE.

For many years theologian Rudolf Bultmann's view held sway: "Jesus is risen into the New Testament proclamation" (Moltmann 1990). Bultmann supported a subjective interpretations: What is most important is not what happened to Jesus but what happens to those who believe in him and his

resurrection. We can't know any historical details about the Resurrection, Bultmann said. We only know that the early church kept believing and proclaiming Jesus after his crucifixion.

The disciples' actions – proclaiming Christ and giving birth to the church despite the shock of Good Friday – remain a strong argument for the truth of the Resurrection. But recent scholarship has emphasized the historical nature of the risen Jesus.

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1986) powerfully contends for the historical character of Jesus' resurrection based on the sources that commend it, both the testimony of original witnesses to the risen Jesus and the tradition of the empty tomb. Jesus' resurrection has more credible historical evidence than many ancient events whose occurrence we don't question, for example, some incidents in Julius Caesar's life.

The Jews of first-century Palestine held a lively hope for the final resurrection of the dead. Jesus' resurrection was experienced within this horizon as the first fruit of the final resurrection. In Pannenberg's view, we know where we are going; Jesus' resurrection shows us the end of history.

This position challenges those who reduce Jesus' resurrection to a misinformed psychological state in the disciples' minds. Christian faith isn't based on mass hallucination. It is grounded in God's action in history – the raising of Jesus from the dead.

(b) THE RESURRECTON VERIFIES JESUS' IDENTITY AND THE TRUTH OF HIS MESSAGE.

Jesus announced the nearness of God's kingdom. He taught his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Luke 11:2). His parables portrayed the unexpectedness of the kingdom's arrival and revealed God's undeserved mercy. He made the kingdom present in his works – healing the sick, forgiving sinners and welcoming dubious characters to share the fellowship of a meal.

Jesus boldly forgave sins, claiming God's authority. He courted controversy by welcoming outcasts and frequently violated religious law. Wit breathtaking audacity, he sharpened God's law. "You have heard that it was said," he would say quoting a bit of the law. "But now I say to you..."

Questions about who he thought he was were inevitable: "By what authority are you doing these things?" authorities asked (Mark 11:28).

Jesus' death on the cross posed the most profound question about his identity and legitimacy. "A man hanged on a tree is accursed by God," Scripture says (Deut. 21:23). Every observant Jew knew this. Little wonder Jesus' scandalized disciples fled and hid. That God's son should die on a cross, an instrument used only to execute criminals, was incomprehensible.

The miracle of Easter transformed grieving and despairing hearts to hope and joy. The resurrection was God's verification of Jesus as the son of God. It placed God's seal of approval on everything Jesus said and did.

Common believers and theologians frequently create a chasm between the life, teachings and death of the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Christ. Some emphasize Jesus' death and resurrection in ways that separate this event from his message and ministry, making it unclear why some objected to Jesus and wanted to kill him. Others, like some in the Jesus Seminar, reconstruct the sayings of the historical Jesus in ways that make him look and sound like a different person than the resurrected Christ the church confesses.

Affirming the resurrection as God's verification of all Jesus stood for – his teaching, forgiving, healings and fellowship with sinners – unifies Jesus' earthly life and death.

(c) JESUS' RESURRECTION MEANS MISSION. ALL FOUR GOSPELS CONNECT JESUS' RESURRECTION WITH THE CHURCH'S MISSION.

Best known is the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Among contemporary theologians, Jurgen Moltmann most forcefully shows how God's mission in the world is being accomplished through the power of new life in the risen Christ. The risen Jesus sends the spirit to empower the church for mission. The Spirit of the living Jesus is present in our worship, in hymn and prayer, in preaching and communion. The Spirit shapes us into the body of Christ and sends us to live out the gospel in words of faith and deeds of compassion.

For Moltmann (1990), the Resurrection isn't an ancient event we merely believe once happened. It's a new reality into which we enter as we receive the Spirit and participate in the life-giving mission of the risen Christ.

Too often the church thinks of evangelism and social ministry as different, even opposing, kinds of ministry. Moltmann (1990) insists that we think holistically about mission in the name of the crucified and risen Christ. Both ministries are part of the fullness of life Christ works in the world.

The salvation Christ offers the world is wholeness in body and spirit – for individuals, families, communities, the world – and harmony between humankind and the entire natural creation. The risen Jesus commissions us to proclaim the gospel evangelically, making disciples of all nations according to his way of justice, peace and love.

(d) JESUS WAS RAISED IN THE BODY. THE BIBLE IS ABSOLUTELY CLEAR ABOUT THIS: THE CRUCIFIED JESUS AND THE RISEN JESUS ARE ONE AND THE SAME.

The resurrected Jesus bears the marks of the nails and the spear. At the same time, the risen body of Jesus possesses transcendent characteristics, such as the ability to appear and disappear instantaneously. This led Paul to speak of the resurrection body as a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44).

Theologian Oscar Cullmann (19767) emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the Greek idea of the soul's immortality and the New Testament witness to the resurrection of the dead. If the soul is immortal, then what is the meaning of the bodily resurrection of Jesus?

Each week the church confesses: " I believe in … the resurrection of the body." This has new relevance in an age when spiritualism, the occult and the New Age religion attract many seekers. Many new religious movements promote methods for people to tend their inner soul with little regard for the body. To cit an extreme example, consider the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate members who were convinced that at death their souls would ascend to the next level of existence and assume new bodies. Believers in reincarnation likewise hold that the soul moves from one body to another.

Jesus' bodily resurrection shows how important the body is to God. The Christian hope is for the final resurrection of the dead, with body and soul inseparable. Without this clear affirmation of bodily resurrection, we are

tempted to denigrate the goodness of God's created world, composed as it is of bodies. Belief in the resurrection of the body keeps the church connected and committed to caring for God's world and turns us from escapism.

The resurrection of Jesus' body guarantees our hope that we, too, shall be raised with spiritual bodies to live forever with God.

"Behold, I tell you a mystery!" Paul wrote of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51). Easter remains a mystery because in Jesus' resurrection we encounter the transcendence and eternity of God. Neither theology nor Scripture answers every question about resurrection life. But they do help us to understand – and even more, to celebrate – what God has done through Jesus' resurrection.

CONCLUSION

In Christian faith, the Jesus event is at the centre of the divine plan of humanity, as it is at the centre of salvation history in which that divine plan is executed. The writer points that Christian faith does not permit the separation from the Christ.

The writer has also considered Hindu interpretations by reformed Hindu scholars as to how they viewed the historical Jesus. He has attempted to show the absolute transhistorical meaning ascribed to the Jesus Christ event by Christian faith. He also stresses in this study that Jesus is not simply a particular historical manifestation.The opinion of the researcher is that pluralism does not provide the answer to believing in the Christ event as a believer would believe through Christian faith alone and not simply in an historical event. For the Christian believes that Jesus is not a symbol or a manifestation or an expression among others. It is noted that while the Christic mystery is obligatory for salvation, Jesus is optional.

The writer has equally consulted works of theologians to support his argument that the historical Jesus cannot be separated from the Christ of faith. These theologians consulted provided information about the gradual

discovery of who Jesus was, the meaning of his life, his death, his resurrection and the meaning of the salvation event accomplished in him. In this study the writer attempted to show that Jesus is the Christ, having become that Christ by his resurrection. Jesus' resurrection stamps his entire life with the absolute seal of divine approval.

The writer in his final chapter states that there is no Christian faith without the resurrection. He also states that there may be a fine ethical religion with the Jesus of Nazareth at the centre, but this is not the biblical faith without the resurrection

For the researcher the resurrection is beyond history and therefore beyond historical investigation.In order to strengthen the relevance of the resurrection the writer has also discussed biblical encounters of persons who have experienced at first hand the resurrected Christ from a New Testament perspective. The gospel writers have shown that the evidence of Christ's resurrection was before them.

Finally for the writer the resurrection message has propelled the Christian church to a process of evangelism. **" Saving faith is resurrection faith and resurrection faith is saving faith"** . The objective of the writer was to show that religious dialogue and co-operation cannot be compromised

with the Christian's belief in the resurrection event. There are numerous things that are agreeable amongst the different religions, however the resurrection event is the point of departure. Belief in the Resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith : it is the Christian faith. The Gospels cannot explain the resurrection; it is the resurrection which alone explains the Gospels.

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