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TOWARDS A PERMEABLE SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY IN
THE CONTEXT OF NORTH INDIA

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2016

SIGNED DECLARATION

I, Swarup Bar, hereby declare that I have written this thesis and that the work it contains is entirely my own. I furthermore declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed _____

Date 10/03/2017

To

My Parents who taught me the value of learning

*And my loving wife Sonali and daughter Ayanna who endured the pain of separation
during my studies away from home.*

ABSTRACT

This research offers permeable Spirit ecclesiology as a viable way forward for the churches in the context of the challenges in North India. Broadly, the challenges of the church in North India are twofold: one, to be an Indian Christian church amidst the plural religio-cultural context; second, to be in solidarity with the struggles of the marginalised. In other words, the church arguably ought to be relational with other communities and rooted in the North Indian context; on the other, it should critically and distinctly witness for Christ as a community of liberation in the context of the struggles of the marginalised.

Thus, the church in North India arguably needs a relational-distinctive dialectics to address the challenges. This calls for a church with permeable borders to uphold the above in tension. I show that such dialectics can be upheld if ecclesiology in North India is construed from a pneumatological perspective with a Christological dimension. In dialogue with both Western and Indian theologians I show that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology is a viable way forward for the churches in North India.

LAY SUMMARY

This research offers permeable Spirit ecclesiology (church with porous borders) as a viable way forward for the churches in the context of the challenges in North India. Broadly, the challenges of the church in North India are twofold: one, to be an Indian Christian church amidst the plural religio-cultural context; second, to be in solidarity with the struggles of the oppressed people. In other words, the church has to be relational with other communities and rooted in the North Indian context; on the other, it should critically and distinctly witness for Christ as a community of liberation in the context of the struggles of the oppressed.

Thus the church in North India needs a relational-distinctive character to address the challenges. This calls for a church with permeable or porous borders to uphold the above in tension. I show that both the relational and distinctive character can be upheld if the church in North India is understood from the perspective of the Holy Spirit in relation with Christ. In dialogue with both Western and Indian theologians I show that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology is a viable way forward for the churches in North India.

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ABBREVIATIONS

(for full details, see the Bibliography)

AC- *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas.*

BI- *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions.*

CAET- *A Convergence of Advaita Vedanta and Eastern Christian Thought.*

CTAV- *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedanta.*

CC- *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic.*

CET- *Christian Existence Today.*

CG- *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology.*

CK- *Christ the Key.*

COG- *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology.*

CPS- *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology.*

DS- *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions.*

DT- *Doing Theology: Indian Christian Reflections on Theologizing in India Today.*

ET- *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology.*

GHBV- *God's Hope Becoming Visible: Indian Christian Reflections on Some Relevant Issues of our Times.*

GIC- *The Gospel of Indian Culture.*

HO- *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor.*

ICT- *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology.*

IDC- *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology - The Cadbury Lectures 2009.*

- MF-** *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity.*
- MIS-** *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies.*
- MM-** *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity.*
- MYO-** *Many Yet One: Multiple Religious Belonging.*
- NWC-** *Nature, Woman and the Church: Indian Christian Reflections on Ecology, Feminism and Ecclesiology.*
- PK-** *Peaceable Kingdom.*
- POG-** *The Politics of God.*
- RA-** *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony.*
- RCI-** *Rethinking Christianity in India.*
- SOL-** *The Spirit of Life: An Universal Affirmation.*
- SPOAF-** *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology.*
- STT-** *Sanctify them in Truth: Holiness Exemplified.*
- SWC-** *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective.*
- TC-** *Theology of Chenchiah.*
- THR-** *The Hauerwas Reader.*
- TK-** *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God.*
- TOC-** *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology.*
- TR-** *Theology of Religions: Birmingham Papers and Other Essays.*
- TT-** *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics.*
- WR-** *What is Religion? A Theological Answer.*

Biblical Citations wherever used are from *NRSV* version.

INTRODUCTION

The present research is entitled *Towards a Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology in the Context of North India*. The research task is to show that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology is a viable way forward for responding to the challenges and struggles of the churches in the North Indian context. For this task the research first aims at determining the shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology and then moves on to apply such an ecclesiology to the North Indian context.

1. DEFINITIONS OF THE MAIN TERMS OR PHRASES USED

1.1. PERMEABLE:

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word ‘permeable’ is ‘permitting diffusion of something through it.’¹ In other words, the meaning of the term suggests exchange or passage of materials through porous borders or boundaries. When translated in the context of the church the concept of permeability would mean a church with porous boundaries or borders. What this essentially means is that the church while having definite boundaries, these boundaries are porous in that they would allow the passage of say different perspectives and people to flow out as well as in.

¹See “Permeable,” *OED Online*. September 2016. Oxford University Press, accessed October 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/141194?redirectedFrom=Permeable&>

1.2. SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY:

Spirit Ecclesiology is seeking to understand the Church, its nature, ministry and mission from a pneumatological perspective while maintaining the Christological dimension. This is a term used rather sparingly by some contemporary authors. Sometimes the term has been used in isolation, but at other times it has been used interchangeably with similar phrases like ‘pneumatological ecclesiology’ or ‘Pentecostal ecclesiology.’² Clarke Pinnock in his book *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* uses this term.³ He uses this in the sense that the church is essentially a charismatic community guided by the Spirit, which continues the mission of Christ through the gifts that believers possess. Spirit ecclesiology appears also in the title of a recent book entitled *Towards a Relational Spirit Ecclesiology in Asia* (2009) by the Indian theologian Abraham Kadaliyil. This relational Spirit ecclesiology considers ‘Christ as the motivating centre and the Spirit as the guiding centre of the Asian church and mission and life in the Asian context of many religions, many cultures and many poor.’⁴ Furthermore, Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, in his book *The Spirit Poured out on all Flesh: Pentecostalism and Global Theology* (2005), mentions the term Spirit ecclesiology in his discussion of the

² There are others who have used the concept of Spirit ecclesiology but termed it differently as ‘Third Article Ecclesiology’. For example, Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2015).

³ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1996), 141.

⁴ Abraham Kadaliyil, *Toward a Relational Spirit Ecclesiology in Asia: A Study on the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences* (Germany: VDM Verlag, 2009)

essential marks of the church from a pneumatological perspective.⁵ Kirsteen Kim in her book *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* uses this term in reference to Samuel Rayan's pneumatological understanding of the church.⁶ In an article written by Chia Roland, entitled *The Community of the Holy Spirit: A Spirit-Ecclesiology in Outline*,⁷ the Spirit enables Christ's death and resurrection and the hope of eschatological fulfilment. The Holy Spirit is the basis of the creation of the church and its continued existence. Another article by Laurenti Magesa, *Towards a Spirit Ecclesiology*⁸ written from an African perspective, seeks to propose how the church should be open in the Spirit and respect the religio-cultural diversity of Africa and have meaningful dialogue as the mission of Christ.

The term Spirit ecclesiology is preferred here because it seems to suggest more than just a pneumatological perspective. It includes the dimension of agency or role of the Spirit in the church⁹ along with the essential Christological dimension.

1.3. THE CONTEXT OF NORTH INDIA:

The North Indian context, broadly speaking, refers to the multi ethno-linguistic, religio-cultural and socio-economic-political context that the church finds itself in North India. Geographically and technically, North India includes the states of

⁵*SPOAF* 151.

⁶ *MIS*, 161.

⁷Roland Chia, "The Community of the Holy Spirit: A Spirit-Ecclesiology in Outline," *CGST Journal*, no 29 July 2000): 119-149.

⁸Laurenti Magesa, "Toward a Spirit-Ecclesiology," in *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Mission and Dialogue and Proclamation*, edited by William R. Burrows (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 173-182.

⁹ The inclusion of the word 'Spirit' in Spirit ecclesiology is deliberate here so that we do not continue the subordination of the Spirit in various ways including regarding its nomenclature.

Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and the union territory of Chandigarh and Delhi. For this thesis, I have taken into consideration a wider area, which includes those states where Church of North India (CNI) churches are found. The CNI is an united church, which was established in 1970, bringing together six denominations.¹⁰ It has twenty seven dioceses spread across North India, covering nearly twenty five states and some union territories. The North Indian context in this project actually refers to the context of challenges and the struggles that the North Indian churches face in this region.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The history of India is partly the history of colonialism by different people at different stages. One of the most influential colonising efforts was that of European and particularly British Colonialism. The effects of centuries of colonialism have left deep marks in India's society, culture and political life which are still felt today. One of the most sustained effects has been in the area of Christianity and churches in India. Though the missionary movement in India has been involved in education, healthcare, alleviating the plight of the masses and bringing the gospel in various ways, the majority of the churches in India and particularly North India have continued to be western in their theology, structures and practice. Christian

¹⁰The Church of North India (CNI), formed in the year 1970 is a merger of six denominations viz., the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon CIPBC (Anglican), the United Church of Northern India-UCNI (Congregationalist and Presbyterian), the Baptist Churches of Northern India (British Baptists), the Church of the Brethren in India, the Methodist Church (British and Australian Conferences) and the Disciples of Christ. See "The Church of North India," accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.cnisynod.org/beginning.aspx>.

expansion in this land had been done with an attitude of supremacy, and a devaluation and demonisation of other religious backgrounds and cultures.¹¹ This has resulted in a Christian community with little interaction with communities and peoples of other faiths and backgrounds. Thus, culturally, the church has not been able to connect with Indian cultures as such and therefore has followed western cultures and practices in its life and ministry as the norm. Religious and theological dialogue with other cultures and religions is still kept to a minimum in the life of the church. These aspects have given the impression that Christianity is a western religion.¹²

There have been sincere attempts since the 19th century by some missionaries and converts to integrate and indigenise Christianity, religiously, culturally and nationally. Although these were significant ground-breaking attempts, the western nature of the church largely continues. Thus, Christianity continues to be looked upon with suspicion and its missionary endeavours have been equated with imperialistic undertakings. The fundamentalist groups of different religions, especially Hindu fundamentalist groups, accuse Christianity of being an anti-national, anti-Hindu and a foreign religion whose secret agenda is to spread western culture and western religion and to convert India into a Christian nation.¹³ Under these circumstances, the church in India struggles to be both Indian and Christian.

On the other hand, there is a huge challenge in India concerning the condition of the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed. The churches in India are mostly

¹¹John Parratt, ed., *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

¹²Kadaliyil, *Toward a Relational Spirit Ecclesiology in Asia: A Study on the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, 5.

¹³ See Sathianathan Clarke, "Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities and Indian-Christian Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 95: 2 (2002): 197-226.

constituted by these people. The *dalits* and tribals who constitute the majority of the members of the churches in North India are oppressed both inside and outside the church. There is a significant issue about justice and liberation of the marginalised in India. The challenge of solidarity with the marginalised and standing for their rights within and beyond the church and seeking to empower them socially, religiously and politically are some of the greatest challenges that the churches currently face.

Thus, broadly, the challenge is on two fronts: firstly, to secure the identity of the Indian church as both Indian and Christian in its nature, ministry and mission; secondly, for the churches in India to wake up to the fact of justice and liberation of the marginalised. However, it will be seen that these two concerns are interrelated as the issue of identity of the Indian church cannot bypass the issue of marginalisation. Therefore, the churches in India and especially North India should be able to address both the above challenges integrally.

Many studies and researches have been conducted in the context of South Indian Christianity, but comparably few have been attempted with regard to North Indian Christianity. Thus the importance of this research is that it seeks to address the dual challenges that have been identified above in an integrated manner and it does so from within the context of North India. The research claims that a pneumatological perspective of the church, coupled with its Christological dimension, in a dialectical relationship, can address the issues integrally as mentioned above. In this research, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with its relational-distinctive dialectics is upheld as a way forward for the North Indian churches. This relational-distinctive dialectics is shown to be an integral feature of a permeable ecclesiology. I argue that the churches in India need to be relational with other

communities and religions to counteract the alienation due to colonialism's impact while also being distinct regarding their Christological witness, and their critical nature and communal identity with particular concerns for the marginalised. I conclude this research by applying such a permeable Spirit ecclesiology to issues of ecumenism, multiple religious belonging and interfaith relations.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The methodological strategy followed in this research has been descriptive while also being comparative and analytical. For my project, I have chosen both Western and Indian theologians. I have chosen western theologians to situate Indian theological thinking into the wider global conversation about Spirit ecclesiology. While Western theologians are used here to set the framework for the project and contribute in building up a paradigm for Spirit ecclesiology, the Indian theologians are used to remodify this paradigm and situate the conversation in the particular North Indian context. In my choice of theologians, I have been mindful of several criteria: First, that a prominent pneumatological emphasis should be present. Second, theologians from a cross-section of traditions are represented. Third, especially for the Indian context, I have chosen those theologians that are representative of particular genres of Indian theological and ecclesiological thinking. Fourth, Indian theologians that address one or more challenges of plurality/diversity and marginality.

Before going into a discussion about the particular choice of theologians, a question may arise as to what is the relationship of Western and Indian theology particularly in this project? Why was Western theologians necessary in the first place

to think about Indian theology and ecclesiology? I believe there must be a dynamic relationship between Western and Eastern /Asian / Indian theology. Asian or Indian theology cannot simply bypass the Christian tradition and formulations developed for centuries in the West. Nor on the other hand Asian or Indian theology uncritically apply Western theological formulations into the Asian or Indian context. The dynamic relationship between the West and the East should be an enriching exchange and critical rethinking between the two. Rethinking Christian theology from the Indian perspective is not new and will be highlighted throughout the thesis as something that began from the 19th century. True, this project has considered Western theologians along with Indian ones, but it is to be noted that the project begins with a survey of the North Indian context. What this implies is that the rethinking that Indian theologians do is from the background of the particular context in question. It will also be seen that while theologies of the western theologians were engaged to arrive at a paradigm, this paradigm is evaluated, revised and modified according to the need and nature of the context. In other words, rethinking theology in India means a critical reflection of the received western thinking, evaluated in the background of the context while introducing original contributions from India. The exchange between the two, however can be both ways. Learning and critical thinking can be both ways and as Western theologies have manifestly influenced Indian thinking, Indian theology can also influence, modify and reshape Western thinking. At the end of the thesis it will be evident as to what possible contributions, particularly a permeable Spirit ecclesiology from the North Indian context can make to global conversations on ecclesiology.

In the following I proceed to justify the choice of theologians for this project. I have chosen Jürgen Moltmann from the German reformed tradition who is explicit regarding the pneumatological orientation of ecclesiology. Furthermore, the broadness and relationality in the Spirit in Moltmann's theology have made him a suitable contributor to this project. I have chosen Moltmann compared to Karl Rahner or Wolfhart Pannenberg or Hans Küng because Moltmann draws from a huge breadth of sources and his voice has been heard beyond the confines of the wider academy and a growing number of two-thirds-world theologians have interacted with his proposals.¹⁴ Moltmann has drawn from his interactions and engagement with the WCC, Eastern Orthodox thought, his interest in the third world, with Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, liberation theologies and Catholic base communities in Latin America.¹⁵ Though Rahner, Pannenberg and Kung's contribution have been significant in terms of relationship between pneumatology and ecclesiology; from an Indian perspective, Moltmann is more attractive. Furthermore, Moltmann represents the strand of relational ecclesiology. On the other hand I have taken Stanley Hauerwas, the American post-liberal ethicist and theologian as a conversation partner to highlight the distinctive nature of the church. In contrast to the founding fathers of post-liberal thought, like Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, Hauerwas stands out for his distinctive and contrastive ecclesiology and serves as a foil to Moltmann's relational open ecclesiology in our project. Hauerwas also has become influential beyond the theological field into much of contemporary public life in America. His ecclesiology that stresses on the embodied character of the Christian community of

¹⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives*, (Downer's Grove/Illinois: IVP, 2002) 127.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

witness is noteworthy for our purposes. Hauerwas represents an ecclesiocentric ecclesiology in this project.

Kathryn Tanner, from Yale is chosen and is used as a foil and critique for the above two Western theologians in this project. Tanner's critique of both Social Trinity stands out as a brilliant counter standpoint and her stress on appreciation of diversity, otherness and justice is a counterstance to post-liberal ideals. Tanner is particularly used to bring out the Christo-theocentric model of the human community or the church.

Another western theologian is used to finally arrive at a shape of permeable Spirit ecclesiology. He is Amos Yong, a Malaysian-American Pentecostal theologian. A Pentecostal theologian is brought into this project because I feel that any pneumatologically oriented construction of theology should include the voice of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition which has a growing number of following throughout the world. My choice of Amos Yong as a Pentecostal theologian over and above say others like Frank D. Macchia or Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is because of Yong's comparatively Asian background on the one hand and on the other his wider engagement in different fields. Both Macchia and Kärkkäinen were suitable for taking into consideration the pneumatological perspective. But Yong's breadth of engagement and scholarship is certainly wider. Wolfgang Vondey and Martin W. Mittlestadt in the introduction to their edited volume, *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship* acknowledge along with others that Yong is a pioneering and leading Pentecostal theologian, a major representative of

Pentecostal scholarship.¹⁶ Yong has engaged in various fields: ranging from ‘theology to neurobiology, from Biblical interpretation to interreligious dialogue, from theological hermeneutics to theology of disability, from political theology to theology of creation, from Pentecostal doctrines to philosophical debates.’¹⁷ It is said that both the Pentecostals and the non-Pentecostals alike see a fresh endeavour in Yong’s works.¹⁸ Moreover from the perspective of our project it will be seen that his theology and ecclesiology fulfils the relational-distinctive criteria for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology.

The Indian theologians chosen are Pandipeddi Chenchiah, Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz and Samuel Rayan SJ. Chenchiah is chosen to represent lay Hindu converts, during the pre- and post-Independence era in India who were among the pioneers of Indian Christian theology. Also, Chenchiah, along with Vengal Chakkari and others were part of the group *Rethinking Christianity in India* which was very prominent and influential in guiding Indian Christian thinking. Chenchiah is chosen over others like Krishna Mohan Banerjee (1813-1855), Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), Vengal Chakkari (1880-1958) or Aiyadurai Jesudasan Appasamy (1891-1975) for valid reasons.¹⁹ Krishna Mohan Banerjee was one of the pioneers of Indian Christian theology but his thrust was interpreting Christ according to the Vedic figure of Prajapati. So, he was primarily Christocentric and lacked

¹⁶ Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt, eds., *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship, Passion for the Spirit*, in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*. Edited by Andrew Davies and William Kay, Vol. 14, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 1-2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Theologians like Pratap.C. Mozoomdar would have been suitable for his pneumatological outlook but his theology has not been quite influential and widespread in Indian Christian thinking. See discussions on his life and thought in M.M .Thomas and P.T.Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, Tiruvalla: The New Day Publications of India, 1992, 47-51.

pneumatological reflections and its ecclesiological implications. While Chakkarai shared many concerns with Chenchiah²⁰ being part of the same group mentioned above, the former's theology is primarily Christological.²¹ Charkkarai lacks the pneumatologically driven theology that Chenchiah has. On the other hand, Brahmabandhav's main contribution is his Indian understanding of the Trinity,²² while he lacks a particular pneumatological perspective. Appasamy is particularly known for his understanding of Christianity as *Bhakti Marga* drawing from Ramanuja's Vishistadvaita and he gives a Christological interpretation in relation to the Church and the Scriptures.²³ In contrast, it will be evident in the latter part of this project that Chenchiah's pneumatology influences his Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology. It will also be seen that his theology helps to build a broader paradigm for the decolonisation of the Indian church.

K.P. Aleaz is chosen for our project because he combines his Eastern Orthodox background (Syrian Orthodox) and Advaitic understanding of Christian theology and philosophy. His stress on the advaitic unity of God, humans and the rest of creation brings a relational aspect to Indian Christian theology. On the other hand, his theology of religions of pluralistic inclusivism stands in line with Brahmabandhav Upadhyay and Stanley J. Samartha.²⁴ But Aleaz categorises Samartha's theology as a theocentric Christology,²⁵ while his own theology can well be described as pneumatologically driven (through the presence of the Atman or the

²⁰ Chakkarai shared concerns of nationalism and decentralised church structures with Chenchiah while he was not quite radical like Chenchiah in criticising the Church's liturgy and sacraments.

²¹ M.M. Thomas and P.T. Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, 123.

²² See *ICT* 69. Also see Thomas and Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, 6.

²³ Thomas and Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, 171.

²⁴ *CAET* 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

Spirit in all). This will be evident as we discuss in the thesis how his pneumatology influences his Christology, soteriology and Christianity or church's relation with other religions. Therefore, the justification for choosing Aleaz over others.

The choice of Samuel Rayan was crucial for the overarching argument of the thesis, i.e. in our bid to develop a permeable Spirit ecclesiology for North India. A search for a theologian was made who has a sustained pneumatological perspective in his theology, together with a relational-distinctive approach, along with a decolonisation stance, an engagement with the religious other in terms of contextual, non-elitist approach and a liberationist outlook for the marginalised. Samuel Rayan perfectly fit all the above criteria. It was difficult to find any other Indian theologian who was as suitable for the present project.²⁶

It is evident that the choice of the theologians both Western and Indian represents a cross-section of theological traditions. We have the Reformed tradition represented by Moltmann, the Post-liberal with Hauerwas, the emphasis on Christocentricity and postmodernism with Tanner and the Pentecostal tradition with Yong. With the Indian theologians, we have the 19th century Hindu convert with leanings towards the Shakti tradition of Hinduism in Chenchiah, Aleaz from the Eastern Orthodox background representing the Advaitic tradition and Samuel Rayan SJ from the Roman Catholic tradition combining the major trends in Indian Christian thinking. One could still ask the valid question as to why in a project that concerns North India, theologians from the North region were not considered as major conversation partners? While admitting that all the major contributions are from

²⁶ Although M.M.Thomas (1916-1996) could have been considered as his theology related to the way of action (*Karma Marga*) or salvation as humanisation in relation to the modern secular world and his advocacy of living theology has been very influential in Indian Christian thinking, yet Samuel Rayan's pneumatological perspective stands distinctive in contrast to Thomas. For a discussion on his life and Thought see *ICT*, 311-328.

South India, I have taken into consideration brief arguments from Krishna Mohan Banerjee and Brahmabandhav Upadhaya in the thesis who are both 19th to early 20th century North Indian theologians. Furthermore, I have argued previously why these theologians fell short as compared to others from the South. Moreover, trying to find contemporary theologians from North India who has a particular pneumatological perspective and holistic approach in theology and ecclesiology is difficult. For argument's sake however, one could think of Arvind P. Nirmal from Maharashtra or Nirmal Minz from Jharkhand or Wati Longchar from the Northeast as prominent North Indian theologians. I have used these theologians to a certain extent in my project. But their theology is not as integrated and as holistic as compared to say Samuel Rayan. A.P. Nirmal's particular focus is Dalit theology, while Minz' on Adivasi theology as Longchar's is about Tribal theology. All of them are contextual theologians but none of them fulfill our criteria of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology.

4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research limits itself to some of the primary concerns and challenges of the churches of North India. While assuming that many aspects of the rest of India would be applicable to North India too; it tries to bring out some distinctive issues particular to North India: for example, the tribal context of Central, East and Northeast India and the linguistic, cultural and ethnological diversity of North India. In the final chapter of this project I limit myself to applying a permeable Spirit ecclesiology to only three issues, namely, Ecumenism, Multiple Religious Belonging and Interfaith

relations. I address the concerns of the marginalised communities integrally with the above three issues.

5. OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One: The Context of North India: Challenges for the Churches.

In this initial chapter I give a descriptive overview of the context of North India. Throughout the chapter I show that the North Indian context, broadly speaking, offers two types of challenges for the churches: firstly, the question of the identity of the churches in the context of colonial captivity and plural ethno-linguistic, religio-cultural presence which includes the challenges from Hindu fundamentalism; secondly, the challenge of the struggles of the marginalised communities like the *dalits*, tribals, and women who constitute the majority of the churches in this region and also briefly raise concerns about the ecological crisis.

Chapter Two: The Case for a Permeable Ecclesiology and its Pneumatological Shape.

In this chapter I determine what constitutes the nature of permeability, search for appropriate models and subsequently arrive at a particular shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. The nature of permeability is explored in terms of the dialectics of relational-distinctiveness. The shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology is arrived at by considering the Western theologians. I explore the Social Trinitarian model of the ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann, the ecclesiocentric model of Stanley Hauerwas and a Christo-theocentric model with Kathryn Tanner. Finding the above models inadequate for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology I offer an alternative model from Amos Yong in terms of Irenaeus' metaphor of the two hands of the Father, the Spirit and the Word / Christ working together in the world.

Chapter Three: A Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology in the Context of North India.

In this chapter I arrive at a revised shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology that is appropriate for the North Indian context. I do this by recourse to Indian theologians. To arrive at a revised shape, I begin by considering two stages of theological and particularly ecclesiological reflections in Indian Christianity. These two stages reveal common and comparative theological-ecclesiological approaches during India's pre and post-Independence period and today. I use Pandipeddi Chenchiah and K.P. Aleaz to highlight the above approaches. Subsequently, I show that the above approaches, although valuable have some drawbacks. Thereby, I offer the permeable Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan, which combines the strengths of the previous theologians, complements their drawbacks while being suitable for the North Indian context.

Chapter Four: Implications of the Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology on Select Issues in North India.

In this chapter I apply the permeable Spirit ecclesiology developed in the previous chapters on three select issues namely, Ecumenism, Multiple Religious Belonging and Interfaith Relations. I show that in each issue there is an interplay of the relational-distinctive dialectics in terms of unity and diversity, universal and particular, spiritual and the concrete ensured by the joint working of the Spirit and Christ. I also show in each the distinctive Asian/Indian understanding and approach of these issues, which differs from the Western ones. In each it is evident that there is an integral connection of these issues with concerns of marginalisation and liberation and that these issues cannot be dealt separately from the latter. I finally end with some constructive contextual proposals of how a permeable Spirit ecclesiology can be applicable regarding these issues.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONTEXT OF NORTH INDIA: CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCHES

In this chapter I discuss the general context of North India including the challenges that the churches face in the region. The context is discussed at the outset to set out the parameters of the thesis. This will help us develop a permeable Spirit ecclesiology relevant for the context. An exploration of the North Indian context is hoped to reveal how crucial the context is for developing an Indian ecclesiology.

I have already mentioned the area and the scope of North India in the introduction to the thesis. However, for the benefit of our discussion in this chapter I wish to elaborate on the same. Technically, North India includes the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and the union territory of Chandigarh and Delhi. However, for this thesis I have taken a larger area as context. I have followed the area that is covered by the Church of North India(CNI). The church of North India is found in all the states in India except the four states of South India. The South Indian states are Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The North Indian context in this sense includes the states of the Northeast, East, West and far North as a whole. The North Indian context differs in many ways to the South Indian context (though there are many points of similarity between the two). India, evidently is not a homogenous whole but differs considerably in many ways regionally. Therefore, I have tried to concentrate on North India only. There are other reasons for concentrating on North India. First, that the researcher belongs to North India and his concerns are particularly for that

region. Secondly, Indian Christian theology has been mostly done taking whole of India into consideration but without adequately recognising the differences and the diversity between the North and the South. Third, and following from this there has been a lacuna in highlighting and dealing with the North Indian context particularly in Indian theology.

Subsequently and during the course of this thesis it will be evident that the North Indian church has two broad challenges, namely that of plurality or diversity and marginality. Now, one can argue that this is also true of whole India. So how does North India stand out in this? In terms of plurality or diversity, the North Indian church has to engage with a diversity different from that of South India. North India differs linguistically, socio-culturally and ethnically from South India. As will be highlighted in the rest of the chapter, the tribal history, context and challenges of the Northeast and central India is unique to North India. Moreover, except for the Northeast states, North Indian Christianity is not so widespread in terms of the Christian population as in the South. So, the churches might need different responses. Secondly, as regards, challenges of marginalisation and struggles of the Northeast and central India tribals, they are different from the challenges that are particularly faced by Dalits in the South. That is why there has emerged separately Tribal theology and Adivasi theology (which are liberation theologies) which concentrates on the struggles of the Northeast tribals and tribals of central India respectively. All this will be dealt with in the rest of this chapter.

Now having outlined the justification for focussing our thesis on North India, I shall now move on to the description of the context of North India. Several issues will be highlighted in this chapter, but due to limited scope, only a few will be

considered while finally determining the implications of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. The discussion will proceed in three sections: firstly, a brief overview of India; secondly, the context of North India; and thirdly, introducing the case for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology.

SECTION ONE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INDIA

This brief overview of India will serve as a background for the context of North India in the next section. It begins with a brief reflection on colonialism *vis-à-vis* Christianity in India, which is crucial for understanding the character of the church in India. This will be followed by a survey of Indian demographics.

1.1. COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

The European colonial history of India and the Christianity that was brought on the sails of imperialism has not left a wholly positive picture of the religion in the nation. In particular, the colonial efforts towards religious conversion was not only to alter people's religion, but also to transform their culture, habits and entire lifestyle in favour of a 'superior' European culture, alien to Indians. M.K.Gandhi's comments bring home the point very clearly. He wrote:

About the same, I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that henceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat...I

also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religions of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.²⁷

The colonial project not only subjugated a people politically, but religiously, economically, culturally and socially which often led to an unfavourable witness for Christ in India. The first prime minister of independent India, Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote:

With the coming of the British power, a new type of missionary came to India. He was attached to officials, and the British army of occupation, and represented the British imperialism far more than the spirit of Christ. It is strange that the gospel of Jesus, the gentle but relentless rebel against untruth and injustice in all forms, should be made a tool of imperialism and capitalism and political domination and social injustice.²⁸

The church and the missionary movement found itself under scathing criticism for its alliance with imperialism and because of its status as a ‘foreign’ religio-cultural institution.

The church, in all practical purposes remained a foreign entity, with its architecture, vestments, liturgy, worship, and institutions with foreign funds and foreign mission-body regulations.²⁹ Christianity, for all its positive contributions towards education, health and elevation of life by well-meaning missionaries, had also managed to completely alienate the Indian Christians from their counterparts in other religions and cultures. Further, Indian Christians faced a serious dilemma

²⁷M.K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth: An Autobiography* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1984), 28-29.

²⁸Jawahar Lal Nehru, *The Unity of India* (New York: The John Day Company, 1949), 50-51.

²⁹ Michael Amalodoss, *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many be One?* (Delhi: ISPCK/ Vidyajyoti, 2005), 2.

whether they should extend support to the national movement for Indian independence or stay away from it. The arrival of Christianity in its nexus with imperial European cultural domination therefore, began to produce different reactions in India. On the one hand, prominent Hindu thinkers in the 19th century, partly influenced by European Enlightenment thinking, pushed for reforms in Hinduism; leading to the creation of communities like *Brahma Samaj*, focussing on intellectual, religious reform; and *Arya Samaj*, a militant reform movement against the British cultural and religious hegemony. Implicit in this endeavour was the new surge of the spirit of nationalism in the minds of the people. On the other hand, there were genuine efforts by Hindu converts to Christianity to reinterpret their new found religion in light of this struggle for religio-cultural-political identity.

The basic struggle for Christians at this time was how to still be Indian (Hindu) in culture and yet be a Christian in religion. There were efforts and experiments both in terms of new ‘ecclesial’ movements and theological-intellectual engagement with Hinduism to realise this. According to David Barrett, from 1858 to 1975, India had more than ‘150 Hindu-Christian’³⁰ movements or churches as well as ‘neo-Hindu groups of devotees of Jesus’ who explicitly acknowledged Jesus.³¹ Efforts were made to start indigenous churches that broke away from ‘missionary’ churches leading to churches, like the *Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus Christ* in 1857 in Tamilnadu, *The National Church of India* in 1886 in Madras (Chennai), *The Calcutta Christo Samaj* (1887), and *The Church of the New Dispensation* in Calcutta (Kolkata).³² These churches or movements, however, have been short-lived, but they

³⁰ David Barrett, *World Christianity Encyclopaedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 374.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Roger E. Hedlund, *Christianity is Indian, The Emergence of an Indigenous Community* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 47. Also see Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous*

represented genuine and pioneering efforts by Indians to root the church and Christianity on Indian soil. Intellectually and theologically, there were also prominent thinkers who tried to bridge the gap or develop a positive dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity. Personalities like Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958), Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959), Aiyadurai Jesudasen Appasamy (1891-1975) and others were prominent in this sense.³³ Although these movements, both ecclesial and intellectual, revealed genuine efforts to reclaim an Indian identity for the church and theology, they were later criticised as elitist and intellectual, failing to raise the concerns of outcaste and the marginalised.³⁴ These efforts; however continue even today along with the emergence of theologies with liberation perspectives in India. This brings us to the present context of India as a whole to which I will now turn. This will be a very broad overview of India in terms of its demographics. It will be seen that many of these aspects are shared by the North Indian region. The demographics will form a background for giving a sense of the degree of diversity and complexity that is India.

Christianity (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969); See also Vijaya Joji Babu Valle, "Becoming Indian: Towards an Indian Contextual Ecclesiology," PhD diss, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculty of Theology, 2010), 11, accessed March 26, 2016. <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/287832/1/Valle+Thesis.pdf>, 26-38.

³³ See *ICT* and *CTAV*.

³⁴ These theologies have been countered by subaltern theologies like that of *Dalit* theologies that sees itself as a counter theology to Brahmanic theologies of the 19th century. See Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalit Theology, Introduction, Interrogation and Imagination," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (Delhi: OUP, 2010), 23-27.

1.2 GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF INDIA

India has a population of over 1.2 billion people.³⁵ In terms of ethnic groups, all the ‘five major racial types, namely, Australoid, Mongoloid, Europoid, Caucasian, and Negroid,’ find representation among the people of India.³⁶ There are twenty two official languages and many others including dialects.³⁷ Added to this are religious communities including Hindus (79.80%), Muslims (14.23%) and Christians (2.30%), as well as Sikhs (1.72%), Buddhists (0.70%), Jains (0.37%) and other religious or non-religious groups (0.9%).³⁸ Christian presence in India can be found in the form of various denominations, mainline and younger churches and fellowships. Roman Catholics make up the majority of Christians, followed by Church of South India (CSI)³⁹ Church of North India (CNI)⁴⁰ and other denominations. Besides these religious traditions there are other ‘popular’ and primitive religious expressions too.⁴¹ These general demographics show the diversity and plurality of India as a whole.

³⁵ Cf. “2011 Our Census, Our Future,” accessed July 18, 2016.

http://www.dataforall.org/dashboard/censusinfoindia_pca/

³⁶ Cf. “National Portal of India: Profile,” accessed July 18, 2016, <https://india.gov.in/india-glance/profile>.

³⁷ “National Portal of India: Profile”

³⁸ These are the census figures in the latest 2011 census of India. “2011 Our Census, Our Future,” accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/c-01.html>.

³⁹ “The Church of South India is the result of the union of churches of varying traditions Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed. It was inaugurated in September 1947, after protracted negotiation among the churches concerned.” Cf. “Church of South India: History,” accessed October 3, <http://www.csisynod.com/history.php>.

⁴⁰ The Church of North India (CNI), formed in the year 1970 is a merger of six denominations viz., The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, CIPBC (Anglican), the United Church of Northern India-UCNI (Congregationalist and Presbyterian), the Baptist Churches of Northern India (British Baptists), the Church of the Brethren in India, the Methodist Church (British and Australian Conferences) and the Disciples of Christ. “Church of North India,” accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.cnisynod.org/beginning.aspx>.

⁴¹ Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 2.

Apart from this plurality and diversity, India is known for its poverty and marginalisation. According to the latest census in 2011, 21.9% or 260.3 million people of India live below the poverty-line.⁴² This reveals that India's population is still overwhelmingly poor. This stark reality of poverty is very much connected with the socio-economic, religious and political marginalisation these people face.⁴³ The immense diversity described earlier coupled with poverty and marginalisation presents numerous challenges for India and the churches. This situation is rendered complex by the striking contrasts inherent in the Indian society. Felix Wilfred, an Indian theologian succinctly captures this reality. He notes that there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor. The reality of sophisticated technological, industrial and nuclear capability stands in contrast to the lack of basic necessities of life and even cases of deaths by starvation. The richness of human resources contradicts the reality of illiteracy and child-labour. India is the largest democracy in the world but sadly has a society stratified by rigid caste system compounded with the challenges of religio-political conflicts.⁴⁴ Having provided a brief general idea of the Indian subcontinent I will now turn to the specific context of North India.

SECTION TWO: THE CONTEXT OF NORTH INDIA

I propose to bring out the context of North India in its geographical scope of the areas (states and union territories)⁴⁵ where the Church of North India (CNI) churches

⁴² Estimated: 25.7% in rural areas, 13.7% in urban area. See "Press Note on Poverty Estimates, 2011-12," Government of India Planning Commission, July 2013, accessed July 18, 2016, http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/pre_pov2307.pdf, 3.

⁴³ I shall explore this further under the section marginalised groups.

⁴⁴ Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology*, 2-4.

⁴⁵ There are 29 states and 7 Union territories (if Delhi is included in Union Territories) in India. "National Portal of India: Profile," accessed August 22, 2016, <https://india.gov.in/india-glance/profile>. Union Territories are administered by the President through an Administrator appointed by him/her. Cf., "2011 Our Census, Our Future," Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs,

are found.⁴⁶ The context of North India is brought out highlighting the challenges that the churches face in this region. It is a complex context. Thus in the interest of clarity, I propose to discuss it under the following themes: firstly, the ethno-linguistic, religio-cultural and socio-political diversity; secondly, the marginalised communities like the *dalits*, tribals / *adivasis* and women, and the ecological crisis; thirdly, the threat of Hindu fundamentalism; and finally, the ‘colonial captivity’ of the churches.

2.1 THE ETHNO-LINGUISTIC, RELIGIO-CULTURAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DIVERSITY OF NORTH INDIA.

2.1.1 Ethno-Linguistic Diversity:

In ethno-linguistic terms, North India is very diverse. Linguistically, North India is dominated by the Indo-Aryan languages;⁴⁷ itself a part of the Indo-European language family.⁴⁸ These language families are spread across North India in many of the states. In some states there is harmonious ethno-linguistic blending, while in some other parts there remain tensions and conflicts due to such diversity including

accessed August 22nd, 2016,

http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/maps/atlas/administrative_atlas.html. The CNI churches are spread across at least 25 states and some of the union territories.

⁴⁶ A note about the particular region in question has been given in the introduction to the thesis.

⁴⁷ The Indo-Aryan language family has Hindi as the lingua-franca of the North, North-West Eastern and Central Indian states. For a reference to Indian languages, see Linguistic Survey of India “2011 Our Census, Our Future,” accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-documents/lis/ling_survey_india.html. Also see Jason Baldrige, “Reconciling Linguistic Diversity: The History and Future of Language Policy in India,” University of Toledo, *Honours Thesis*, 1996, accessed August 23, 2016, <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~jason2/papers/natlang.htm>.

⁴⁸ Indo-European family of languages is spoken in most of Europe and in South Asia. It has around ten branches including Indo-Iranian which has languages spoken in India including Bengali and Hindi. For a study on Indo-European family of languages, see Benjamin W. Fortson IV, *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction*, Second Edition, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010).

socio-political factors. For example, in West Bengal⁴⁹ there are people from the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Punjab and others. Many of them have managed to be culturally and linguistically dual.⁵⁰ Communities of Gorkhas, Sherpas and ethnic Tibetans can also be found in the Darjeeling Himalayan hill region in this state.⁵¹ West Bengal is also home to tribal or *Adivasis* (indigenous people) such as *Santhal*, *Kol*, and *Toto* tribes.⁵² There are also a number of ethnic immigrants, primarily in the state capital of Kolkata, including Chinese, Tamils, Anglo-Indians, Jews, Armenians, and Parsis.⁵³ The state of Bengal, with all this diversity, strives to live harmoniously with all these diversity.

2.1.2. Religio-Cultural Diversity:

Apart from this ethno-linguistic diversity, religious diversity adds to the complexity of the region because the religious demographics differ hugely in different states. While Hindus form the religious majority in North India; Muslims are the majority in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, but are in a minority in the state of Mizoram in the North-East region.⁵⁴ Muslims are the second largest minority population in the states of Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and a few other states. Christians form the

⁴⁹My native state lies in the East surrounded by the neighbouring states of Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar and bordered by Bangladesh in the East.

⁵⁰Keeping their own mother-tongue and cultural roots, some have managed to be blended into the ethno-linguistic and cultural atmosphere of Bengali society.

⁵¹ See the Darjeeling Government official website, accessed 23rd August, 2016, <http://www.darjeeling.gov.in/people.html>.

⁵² See, The Official Government of West Bengal website, accessed August 23, 2016, <http://westbengal.gov.in/>

⁵³ See Hmadri Banerjee, Nilanjana Gupta and Sipra Mukherjee eds, *Calcutta Mosaic: Essays and Interviews on the Minority Communities of Calcutta*, Anthem South Asian Studies (New Delhi: Anthem Press, 2009).

⁵⁴For details of the distribution of religion in different states see “2011 Our Census, Our Future” accessed August 23, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/c-01.html>.

majority in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, all of which are Northeastern states, and are a minority in the states of Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, which are east, west and north western states. Sikhs form the majority in Punjab and have little presence in other states.⁵⁵ Buddhism is the second largest minority in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh with some presence in states like the Jammu and Kashmir, which includes the Ladakh region, Mizoram and Maharashtra. There is a small minority of Jews in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Parsees can be found in Gujarat and Mumbai.⁵⁶ Culturally, in terms of food, dress, habits and life-style, there is a wide variety among the North Indians: for example, the food habits in West Bengal differ considerably from the food habits of people in the state of Gujarat.

2.1.3. The Intermingling and Crossing of Religio-Cultural Boundaries

Despite this diversity in many regions in North India there is a harmonious religio-cultural-social intermingling. For example, movements like the one founded by Kabir,⁵⁷ known as *Kabirpanth* (Saint Kabir's path), draw Hindu and Muslim principles together and propagate the brotherhood of all under the fatherhood of God. *Kabirpanth* opposes caste practices and declares that God is equally to be found in

⁵⁵ "2011 Our Census, Our Future"

⁵⁶"2011 Our Census, Our Future"

⁵⁷ Kabir was a fifteenth century saint honoured throughout India. He was born in a Muslim weaver's family in Varanasi (Benaras in North India). He studied under a Hindu guru, probably Ramananda and developed into a powerful preacher and poet. His legacy is acknowledged in the failure of any attempt to put him within the confines of either Hinduism or Islam or any particular religion for that matter. For a discussion of his life and work, see Kabir, *Bijak of Kabir*, Translated by Linda Hess and Shukhdeo Singh (Oxford University Press, 2002).

temples and mosques.⁵⁸ Kabir's present-day followers, the *Kabir-panthis*, are active in North India where they conduct inclusive *satsangs* (fellowships) and community events.⁵⁹ This reveals the reality that Indian religious communities show considerable intermingling and crossing of boundaries. The religious borders are porous⁶⁰ and religious practices are often inter-community events. Similar crossing of borders can be found in the interrelation between Hinduism and Christianity. For example, communities such as Hindu devotees of Christ exist where thousands of *Christbhaktas*⁶¹ come together in Varanasi, Allahabad and Lucknow, in the state of Uttar Pradesh for prayer meetings, and express their faith in Jesus without being baptised.⁶² These examples show that in many parts of North India people experience religio-cultural intermingling and harmonious living.

2.1.4. The Religio-Cultural and Socio-Political Conflicts

While we see intermingling and movement across borders, this also brings with it challenges which can often lead to conflict. These conflicts may be due to caste or tribal discrimination, or due to geo-political and historical reasons. An example of this can be seen in the Northeast, which consists of eight states as recognised by the

⁵⁸ See A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1981), 481 cited in Roger Hedlund, *Quest for Identity: India's Churches of Indigenous Origin: The Little Tradition in Indian Christianity* (Chennai / Delhi: MIIS / ISPCK, 2000), 108.

⁵⁹ Hedlund, *Quest for Identity: India's Churches of Indigenous Origin: The "Little Tradition in Indian Christianity*, 108.

⁶⁰ Felix Wilfred argues that in different parts of Asia people do not maintain strict borders in terms of religion. Borders are 'fluid and porous.' See Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 175.

⁶¹ See a research about this community by Jerome Sylvester IMS, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of Religio-Cultural Phenomenon* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013).

⁶² Ibid.

Government of India,⁶³ having a population of 45 million people.⁶⁴ Geo-politically, it is a strategic area as it shares borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China. Different factors like language, ethnicity, tribal rivalry, feelings of exploitation, control of resources and discrimination has resulted in conflicts and insurgencies in this region.⁶⁵ Similarly, the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the far North is a politically strategic state as it shares boundaries with neighbouring Pakistan, Afghanistan and China. Jammu and Kashmir always remains tense and is prone to violence⁶⁶ since Indian Independence.⁶⁷

⁶³ The States are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura. See Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs website, "North East Division," accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.mha.nic.in/northeast_new.

⁶⁴ See K.R. Dikshit and Jutta K. Dikshit, *North East India: Land, People and Economy*, Advances in Asian-Human Environmental Research, (Netherlands: Springer, 2014), 421.

⁶⁵ For a detailed picture on the insurgencies and conflicts in this region, see "Insurgency in the North East," accessed August 23, 2016,

http://www.mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/InsurgencyNE_052016.pdf, in Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs website, accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.mha.nic.in/northeast_new.

⁶⁶ Very recent incidents of violence have been reported in Jammu and Kashmir leading to the deaths and injuries of many people over the killing of the commander Burhan Wani, of Hizbul Mujahideen, a secessionist group on 8th July, 2016. See Jon Boone, "Kashmir Death Toll Reaches 23 in Protests at Killing of Rebel Leader," *The Guardian*, U.K. Edition, accessed July 11, 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/11/kashmir-death-toll-23-protests-shooting-burhan-wani-independence-violence>. I will deal with the struggles of the Northeast people in details later in the chapter.

⁶⁷ The territory of Jammu and Kashmir was a site of much aggression and conflict since India's independence in 1947. The partition took place in this year to form the separate state of Pakistan. The Hindu ruler of the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (where majority was Muslim) was initially undecided which side he will be. Ultimately, he decided to accede to India after the Indo-Pakistan war in 1947. In the ceasefire of 1949, India was left with most of the areas of Kashmir. Indo-Pakistan war again occurred in 1965. In 1975 India and Pakistan sign the Shimla Agreement and agree to respect the line of control. Across this line of control two regions stand still divided between India and Pakistan where violent conflicts continue to occur. For a detailed study on this issue see Sumatra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-Determination and Just Peace* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997); Aparna Rao ed. *The Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture* (Delhi: Manohar, 2008).

2.1.5. Diversity of Christian Denominations:

Amidst the above ethno-linguistic, religio-cultural and socio-political complexity and diversity, the Christian community and its churches are present with their numerous denominations making it more complex for the churches in this region to witness to the Gospel. In North India, Church of North India (CNI) is the largest united church in the region with twenty seven dioceses. Other denominations are the Roman Catholics, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Church of God, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh-Day Adventist, Presbyterian including younger churches. Most of these churches prefer to work on their own, each with its own mission strategy based on the background it draws from and the challenges of the mission-field.⁶⁸

The challenge for the churches in the North Indian region amidst this diverse complexity is how to keep their own identity as an Indian Christian community and also respect the diversity found around it. It is a challenge of both being a distinctive Christian community in Christ and also being contextual in terms of its relationship with the diversity of other communities: in other words how to be an Indian Christian church in its nature, ministry and mission.

2.2. THE CONTEXT OF MARGINALISATION

This section will draw attention to the context of the marginalised and oppressed communities of North India, namely, *dalits*, tribals and/or *adivasis*, and women. The

⁶⁸See the detailed discussion of different churches formed by different mission agencies that have arrived in North India at different periods of time and often led to conflicts with other denominations. See C.B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, Indian Theological Library, Revised Edition, Published for the Senate of Serampore College (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

context and concerns of these oppressed groups are brought into the discussion since the majority of the North Indian church members belong to these communities. These communities are marginalised due to various religio-cultural, socio-political and economic factors. I will begin with the context of the Dalits.

2.2.1. The Marginalisation of Dalits.

2.2.1.1. *A History of Oppression, Discrimination and Violence*

The origins of caste, untouchability and the *dalit* community is itself a debatable issue as there is little or no conclusive evidence about it. However, the Aryan Invasion theory continues to be popular. Proponents of this theory argue that invasion or series of invasions occurred during 1500 BCE when the Aryans conquered the inhabitants and initiated a process of caste system and untouchability.⁶⁹ The Aryan society is classified into four castes (more appropriately *varnas*).⁷⁰ They are namely, the *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriyas* (rulers and warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants or traders) and *Shudras* (labourers or servants). Those that fall outside this classification are known as the ‘untouchables’ or

⁶⁹ The Aryan Invasion theory was first published by Herbert Risely, a British administrator, ethnographer and anthropologist. There are of course suggestions of other theories based on Ambedkar and from *dalit* local myths. See Philip Vinod Peacock, “In the Beginning is also an End: Expounding and Exploring Theological Resourcefulness of Myths of Dalit Origins,” in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, edited by Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 74-90. This theory has been used for advantage by different groups of people, both Right-wing and the Left. See Peniel Jesudashan Rufus Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 6-19.

⁷⁰P.J.R. Rajkumar contends that the understanding of the word caste is often simply equated with the *varna* system. But he argues that the notion of caste involves the concept of *jati* also. The *varna* system involved the fourfold classification of Indian society which was based on function. *Jati* on the other hand referred people from the same ancestry. Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities*, 4.

outcastes or *dalits*. *Dalits* are discriminated against in many ways and find themselves outside the borders of Hindu society.⁷¹ *Dalit* oppression ranges from religious to social, to economic deprivation. They are discriminated in the spheres of education and employment, forbidden to enter temples or use public vehicles, and are subject to violent atrocities.⁷² For instance, it is reported that from 1995-1997, a total of 90,925 crimes against *dalits* were allegedly reported and it continues to this day.⁷³ *Dalits* often work as scavengers, sewage cleaners and in other menial occupations, considered polluting jobs from the perspective of the high castes. The present *dalit* population in India is 16.6% (STs).⁷⁴ Almost two-thirds of *dalits* are illiterate, but those who are educated still suffer oppression. The recent incident in January 2016 of the suicide of a *dalit* named Rohit Vemula, a research scholar in the University of Hyderabad, due to discrimination by the high caste Hindu establishment shows the seriousness of the oppression that does not spare even the educated and aspiring young people.⁷⁵ The plight of *dalit* women is worse. They are often tortured, abused, gang raped, and subjected to inhuman treatments by the higher castes. Thousands of *dalit* girls are sold into the commercial sex industry.⁷⁶ Globalisation, on the other

⁷¹ S. Clarke, D. Manchala, P.V. Peacock, "Introduction" in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, 2-3.

⁷² For a description of the plight of the *dalits* see Lazar Stanislaus SVD, "Dalits and the Mission of the Church," accessed July 20, 2016, [ww.sedosmission.org/web/en/mission-articles/doc_view/551-dalits-and-the-mission-of-the-church](http://www.sedosmission.org/web/en/mission-articles/doc_view/551-dalits-and-the-mission-of-the-church).

⁷³ Chandran Paul Martin, "Globalisation and its Impact on Dalits: A Theological Response," in *Globalisation and its Impact on Dalits: A Theological Response*, edited by James Massey (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit / Subaltern Studies, 2004), 21-24.

⁷⁴ According to Government classification, *dalits* come under the Scheduled Caste Category. See Dr. C. Chandramouli, "Census of India 2011: Release of Primary Census Abstract: Data Highlights 30th April, 2013," accessed August 24, 2016, http://idsn.org/wpcontent/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/India/2013/INDIA_CENSUS_ABSTRACT-2011-Data_on_SC-STs.pdf.

⁷⁵ For the full incident see Manash Bhattacharjee, "The Clarity of a Suicide Note," *The Hindu*, January 25, 2016, accessed August 24, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/dalit-scholar-rohith-vemulas-suicide-letter-clarity-of-a-suicide-note/article8130703.ece>.

⁷⁶ Prasanna Kumari Samuel, *Dalit Women's Experiences: A Theological Imperative for Indian Feminist Theology* (Chennai: Gurukul, 2009), 133.

hand contributes further towards land alienation, unemployment, displacement, migration, acute poverty, starvation and lack of food security for the *dalits*.⁷⁷

2.2.1.2. *The Plight of Dalit Christians*

Christian *dalits* form the majority of the Christian community in India (70-80% of Christians are from a *dalit* background).⁷⁸ Jose Kalapura, in his article *Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India*, shows that Bihar (East India) has the largest concentration of *dalit* Christians. It is inhabited by three ethnic Christian communities: the *Bettiah* Christians, converted from upper and middle castes, *Santhals* (tribals) and *dalit* Christians.⁷⁹ *Dalit* conversions have occurred due to mass movements as in Punjab (North-West India) and also due to kin-group ties and inter-family ties within different castes. The vast majority of *dalits* are known as *Chamars*. In terms of religious identity, a *dalit* Chamar Christian is not regarded as a true Christian because of untouchability. According to church data there are around 50,000 *dalit* (*Chamar*) Catholics in this region. Other churches including Pentecostals claim that Bihar has around 68,000 *dalit* Christians from seventeen Scheduled Caste (SC) groups.⁸⁰ S.M. Michael, in his article *Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity*, points out that in Bihar the majority of *Dalit*

⁷⁷Chandran Paul Martin, "Globalisation and its Impact on Dalits: A Theological Response," in *'Globalisation and its Impact on Dalits: A Theological Response,'* 21-24.

⁷⁸S.M. Michael, "Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity," in *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity*, edited by Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur, (New Delhi: SAGE, 2010).52-54. Also see Julian Saldanha, "Patterns of Conversion in Indian Mission History" in *Mission and Conversion: A Reappraisal*, edited by Joseph Mattam and Sebastian Kim, Fellowship of Indian Missiologists (FOIM), (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1996)79-80.

⁷⁹Jose Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India" in *MF* 77.

⁸⁰Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 78-79.

Christians work as agricultural labourers, cobblers, watchmen, cooks, carpenters, drivers, petty businessmen, and domestic servants.⁸¹

2.2.1.3 *Dalit Christians and Fight for their Rights*

The *dalit* Christians face manifold discrimination: first, from the hands of the government; second, from the caste Hindus; third, by the caste Christian community; fourth, by fellow Hindu *dalits*; and fifth, by the subgroups of *dalit* Christians themselves.⁸² The discrimination by the government takes the form of not providing Scheduled Caste (SC) status to *dalit* Christians (and *dalit* Muslims) as enjoyed by their as Hindus, Sikhs or Buddhists counterparts. This issue has been a struggle for the church since 1950 when the Presidential Order was passed that Christian *dalits* are not entitled to Constitutional provisions.⁸³ The argument behind this order presumed that once converted to Christianity, people automatically are released from caste stratification and discrimination, both social and economic, which is far from reality. *Dalit* Christians have been campaigning for the SC (Scheduled Caste) category and some churches of the CNI and other denominations are at the forefront in this struggle.⁸⁴

⁸¹ S.M. Michael, "Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity" in *MF* 51-62.

⁸² L. Stanislaus, "Dalits and Mission of the Church." In *Liberative Struggles in a Violent Society*. Edited by John Vattamattam. Forum Series-1, (Hyderabad, 1991), 197, *SEDOS*, www.sedosmission.org/web/en/mission.../551-dalits-and-the-mission-of-the-church

⁸³ James Massey, *Roots: Concise History of the Dalits* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1991), 35-46. See the Presidential Order in "The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950]1," accessed August 24, 2016, <http://www.lawmin.nic.in/ld/subord/rule3a.htm>.

⁸⁴The CNI strongly endorses *dalit* struggle for their rights to be included as SCs. Recently there was a 'silent rally' to demand the rights of the *dalit* Christians and Muslims organized by National Council of Dalit Christians in New Delhi on 10th March, 2016, which included representation from CSI, Mar Thoma, NCCI and other churches. See "Silent Rally to Demand Justice for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims," accessed August 24, 2016, <http://cnisynod.org/>

2.2.1.4 *Dalit Christians Living with Fluid Boundaries*

Due to the discrimination by the Government meted out to Christian *dalits*, as discussed, many converts have reverted or remained ‘non-practicing / non-professing’ Christians or live in ‘two worlds,’ to avail themselves of the facilities given to Hindu *dalits*. The response to this situation, for example, by the Roman Catholic Church, has been in terms of efforts at ‘faith formation’ through catechising, discourses and seminars to teach people to be regulars in the churches.⁸⁵ Yet, in spite of such efforts, most of the *dalit* Christians seem to live in two worlds. They switch between their identity of being a *dalit* on the one hand and being Christian on the other. These two identities do not seem to sit comfortably with each other. On the one hand, being a Christian does not necessarily guarantee a socio-economic uplift; at the same time there is ambiguity regarding whether they should avail themselves of the special privileges awarded to their non-Christian counterparts by the government. Some Christians tend to reject any privileges that come along with caste and others seek it. In this situation of ambiguity, some are seen to either hide their Christian identity, while others assert their Christian beliefs depending on a particular situation. It has been seen that when *dalits* need admission in Christian schools they assert their Christian identity, but when they look for government jobs they uphold their Hindu identity. While this may be considered an opportunistic attitude and a lack of religious conviction, some have pointed out that governmental reservations or provisions is not only required socially or economically but also are

⁸⁵Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,”78-79.

required for prevention of violence against them.⁸⁶ The example of the Christian *dalit* dilemma is witnessed in an incident where a *dalit* Christian carrying a dead body of a person shouted *Ram Naam Satya Hai* (Rama's name is truth) on the road, but while in the vicinity of the church shouted *Jai Yesu* (Praise Jesus).⁸⁷

This phenomenon of transcending boundaries between *dalit* and non-*dalit* identities is seen in the encounter of *dalit* culture and Christianity. Here some socio-religious boundaries have become blurred and others have been redrawn. It is actually a process of change and continuity occurring simultaneously. Kalapura reports that in recent years, in the urban parish communities in Patna (Bihar), there has been weakening of caste boundaries and inter-caste, inter-ethnic Christian cooperation has arisen particularly around the issue of marriage. Some *dalit* Christians do not like Christian restrictions on Christian-Hindu marriage alliances as Hindu grooms frequently opt for Christian girls who are better educated than their Hindu counterparts.⁸⁸ The transcending of boundaries thus continues between the Hindu and Christian cultural norms and traditions.

2.2.1.5 *Various Attitudes towards Dalit Christianity*

John C.B. Webster shows that *dalit* congregations have considerable diversities in terms of their background, nature and visions. He writes that *dalit* Christians

differ in the length of their histories and in their denominational traditions; in their patterns of conversion and of worship; in the facilities at their disposal; in governance and organisation; in social class and occupation; in their

⁸⁶Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 90. See the argument of Ashok Kumar M and Robinson in Rowena Robinson, "Legally Hindu: Dalit Lutheran Christians of Coastal Andhra Pradesh", in *MF* 149-165.

⁸⁷Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 90.

⁸⁸Interview with Ramesh Robert, 23rd May 1998, Ganj cited in Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 83.

leadership; and in the levels of harassment, discrimination and opposition they face.⁸⁹

The diversity so described also leads to diversity of responses to the *dalit* issue in the church. In one congregation, with an Anglican background in New Delhi, *dalit* identity is rejected, while it appears to be a taboo at a Catholic church in Punjab; however, this *dalit* identity is acknowledged in a Pentecostal church and a CNI church in the same state. In a church of Presbyterian background, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, *dalit* identity is both taken for granted and used as a basis for inviting others to become *dalits*.⁹⁰

2.2.1.6. *Efforts at Indigenisation by the Churches:*

Efforts at indigenisation, for example by the Catholic churches in the region in question, have been in terms of liturgy and cultural practices. Kalapura shows that in certain churches, Ganga *jal* (river water) is substituted with ‘holy water’ and Lord Ganesh’s statue replaced by one of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary.⁹¹ Since 1989, the local *puja* (worship) of *Chhat Mata*, a Hindu celebration of the divine mother (where prayers are offered by women for their children and husbands through fasting and rituals), is converted into a prayer to *Mata Mariam* (Mother Mary). These practices have been both accepted and rejected by Christians.⁹² Indigenisation covered music, folk songs, story-telling in song (*Isayan*-Life of Christ in local dialect) replaced the

⁸⁹John C. B. Webster, “Varieties of Dalit Christianity in North India,” in *MF* 113.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹See K.N. Sahay, *Christianity and Culture Change in India* (New Delhi: Inter India Publications, 1986), 165-69 cited in Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 80.

⁹²Kalapura, quoting interviews with Father Mani Thundathikunnel, 15th January, 1998, Shahpur and interview with George Sakhichand, 19th January 1998, Ganj Shahpur, in “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 81.

epic of *Ramayana*. The adoption of Hindi equivalent of Christian names was allowed from the 1950's. Kalapura notes that in spite of all the efforts at indigenisation some former practices and beliefs persist, which conflict with Christian practices. The liminal world of the *dalits* and transcending of boundaries is also seen in the practice of some Christians privately consulting *bhagats* and *pundits* (Hindu Priests) to cure diseases and solemnise marriages in Bhojpur districts of Bihar.⁹³ The community here also retains certain cultural traditions such as the playing of drums and dancing.⁹⁴

2.2.1.7. *The Challenge for the Churches:*

The struggle for the churches in this overall *dalit* issue is, on the one hand, showing solidarity with the Christian *dalits* to counteract discrimination in the churches and on the other, struggling with them against the upper castes and advocating with the government for *dalit* rights. The ministry of the church becomes very complicated in this context. On the one hand their struggle for *dalit* justice can bring confrontation with upper caste Hindu society and the government. On the other hand, the church's message of peace and unity between all communities could be in jeopardy as there are no easy avenues of reconciliation between the oppressor and the oppressed. Moreover, the denominational diversity, along with diversity of opinions regarding *dalit* identity and *dalit* rights further complicates the issue for the churches. Added to this is the suspicion of the wider Hindu community and the fundamentalist groups who accuse the church of conspiring with anti-nationalist or 'western' forces in

⁹³Kalapura referring to interview with Mohangu Baptist, 21 April 1997, Ganj, Bhojpur district in "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 81

⁹⁴Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 81.

addressing such issues. Thus the church has the dilemma of affirming its nationality and averting people's suspicion even as it struggles for peace and justice for and with the oppressed *dalits*. Complicating the dilemma further is the wrongly projected elitist image of the church, which drowns its actual *dalit* reality. The CNI recognises this fact in one of its Synodical statements (1993), which states:

Despite the majority of the membership of the church consisting of the marginalised, it has been primarily serving the interest of the elite and upper ten per cent through the educational, medical and other institutions[...]The church also generally reflects the culture and values of the dominant systems.⁹⁵

Another statement issued by the *Yesu Krist Jayanti* 2000 shows the caste-ridden church in India. It says, 'The Christian community cannot shrug off its responsibility collectively and individually, because we too have tolerated caste discrimination within the Church, in spite of the official statements of the Church condemning it as sinful.'⁹⁶ Over the years there has been significant growth of *dalit* theology as a means to respond to the challenges of the *dalit* struggles but correspondingly there have not been enough changes in the ecclesial level.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ "Towards a Holistic Understanding of Mission Consultation" in *Church: A Community in Mission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*, A Report, New Delhi (15-17 November 1993).

⁹⁶ Stanislaus, "Dalits and Mission of the Church," 197 in Vattamattam, John and others, eds. *Liberative Struggles in a Violent Society* (Forum Series-1, Hyderabad, 1991) 87, *SEDOS*, www.sedosmission.org/web/en/mission.../551-dalits-and-the-mission-of-the-church.

⁹⁷ Peniel Rajkumar addresses this issue of the difference between *dalit* theology in the academia and the Indian churches in his work, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series, (London / New York: Routledge, 2010)

2.2.2. The Marginalisation of Tribal and *Adivasi* (Indigenous) People

The following will be a general picture of the condition of marginalisation of the tribals in Central, East and Northeast India. I begin by a general description of the tribal demography in India.

2.2.2.1. *Tribal Demography in India:*

According to the latest 2011 Census figures, there are 705 groups notified as Scheduled Tribes (STs). They represent 8.6% of India's total population.⁹⁸ It is to be noted that there are some common challenges that the tribal people face in different parts of India. The areas of common concerns are those of loss of land and livelihood due to profit making groups and economic globalisation, discrimination by other non-tribal communities, religious fundamentalist forces that disregard their particular identity seeking to co-opt them into Hinduism and the discriminatory policies of the government. These issues will be clearer as we proceed further.

2.2.2.2. *Tribal Discrimination and Oppression pre- and post-Independence in Central and East India:*

The tribals in the central and east India are usually called *Adivasis* (or indigenous people) and theology concerning them is named *Adivasi* theology. Theologians have

⁹⁸Dr. C. Chandramouli, "Census of India 2011: Release of Primary Census Abstract: Data Highlights," http://idsn.org/wpcontent/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/India/2013/INDIA_CENSUS_ABSTRACT-2011-Data_on_SC-STs.pdf.

been found to use ‘tribals’ and ‘*adivasi*’ interchangeably and separately, but ironically the tribals or *adivasis* themselves are not satisfied with such terminologies. Nirmal Minz, a tribal theologian for one, contends that ‘tribe’ is an administrative concept and tribals themselves often do not want to call themselves tribals, but prefer names like Mundas, Oraons, Bhils, etc, according to their particular group or tribe name.⁹⁹ Tribal oppression and discrimination started during different periods of colonialisation of India. Minz notes that the tribals were alienated by the Aryans and Moghuls who treated them with contempt. The British colonialists brought about a different administrative treatment. Actually, confusion of identity followed due to colonial dissection of ethnic groups with national and international boundaries.¹⁰⁰ The geographical boundaries did not correspond with the demarcation of different ethnic tribes. This led to the denial of constitutional and other rights for some tribes. For example, the *Oraon* tribe was split between the three states of Bihar and Orissa in the East and Madhya Pradesh in central India. Tribal theologians consider this to be a great injustice to the tribals.¹⁰¹ Post-independence, the Indian government again classified the Indian states into 5th and 6th scheduled areas.¹⁰² Following this in 1950, the terms Scheduled Caste (SC: Dalits) and Scheduled Tribe (ST: Tribals) were adopted as constitutional names further classifying and branding Indian marginalised

⁹⁹ Nirmal Minz, “Dalit-Tribal: A Search for Common Ideology”, in *Indigenous People: Dalit Issues in Today’s Theological Debate*, edited by James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 136 also see Sumit Abhay Kerketta, *Adivasi Theology, Towards a Relevant Christian Theology for the Jharkhandi Adivasis* (Ranchi: ATCR/GTC, 2009), xii.

¹⁰⁰ Vanlal Chhuanawma, “A Search for Tribal Identity in North-East India: A Challenge to Formation of Tribal Theology,” in *Search for a New Society: Tribal Theology for North East India*, edited by Yangkahao Vashum, Peter Haokip and Melvil Pereira (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2012), 75.

¹⁰¹ Nirmal Minz, “Missiology for Twenty First Century Tribal India” in *Missiology for the 21st Century: South Asian Perspectives*, edited by Roger E. Hedlund and Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, (Delhi / Chennai: ISPCK/ Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies, 2004), 399.

¹⁰² The 5th schedule areas are found in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan; 6th schedule areas is in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

people.¹⁰³ This complicated the problems for the *adivasis*. For example, in some states such as Assam they still strive to get the constitutional provision of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Apart from this discriminatory treatment by the government, the tribals are often deprived of their land by non-tribals. There are the entrepreneurs and the political leadership who dispossess the tribals of their land in the name of developmental projects. Various religious groups again attempt to add to their number from among tribals through religious conversions. Such attempts contribute considerably to the disintegration of tribal society and cultural unity.

Due to conversion (especially to Christianity), a complicated process of interrelationship between the tribal Christians and tribals of indigenous religions and Hinduism continues to take place. The example of one of the states, Jharkhand makes the point clear. This state can also be taken as representative of some of the other tribal states (in central India). Jharkhand state in East India has around 4.1% Christians. It consists of 27.67% tribals of whom the main ones are Santhals, Oraons, Mundas and Hos. The majority of Christians belong to the above mentioned tribes. The advent of Christianity in this region with Lutheran (1845) and Jesuit missionaries (1869) was soon followed by more than a dozen other missionary bodies of different denominations in subsequent years. Tribal conversions hugely increased from 1880 under the Jesuit missionary Constant Lievens, who offered to help the tribals in land-related disputes with the upper castes.¹⁰⁴ All these changed the demography of the state.

¹⁰³Vanlal Chhuanawma, "A Search for Tribal Identity in Northeast India: A Challenge to Formation of Tribal Theology", in *Search for a New Society*, 67.

¹⁰⁴Kalapura, "Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India," 85.

2.2.2.3. *Complex Religio-Cultural Transcending of Boundaries among Tribal Christians:*

Post conversion, the tribals however continued to oscillate between their old religion and Christianity. It is to be noted that conversion brought about several complexities in the life of the tribals.¹⁰⁵ Particularly, the relationship of Christianity with tribal religion or religiosity can be characterised by that of considerable heterogeneity, change, assimilation, conflict and reaffirmation. As Kalapura notes, before conversion a tribe was a relatively homogeneous group with shared socio-religious traditions. After conversion, Christianity brought about heterogeneity leading to what he cites Pandey¹⁰⁶ in referring to ‘caste like groups’ within the tribe. In terms of marriage, in the same tribe one can marry only people of similar religion where earlier tribal endogamy and clan exogamy existed. So while it created inter-tribe solidarity on religious lines, it created a wedge within the tribe.¹⁰⁷ So Christianity is seen to both unify and to disintegrate tribal communities. Further, tribal Christians seem to live in two worlds, that of the Christian and the *Sarna*¹⁰⁸ ones, transcending boundaries. This aspect; however, is not regarded in a favourable light by other Christians who try to strictly follow Christian practices. The latter look down upon

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ravi Bhushan Pandey, *Christianity and Tribes in India* (New Delhi: Academic Excellence, 2005) cited in Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 86.

¹⁰⁷Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 86.

¹⁰⁸The *Sarna* religion is the traditional tribal religion for example of the Munda Tribes in the Chotanagpur region. The Mundas, along with the Santals, are what is left of an originally much larger and more widely spread Austro-Asiatic population in the Ganga basin. In the plains, they were assimilated into the Indo-Aryan speech community, but in the isolation of the hills of Chotanagpur (southern Bihar, western Orissa, north-eastern Madhya Pradesh) they retained their linguistic and cultural identities. The visible mark of their religious identity is the *Sarna*, the sacred grove where rituals for the gods are performed. The *Sarna* religion is characterised by “ethnocentrism” and “endogamy”, belief in a Supreme being called “Singbonga” and belief in multiple spirits and integration with nature. For more on the *Sarna* religion see Dr. Koenraad Elst, “The *Sarna*: A Case-Study in Natural Religion”, accessed August 23, 2016, <http://koenraadelst.bharatvani.org/articles/chr/sarna.html>.

the former and try to dissociate from them as much as possible. As a result there is considerable inter-tribal, inter-religious and inter-cultural conflict going on in these areas.

The churches belonging to different denominations have been trying to assimilate, accommodate or reject different cultural or religious elements in order to bring harmony. Kalapura draws attention to a work by Keshari. N. Sahay, which characterised similar trends in terms of ‘oscillation, securitization, combination, indigenization and retroversion.’¹⁰⁹ The tribal peoples have often opted to oscillate between the Christian and the *Sarna* rituals and practices overtly or covertly. Baptised tribals are seen to oscillate between attending prayers at churches and also secretly or openly practicing indigenous spirit worship, witchcraft and the observance of *Sarna* festivals. This is when they face a calamity or difficult situation. Fellow converts call them *Kachcha* Christians (raw Christians) as ‘they have so called *mithya biswas* (superstitious belief) in them.’¹¹⁰ As pointed out earlier, securitisation or scrutinisation regarding which *Sarna* tradition or practices to retain or what to reject have led to meaningful engagement and dialogue. On the other hand, any non-critical rejection has led to alienation and religious superiority complex in the tribal Christians.¹¹¹ There is also the aspect of cultural combination where both Christian and *Sarna* traditions have been merged or tolerated in the socio-religious schema. One example is how the dancing traditions of *Sarnas* for young people have been limited to festive occasions while it used to be held every night,

¹⁰⁹K.N. Sahay, *Under the Shadow of the Cross* (Calcutta: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, 1976), viii, ix, cited in Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 86.

¹¹⁰Pandey, *Christianity and Tribes in India*, 175-76, cited in Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 87.

¹¹¹Pandey, *Christianity and Tribes in India*, 184, cited in Kalapura “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 87, 88.

with a consensus reached between Christian principles and *Sarna* cultures.¹¹² A retroversion process is also seen where previously discarded cultural elements are reintroduced by the tribal Christians. A case in point is the re-use of vermillion (a powder put on the forehead by women during marriage or during festivities) which now does not seem to essentially conflict with Christian principles.¹¹³ Kalapura points out that tribal Christianity here does not smack of ‘foreignness,’ but as a rich and diverse religion has the capacity of assimilating different compatible tribal elements in its fold. This has also been important as a challenge to the homogenising and hegemonising attempts by the fundamentalist Hindu forces who say that tribals converting to Christianity have lost their tribal identity.¹¹⁴ Having shown the situation of tribals in Central and East India, now I turn particularly to Northeast India. It will be seen that Northeast Indian tribal Christians have several similar challenges in common with their counterparts in other parts of India, but at the same time, also face some different challenges.

2.2.2.4. *Tribal Christianity in Northeast India*

Having discussed the situation of the tribals (*adivasis*) in Central and East India, I now turn to focus specifically on the concerns of the Northeast tribal communities. This region is taken separately since they have their own particular challenges and struggles in addition to some that are similar to the tribals of central India.¹¹⁵ Apart

¹¹²Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 88; cf. references no.27, 94.

¹¹³Kalapura, “Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christians in Eastern India,” 89.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵The issue of loss of land and livelihood and the discrimination of the government towards them are similar to the struggles of the tribals in central India.

from the ethno-linguistic diversity, it has some of the major religions, like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism in its midst. Christians form a majority in three of the eight states, namely, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Others are Hindu or Buddhist majority states. This speaks much of the tribal ethno-linguistic plurality and religio-cultural complexity brought about by conversions, mainly to Christianity. Like the tribals in central and East India, the Northeast tribals also have reservations about using the term ‘tribals,’ as it carries a connotation of backwardness and superstition; characteristics that are showing signs of waning in recent decades.¹¹⁶ The advent of Christianity via British colonialism, missionary endeavours in the 19th century and revival movements¹¹⁷ in the 20th century impacted the tribal communities negatively and positively. Some of the negative impacts have been the erosion of traditional customary laws and customs with British laws of governance which alienated them from the earth and community-centred customs; the shift from an agrarian economy to a monetary economy and urbanisation leading to individualism; and creation-centred to anthropocentric and other-worldly theology and ethos.¹¹⁸ All these ultimately alienated the converts from their previous communities.¹¹⁹ The positive aspects were that of educational and the social-moral

¹¹⁶V. Xaxa, “Tribes, Conversion and the Sangh Parivar,” *Jnanadeepa* 3 (1) (2000): 23-25, cited in Peter Haokip, “Tribal Theology: Sources, Methodology and Hermeneutics,” in *Search for a New Society*, 30.

¹¹⁷Lakshon Bhatta, “Contradiction and Change in Mizo Church” in *MF* 169-182.

¹¹⁸Wati Longchar, “Tribal Identity and Theology,” in *Rethinking Theology in India: Christianity in the Twenty First Century*, edited by James Massey and T.K. John, (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2013), 107-112. For particular discussion of the tribal loss of self-identity and connectedness to the earth and nature due to colonial missionary thinking and globalisation, see Wati Longchar, ed. *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education: An Indigenous Perspective*, (Taiwan: PTCA, Series No.4, 2012).

¹¹⁹George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 48-49 cited in Wati Longchar, “Tribal Identity and Theology,” in *Rethinking Theology in India: Christianity in the Twenty First Century*, 107-112.

uplift of the tribals. Many harmful practices such as ‘head-hunting’¹²⁰ and superstitious practices were given up in favour of ‘moral aspects’ of Christianity.

2.2.2.5. *The Challenges of the churches vis-à-vis Northeast Tribals:*

There are various challenges for the churches in this region which are outlined in the following:

First, there is the question of meaningful engagement with the distinct, rich tradition of myths, stories and semantic world-view of each of the tribes.¹²¹ Second, there is the hurdle of strong denominational disunity within the Christian churches.¹²² Third, the challenge in the process of *Sanskritisation* carried out by Hindu fundamentalist groups through forceful denial of the tribal religious identity and language and their gradual assimilation into the Hindu fold.¹²³ Fourth, there is a genuine lack of inter-religious dialogical relations between different religious communities. Fifth, inter-tribal conflicts to attain socio-economic, political status and land.¹²⁴ Sixth, the impact of globalisation that is found to have taken away habitable and agricultural land for

¹²⁰ Headhunting is a practice which preserved the heads of enemies as trophies after killing. The Naga tribes of India and Myanmar used to practice such a custom. The practice was common up to the 20th century. Many of the Naga warriors still bear the marks (tattoos and others) of a successful headhunt. In Assam, in the northeast of India, the Garos, Khasis, Nagas, and Kukis used to be head hunters including the Mizo of the Lushai Hills, which was later abolished when Christianity was introduced in the region. For a study on headhunting practices see Janet Hoskins, ed, *Headhunting and Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996).

¹²¹Haokip, “Tribal Theology: Sources, Methodology and Hermeneutics,” 35.

¹²² Alphonsos B. D’ Souza, SJ, “Tribal Theology in the North East: Some Suggestions from Sociology,” in *Search for a New Society*, 23-25; also see Nirmal Minz, “Theology and the Struggle of the Adivasi/Indigenous People of India” in *Rethinking Theology in India: Christianity in the Twenty First Century*, 406.

¹²³D.N. Majumdar, “A Study of Tribe-Caste Continuum and the Process of Sanskritization among the Bodo-Speaking Tribes of the Garo Hills,” cited in K.S.Singh, ed., *Tribal Situation in India*, (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1972) 269 in Chuuanawma, “A Search for Tribal Identity in North-East India: A Challenge to Formation of Tribal Theology,” 69.

¹²⁴Chuuanawma, “A Search for Tribal Identity in North-East India: a Challenge to Formation of Tribal Theology,” 73.

building mega-development projects leading to displacement of the tribals. Seventh, there is discontent regarding the so-called ‘step-motherly’¹²⁵ attitude of the Central government- the allegedly irresponsible actions of its personnel (political, military, bureaucrats, business etc.), which tends to fuel insurgencies,¹²⁶ and violence and injustice in the region. Any socio-political movement for autonomy or self-determination therefore is seen as having anti-national, sectarian undertones. Eighth, there remain ideological differences among community leaders and intellectuals with regard to people’s movements for liberation. Ninth, there is the sensitive issue of migrants from central India and neighbouring countries which takes a toll on the limited resources of land and employment opportunities.¹²⁷

2.2.2.6. *Tribal Spirituality in North India and Christian Missions:*

Traditionally, the tribals sought to face the above challenges with a spirituality that is inter-connected and earth-friendly, one that stands in contrast to the individualistic and other-worldly tendencies in denominational Christianity in these areas. The basic spirituality of the tribals centres on land, forest and nature, which are under ‘community ownership’ and not for exploitation by individualistic profit-making enterprises.¹²⁸ They traditionally practice indigenous religion, which features

¹²⁵S.C. Dube, “Inaugural Address” in K.S. Singh, ed. “Tribal Situation in India,” 28 in Chuanawma, “A Search for Tribal Identity in North-East India: A Challenge to Formation of Tribal Theology,” 78.

¹²⁶To contain the insurgencies, the Government of India has deployed armed forces (military and para-military) with special powers known as the ‘Armed Forces Special Power Act 1958’(AFSPA), and by now it has become a serious human rights issue owing to the excesses and brutalities of the security forces (eg. extra-judicial killings, fake encounters, disappearances, etc.) See Linus Neli, “Vision of a Northeast Community: Based on Peace with Justice,” in *Search for a New Society*, 211.

¹²⁷Neli, “Vision of a Northeast Community: Based on Peace with Justice”, in *Search for a New Society*,” 202-203.

¹²⁸For a discussion of indigenous spirituality, see Wati Longchar, ed. *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education: An Indigenous Perspective*, 19-42.

worshipping the supreme God (the Great Spirit), minor Spirits and the family deity. Evil spirits are pacified and favours are earned from good spirits. Ancestral spirits form part of the corporate society of the tribal community. Here, Nature-Humans-God/Spirit is a continuum.¹²⁹ This religiosity/spirituality has suffered under imperialistic tendencies in Christianity and homogenising tendencies of *Hindutva* movements (Hindu fundamentalism). In recent times there have been considerable changes in missions in tribal areas where fewer foreign mission strategies and concepts and more indigenous ones are applied in keeping with tribal customs and traditions. Nirmal Minz reports that ‘the foreign missions have receded into the background, and indigenous Indian missions have presented themselves as a dynamic movement of the Spirit during the last 25years in India.’¹³⁰ The charismatic/Pentecostal, evangelistic denominations working in the tribal areas through prayers, preaching and healing have developed living churches in the region.¹³¹

In the above section I have highlighted the struggles and the challenges of the tribals including Christian tribals both in Central, East and Northeast India. I have noted the discrimination meted out by the government, which the churches must address in order to be in solidarity with the tribals. Particular attention to tribal spirituality that is earth-friendly needs to be given in theology and church practice. The complicated question of conversion, the approaches of the Hindu fundamentalist groups and the overlapping of boundaries between the old religion and Christianity needs to be sensitively addressed by the church. The impact of globalisation, land-grabbing by corporate and so-called developmental agendas affecting the sustenance

¹²⁹Minz, “Missiology for the 21st Century Tribal India,”397.

¹³⁰Minz, “Theology and the Struggle of the Adivasi /Indigenous People of India,” 409.

¹³¹ Ibid., 408-409.

of the community, is a critical area to be responded to. Added to this is the need for an ecumenical response to the denominational divisions within churches that continue to threaten the unity of the churches.

2.2.3. The Marginalisation of Women

This section will pick up on the aforementioned plight of *dalit* women and briefly outline the main struggles and challenges that women face in India and provide pointers to the challenges the churches face regarding marginalisation of women.

2.2.3.1. *The Plight of Dalit Women*

The *dalit* women in India are often known as “The Dalit of the Dalit”¹³² and find themselves oppressed and violated by various people including their fellow *dalit* counterparts. The suffering of *dalit* women is due to several factors, namely, caste, patriarchy, globalization, capitalism and so on.¹³³ The *International Dalit Solidarity Network* highlights some specific statistics concerning the plight of *dalit* women. It notes that a three year study of 500 *dalit* women across four Indian states have thrown up overwhelming accounts of violence and oppression. It reports that the majority of *dalit* women have experienced one or more incidents of ‘verbal abuse (62.4%), physical assault (54.8%), sexual harassment and assault (46.8%), domestic

¹³²See Aruna Gnanadasan, “Dalit Women: The Dalit of the Dalit” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. by Arvind P. Nirmal and V.Devasahayam (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1980).

¹³³Surekha Nelavala, “Liberation Beyond Borders: Dalit Feminist Hermeneutics,” *PhD Diss.* (New Jersey, Drew University, 2008), 34.

violence (43.0%), and rape (23.2%).¹³⁴ Further, the ‘lack of law enforcement’ incapacitates women to register their complaint with the police. Even when cases are registered there can be lack of proper investigation due to caste or gender bias.¹³⁵ In addition to *dalit* women being oppressed thus, women in India in general are continually the victims of oppression and discrimination.

2.2.3.2. *Rise of Violence against Women*

Violence against women has been a cause of concern in India and particularly in North India. An article in *Asia Times* reveals *National Crime Records Bureau* (NCRB)’s report that crimes against women have doubled from 1.5 million cases to 3.5 million from the year 2001 to 2014. The capital of Delhi itself has recorded a 566% rise in violence against women. Other states include West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa.¹³⁶ In the Northeast, especially in Manipur and in conflict prone areas, women regularly become victims of police brutality. Women’s safety, survival and security depend on the repeal of the AFSPA,¹³⁷ which still seems to be a distant dream. National reports suggest that

¹³⁴ See *International Dalit Solidarity Network* website, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://idsn.org/key-issues/dalit-women/dalit-women-in-india/>

¹³⁵ Ruth Manorama, “Background Information on Dalit Women in India,” accessed July 22, 2016, www.rightlivelikelihood.org/fileadmin/Files/PDF/Literature_Recipients/Manorama/Background_Manorama.pdf.

¹³⁶ Kadayam Subramanyam, “Rising Violence Against Women in India: Regional Human Development View Needed,” Nov. 11, 2015, *Asia Times News & Features, South Asia*, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://atimes.com/2015/11/rising-violence-against-women-in-india-need-for-a-regional-human-development-view/>. For details, visit NCRB official website <http://ncrb.gov.in>.

¹³⁷ AFSPA is the Armed Forces Special Power Act, which is a controversial act introduced in 1958 for the North Eastern States giving powers to the Indian Armed forces to act in ‘disturbed’ areas. This act is since then criticised from several quarters due to alleged human rights violations. See reports of misuse and human rights abuse in Manipur, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/courtappointed-panel-highlights-misuse-of-afspa-in-manipur/article4921637.ece>.

all major crimes such as rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry deaths, and assault with intent to outrage modesty, witnessed increase. Kidnapping and abduction cases showed the highest rise (nearly 300 per cent) from 14,645 in 2001 to 57,311 in 2014.¹³⁸

Domestic violence as defined in India as ‘cruelty by husband or his relatives’ has been on the rise. In 2013, the NCRB reported 118, 866 cases.¹³⁹ Apart from this increasing violence against women, general attitudes of discrimination continue in the Indian society.

2.2.3.3. *Status of Women in India and the Church’s Responses*

Nirmala Vasanthakumar notes that in India, women’s worth is measured by their ability to produce children. They have no share in property. Their roles are expected within their household. The most common societal image for women is as a ‘virtuous housewife’, as ‘men’s property’ or as ‘sexual objects.’¹⁴⁰ Stella Faria on the other hand paints a picture of women confronted with ‘double standards of an androgynous social system,’ swinging between optimism of new experiences of achievements and facing discrimination in the other.¹⁴¹ In the church, the plight of women centres on the issues of participation in the decision-making processes and in the question of

¹³⁸Subramanyam, “Rising Violence against women in India: Regional Human Development View Needed.”

¹³⁹ See BBC News India, “100 Women 2014: Violence at Home is India’s Failing,” accessed July 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-29708612>. For a detailed picture of crimes against women visit NCRB official website <http://ncrb.gov.in>.

¹⁴⁰ Nirmala quotes Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Women and Society in India*, (Ajantha Publications, 1990), 175; and Anna V. Alexander “Through the Feminist Looking Glass” in *Emerging Christian Women*, in Nirmala Vasanthakumar, “Role and Identity of Women in the Church,” in *Feminist Hermeneutics*, ed by Lalrinawmi Ralte and Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, (Delhi: IWIT/ISPCK, 2002) 50, 51.

¹⁴¹Stella Faria, “Keynote Address on Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics” in *Feminist Hermeneutics*, 17.

ordination. In CNI churches however, women's ordination¹⁴² is accepted and the first Indian woman was ordained in 1983. Women continue to be ordained, but there continues to be an imbalance of power between men and women in the different ministries of the church.¹⁴³ In the Northeast, in the Baptist Churches, women do have equal opportunities and many are theologically trained, but at the local level, their roles are 'defined and restricted.'¹⁴⁴ The Presbyterian churches¹⁴⁵ in the Northeast maintain a hierarchical and patriarchal structure. There are theologically trained women, but their ordination is not accepted. In the Catholic Church women are completely excluded from major decision-making bodies of the church. Though they are very active in different ways, ordination is completely denied to them. In Lutheran and Methodist churches, women play active roles as teachers and evangelists and ordination is open to them.¹⁴⁶ In Pentecostal churches, women get little participation in the hierarchical church administration. Ordination is not accepted although they actively participate in the rest of the activities of the church.¹⁴⁷ Feminist theologies and feminist hermeneutics have been emerging in response to the marginalisation of women, though feminist concerns have still to take centre stage in the agenda of the churches.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² The Church of South India has consecrated its first woman bishop on 29 Sept 2013. The Rev. E. Pushpa Lalitha was consecrated Bishop in Nandyal in the Southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. See George Conger, "First Women Bishop of India Consecrated," 3rd October, 2013, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://www.churchnewspaper.com/35399/archives>.

¹⁴³ I personally know of some of my recent women colleagues in the Diocese of Calcutta, CNI who have been ordained into priesthood. Also see Vasanthakumar, "Role and Identity of Women in the Church," in *Feminist Hermeneutics*, 55.

¹⁴⁴ Vasanthakumar, "Role and Identity of Women in the Church," 55.

¹⁴⁵ Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Khasi and Jaintia Presbyterian Church, Manipur Presbyterian Church and Cachar Hill Tribes Presbyterian Church. See Vasanthakumar, , "Role and Identity of Women in the Church," 57.

¹⁴⁶ Vasanthakumar, , "Role and Identity of Women in the Church," 55,56.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 55, 56, 57.

¹⁴⁸ However feminist theologians like Aruna Gnanadasan, Gabriele Dietrich, Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, Lalrinawmi Ralte and others have made significant contributions to feminist theology in India. See Aruna Gnanadasan *Listen to the Women, Listen to the Earth* (2005), *No Longer a Secret:*

This section has revealed that marginalisation of women in India occurs due to several factors ranging from general socio-cultural-religious norms and patriarchy, to attitudes perpetuated by the caste system. This has been a significant challenge to churches for a long time. Moreover, the increase in violence against women poses a severe challenge to the churches and ecclesiastical responses have become increasingly necessary. With regard to ordination and the issue of the participation of women in the decision making bodies of the church, more needs to be done.

2.2.4. Marginalisation of the Earth: Eco-Crisis

The issue of the environment and eco-crisis in India have not been one of the primary concerns of the Government or the Church and have been quite neglected so far.

2.2.4.1. *Ecological-Crisis- The Stark Facts*

An article in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*¹⁴⁹ reports that the impacts of climate change and ‘essential ecosystem services’¹⁵⁰ have found little attention among India’s ecologists and not much research has been done as there is a lack of interest

The Church and Violence Against Women (1997). Gabriele Dietrich- Women’s Movements in India: Conceptual and Religious Reflections(1988), Reflections on the women’s movement in India: religion, ecology, development (1992), Towards Understanding Indian Society(1998), A New Thing On Earth: Hopes And Fears Facing Feminist Theology : Theological Ruminations Of A Feminist Activist (2001). Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar- Gender and Identity in Envisioning a New Heaven and a New Earth, edited by Rini Ralte and others(1999), “New Eyes, New Reading, New Woman...,”Feminist Hermeneutics, edited by Lalrinawmi Ralte and Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar (2002), “Women’s Movements in Mission: Some lessons for the Church Today’, Re-routing Mission: Towards A People’s Concept of Mission (2004) and others.

¹⁴⁹See Navinder J. Singh and Sumanta Bagchi, “Applied Ecology in India: Scope of Science and Policy to Meet Contemporary Environmental and Socio-Ecological Challenges-A Review,”*Journal of Applied Ecology* 50 (2013):10, 11.

¹⁵⁰Regarding clean water and pollination.

among Indian scientists in ecology.¹⁵¹ Yet India's environmental crisis presents itself in different forms. Gadgil and Guha note that from the colonial period in the 18th and 19th century there has been an increased pressure on natural resources especially regarding forest cover.¹⁵² The situation has worsened due to increased human population and consumption, and the need for more resources.¹⁵³ Further reports have confirmed that there are issues of shortage of water, soil degradation and erosion and bio-diversity loss, including air and water pollution.¹⁵⁴ Air pollution and water contamination have led to serious health issues: arsenic poisoning from water has become a serious issue in most of Eastern India.¹⁵⁵ For instance, it has been reported that about twelve out of nineteen districts of West Bengal have arsenic in ground water.¹⁵⁶ Other states in North India have reported the presence of uranium and mercury in ground water.¹⁵⁷ This is true of the rural scene but it is also seen as a result of an increasingly urbanised population. Several health issues relate to lack of proper waste management.¹⁵⁸ Further, regarding soil erosion, recent official reports have suggested that about '130 Mha of land in India has been affected by serious soil erosion'.¹⁵⁹ Added to this is the issue of 'agricultural intensification,' which puts a strain on water resources as India is prone to drought and floods. This has also

¹⁵¹Singh and Bagchi, "Applied Ecology in India: Scope of Science and Policy to Meet Contemporary environmental and Socio-Ecological Challenges-A Review," 50, 10, 11.

¹⁵² Ibid., 4.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁶ See an independent report by SOES organisation, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.soesju.org/arsenic/wb.htm>

¹⁵⁷ Singh and Bagchi, "Applied Ecology in India: Scope of Science and Policy to Meet Contemporary environmental and Socio-Ecological Challenges-A Review," 5.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ See the Department of Land Resources Official Website of Government of India, accessed July 26, 2016, http://dolr.nic.in/dolr/wasteland_atlas.asp, more specifically http://www.dolr.nic.in/WastelandsAtlas2011/Wastelands_Atlas_2011.pdf.

impacted the aquatic life very seriously and ecosystems in general.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, in spite of 21% of India's land being under forest cover,¹⁶¹ the country has seen 'persistent and chronic deforestation' particularly in the Western Ghats and the Himalayas.¹⁶² Related to this is the concern for the loss of habitats for animals and their extinction due to deforestation and illegal wildlife trade.¹⁶³ Regarding climate change, studies have suggested that India is the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, which is about 5.3% of global emissions. 'Energy, industry, agriculture and automobiles' are the main emitters of CHGs.¹⁶⁴ Climate changes in India have been known to affect food production, water supply, forestry and biodiversity. Some estimates project warmer and wetter climates. Several vector borne diseases are known to occur due to the effects of climate change.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Singh and Bagchi, "Applied Ecology in India: Scope of Science and Policy to Meet Contemporary environmental and Socio-Ecological Challenges-A Review," 6.

¹⁶¹ See Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests website, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://moef.nic.in/downloads/public-information/Report%20to%20the%20People.pdf> and United Nations FAO *Global Forest Assessment Report* 2010, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.fao.org/forestry/fra/fra2010/en/>

¹⁶² Singh and Bagchi, "Applied Ecology in India: Scope of Science and Policy to Meet Contemporary environmental and Socio-Ecological Challenges-A Review," 7.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Singh and Bagchi, "Applied Ecology in India: Scope of Science and Policy to Meet Contemporary environmental and Socio-Ecological Challenges-A Review," 8.

¹⁶⁵ Several vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, chikungunya and elephantiasis are prevalent in India, and climate change is likely to influence their transmission. Estimates suggest about 1.48 million cases of malaria occur annually in India, and 1173 deaths were reported in 2007. See the "National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme 2007", accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.nvbdc.gov.in/>.

2.2.4.2. *Ecological Crisis as a Justice Issue*

The ecological crisis in India is not only a scientific issue, but is very much related to poverty, marginalisation and deprivation. It is an issue of justice and liberation. Kuruvilla Cherukara Abraham, a leading Third World theologian from India, insists that:

It is not a problem created by scientists or by a group of people who fancy growing trees around their houses. It is the problem of the poor. It is integral to their struggle for justice and liberation, and basically it is about preserving the integrity of Creation.¹⁶⁶

Ashish Kothari, the founder of an Indian Environmental Group *Kalpavriksh*, encapsulates the dilemma of India's environmental concerns as a social justice issue, which he calls 'crisis of mis-development'.¹⁶⁷ He argues,

[India's] sordid story of inequality [is] masked by the glitter of the new urban pockets that business and political leaders proudly showcase. Four decades of state-dominated "development" followed by two decades of corporate-dominated economic globalization have led India down the path of unsustainability: it now has the world's third largest ecological footprint. While some forms of poverty have been reduced, others persist. Sixty million people have been forcibly evicted by "development" projects. Roughly three out of four Indians suffer from deprivation of at least one of the following basic needs: adequate and nutritious food, safe drinking water, sanitation, energy, gainful and dignified employment education, health care, and adequate shelter.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ See K.C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission* (Triruvalla: Christiva Sahitya Samithi, 1996) in "Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K.C. Abraham, Chapter 8: A Theological Response to the Environmental Crisis" *Religion Online*, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1450&C=1295>.

¹⁶⁷ Ashish Kothari and Aseem Shrivastava, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (Delhi: Penguin, 2012); Simron Singh, et al., "India's Biophysical Economy, 1961–2008: Sustainability in a National and Global Context," *Ecological Economics* 76 (2008): 60–69, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800912000456>;

¹⁶⁸ Ashish Kothari and Aseem Shrivastava, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (Delhi: Penguin, 2012); Simron Singh, et al., "India's Biophysical Economy, 1961–2008: Sustainability in a National and Global Context," *Ecological Economics* 76 (2008): 60–69, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800912000456>; Kalpavriksh,

Over the years there have been various social justice movements¹⁶⁹ that have tried to provide resistance to capitalist and corporate endeavour to snatch land, habitats and forests from the local inhabitants. One such movement is the *Chipko*¹⁷⁰ *Movement*, which adopted the Gandhian principles of *Satyagraha* (laying hold of truth) and non-violent resistance to highlight the environmental crisis, especially deforestation in the region of Uttarakhand. This movement saw the participation of huge numbers of people, especially women. On March 26, 1974, women embraced trees in the Reni forest in Uttarakhand to save them from being cut by a government backed auction in spite of several protests previous to the incident. The women were ultimately able to save the forest.¹⁷¹ Women have been in the forefront of some of these social movements as environmental crisis has affected women and children the most. A number of women-activists feminists and authors¹⁷² have critically reflected

Globalisation in India: Impacts and Alternatives (Pune: Kalpavriksh, 2013), accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Globalisation%20Brochure.pdf>. As cited in Ashish Kothari, "Radical Ecological Democracy: A Path Forward for India and Beyond," A Great Transition Initiative (GTI) Essay: Towards a Transformative Vision and Praxis, July 2014, 7-8, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.greattransition.org/publication/radical-ecological-democracy-a-path-forward-for-india-and-beyond>, 10.

¹⁶⁹ Movements such as *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) is a social movement consisting of *adivasis*, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists against a number of large dams being built across the Narmada River, which flows through the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. See P.P. Karan, "Environmental Movements in India," in *Geographical Review*, American Geographical Society, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Jan., 1994): 32-41.

¹⁷⁰ The word 'chipko' means 'to stick' or 'to embrace.'

¹⁷¹ Following the events at Reni, forest auctions were opposed in different parts of Garhwal district. Subsequently, over the next five years, the movement spread to many districts in the region and within a decade it spread throughout the Uttarakhand and Himalayas. For details of the movement and its aftermath, see Barnali Kalita, "Chipko Movement: A Landmark Effort in Addressing Environmental Crisis in India", *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovations*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, (July - September 2015): 17-21. See also J. Bandopadhyay and Vandana Shiva, *Chipko: India's Civilisational Crisis to the Forest Crisis* (New Delhi: INTACH, 1986); Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, Expanded Edition, 2000).

¹⁷² Medha Patkar is a social activist from India and a politician. She is the founder member of Narmada Bachao Andolan and was the National Convener of *National Alliance of People's*

on the impact of the environmental crisis on women and on social justice issues more generally. One of them, Vandana Shiva, well known for her activism, has called attention to the dangers of co-option by environmental metaphors forwarded by governments, the World Bank and other multinational corporations. Her approach is to focus instead on holistic approach respecting the rights and privileges of all marginalised communities.¹⁷³

2.2.4.3. *Response of the Churches to the Ecological Crisis*

To date there has been a limited response by the churches in North India and more needs to be done.¹⁷⁴ The theological community in India, both North¹⁷⁵ and South India has responded theologically to environmental issues.¹⁷⁶ Specific commitments about creation care have been made by the Church of North India (CNI).¹⁷⁷ A

Movements (NAPM), an alliance of progressive people's organisations. Another writer activist is Arundhati Roy, best known author of *God of Small Things* (1997) for which she received the Booker Prize.

¹⁷³See Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (New Delhi: Zed Books, 1989)

¹⁷⁴There have been recognitions of the Church of South India's (CSI) commitment to creation. For example, the United Nations Development Programme in partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, recognised the Church of South India for "Its Long Term Commitment to Protect the Living Planet" on Nov. 3, 2009 at a ceremony at Windsor Castle, presided over by Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh. The awards were presented by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General. See Ecumenical Water Network, "Church of South India Recognized for Protecting the Planet," accessed August 25, 2016, <http://water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/news-events/church-of-south-india-recognized-for-protecting-the-planet>. Also see the CSI's Seven year plan of Green Parishes and Green Dioceses, "1000 Green Schools Plan by Church of South India", *ACNS*, <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Christian-CSI-7YP.pdf>, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2016/06/1000-green-schools-plan-by-church-of-south-india.aspx>.

¹⁷⁵For contributions from the North East India, see the chapter on "Creation Centred Spirituality and Christian Theology: Some Pointers" by Wati Longchar, *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education: An Indigenous Perspective*, 96-128.

¹⁷⁶See *A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis*, edited by Thomas Samuel and Mathew Koshy Punnackadu (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahithya Samithi, 2009); Nalunakkal, George Mathew. *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Eco-Theology*. Delhi: ISPCK / NCCI, 1999.

¹⁷⁷See the report of Anglican News Service on the CNI pronouncement. "North India Church Urges Determined Commitment to Protecting All of Creation," accessed August 25, 2016,

particular wing of the CNI known as Synodical Board of Social Services works to empower socially excluded and marginalised communities like *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, women and children along with issues of climate change.¹⁷⁸ There have been national consultations on Climate Change organised by CNI to raise awareness and make action plans.¹⁷⁹ Local churches, of course, in North India have tried to respond to their environment in small ways, for example, initiatives regarding tree plantation, cleanliness drives and so on. There has been growing awareness among North Indian churches concerning the environment and climate change, but environmental concerns as a particular and urgent mission for the church has yet to take concrete shape.

2.3. HINDU FUNDAMENTALISM¹⁸⁰ AS ONE OF THE MAJOR THREATS FOR CHRISTIANS AND OTHER MINORITIES.

India has witnessed onslaughts of fundamentalism from different religions in different forms in different epochs. Religious fundamentalism has been one of the

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2015/07/north-india-church-urges-determined-commitment-to-protecting-all-of-creation.aspx>.

¹⁷⁸See “CNI Mission Priorities,” accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.cnisynod.org/mission.aspx>. See also National Council of Churches in India website, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.nccindia.in/index.php/affiliates-network/member-churches/92-affiliates-network/member-churches/151-cni.html>.

¹⁷⁹ See the “CNI Consultation on Climate Change and Youth,” accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.cnisynod.org/1003/news06.htm>.

¹⁸⁰In Christian parlance, the term fundamentalism is derived from a title of a series of booklets, *The Fundamentals*, published in the USA between 1910 and 1915. It referred to central elements of Christian teaching, but fundamentalism’s emphasis on biblical inerrancy is always prominent. See Alan Richardson and John Bowden eds. *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 223. Fundamentalism and fundamentalists are to be found in other religions. There are fundamentalist strains in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and other religions. India has gone through the effects of these fundamentalist forces and epochs since the pre-independence times. See a discussion on fundamentalism and the threats of Islamic fundamentalism in India in an interesting article by Krishna Kumar, “Religious Fundamentalism in India and Beyond” *Parameters* (Autumn 2012):17-33, accessed July 21, 2016, strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/articles/.../kumar.pdf.

major factors in the religio-political conflicts of the nation.¹⁸¹ Acknowledging that fundamentalisms of different religions including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and others have impacted the nation in different ways, I limit my scope to Hindu fundamentalism in this project.¹⁸²

2.3.1. *The Rise of Hindu Fundamentalism*

North India's secular fabric started to be threatened by Hindu fundamentalism in different ways since its rise in the early years of the 20th century. Hindu fundamentalism has its roots in the Hindu renaissance, which started in the 19th century as a reaction to British imperialism and the influence of western education.¹⁸³ Hindu Renaissance, along with nationalistic fervours, began in Bengal through the establishment of religious *Samaj* (societies) led by prominent Bengali thinkers like Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen and others. Roy established the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1830 along with others, which sought to revive Hinduism against idolatry through Vedantic philosophy and ethical teachings of Jesus. This was the first attempt of its kind to revive Hinduism from its supposed decline after the colonialism of the West. Later, a more radical organisation known as the *Arya Samaj* was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, whose main watchword was 'Back to the Vedas,' and who declared India to be solely the land of the *Aryans* (Hindus). The *Arya Samaj* sowed one of the first seeds of fundamentalism, which was followed

¹⁸¹For a detailed picture of fundamentalism in India, see T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds, Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*, Second Edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁸²I have chosen to focus on Hindu fundamentalism as the present Indian government has connections with Hindu fundamentalist groups and is known for widespread discrimination against minorities.

¹⁸³Rodinmawia Ralte, *Hindus and Hindutva, Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Exclusivism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism* (Taiwan: PTCA, 2014)11-12; see also M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response* (Bangalore: CFCC, 2007), .3.

up by other well-known leaders of the time. The *Arya Samaj* was also the first to take up the *Shuddhi* movement (purification ceremony for reconversion) to check conversions from Hinduism to other religions.¹⁸⁴ Later, this spirit of Hindu Renaissance, coupled with nationalistic fervours took an extremist turn in the thoughts of prominent Hindu thinkers like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, an ardent nationalist, and V.D. Savarkar, a militant Hindu.

2.3.2 *The Concept of Hindutva*

V.D. Savarkar was influential in developing militant concepts, which were later to be followed by the fundamentalist organisations. The term ‘Hindutva’ coined by him, means ‘Hinduness.’ For him a Hindu is a person who recognises the whole Indian subcontinent as one’s motherland and fatherland and a descendant of Hindu parents; and one who accepts Sanskrit to be one’s primary language. Savarkar’s slogan, ‘Hinduse politics, Militarise Hindus’¹⁸⁵ went a long way into shaping the nature and motivations of later fundamentalists. His ideas eventually led to the formation of multiple Hindu fundamentalist organisations under the collective name of the *Sangh Parivar*. The main aim of the *Sangh Parivar* is to see India as a country identified as a single Nation (Hindu *Rashtra*) with one culture (Hindu culture, which is an utopian concept in a multi-cultural society like India), one religion (Hindu religion, which is again impractical in a multi-religious India) and one language (Hindi, inappropriate in the context of twenty two different official languages of India and the numerous

¹⁸⁴Ralte, *Hindus and Hindutva, Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Exclusivism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism*, 15-18.

¹⁸⁵Ralte, *Hindus and Hindutva, Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Exclusivism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism*,.3

indigenous languages and dialects). This goal is politically motivated and seeks to divide the country along religious lines, and includes the attempt to enlist the support of the majority Hindus to aid electoral gains.

Studies have pointed out that Hindu fundamentalism's narrowness and discriminatory attitude towards other religious minorities is quite different from the traditional Hindu ethos of tolerance and respect as held by the most prominent Hindu philosophers and religious teachers. In the earlier periods, Hindu kings gave shelter to Christians, Buddhist and Muslims on various occasions.¹⁸⁶ However, the arguments of the fundamentalists go the other way. They argue that due to the rule of the Muslims and the domination of the British together for so many years, Hindu culture and religion suffered a major setback and the glory of Hinduism faded away. Therefore, one of the main tasks of these organisations is to bring back the past glory of Hinduism. Added to this is the inculcation of a fear psychosis that the minority population is increasing, which will eventually lead to a decrease in the number of Hindus in India. This accusation is simply not true at least in the case of Christians. Almost 2000 years of Christian presence in this country has not secured any significant increase in official numbers of Christians in this country. The Christian population is only around 2.3% of the Indian population at present.¹⁸⁷ So any allegation that Christian missionary activity in India until today has considerably increased the number of Christians in India is false.

Here a brief outline of the *Sangh's* ideology and agendas would open our eyes to the challenges the Christian community and its institutions and other minorities face at present. One of their first attacks is on the secular fabric of India and minority

¹⁸⁶See James Massey, *Rethinking Theology in India: Christianity in the Twenty First Century*, 66.

¹⁸⁷See "2011 Our Census, Our Future," accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/c-01.html>.

rights. The *Sangh Parivar* is bent on altering the secular fabric of the nation, which enshrines tolerance and respect for all religions and rights for the minorities. The Indian idea of secularism differs from Western secularism, the latter broadly implying equidistance of the state from religion, which can take the shape of prohibition of religious association in state activities. In India, secularism means neutrality between different religions traditions, not necessarily involving the prohibiting part.¹⁸⁸ For the *Sangh Parivar*, secularism is to be understood in its own brand of Hinduism (or *Hindutva*) and the Indian understanding of secularism has come under attack. They are bent on altering its meaning. Practically, the notion would include ‘saffronising’ (saffron is the colour of *Hindutva*) our educational norms, history and Indian Constitution according to their narrow *Hindutva* ideology. I quote M.T. Cherian who researched *Hindutva* and fundamentalism. He notes that in the hands of these fundamentalists:

The secular education is changed for religious education. Secular historiography is being changed for communal history, and the constitution which is a guarantee for secularism is under the threat of revision. [...] The minority rights are affected, freedom of religion is curtailed, and provisions guaranteed by the Article 25 of the Constitution of India are curtailed. The members of minority religious communities are alienated by the government headed by the BJP.¹⁸⁹

The *Sangh Parivar*’s main objection is that the secularist ideals enshrined in the Indian Constitution is pseudo-secularist and Western. This kind of secularism provides special privileges to the minorities (e.g. Articles 25, 30, 44, 370 of the

¹⁸⁸For a brief discussion on differences of the idea of secularism in India and the West see Amartya Sen’s *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005) 17-20; also see Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response*, 49-50.

¹⁸⁹Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response*, .319.

Indian Constitution),¹⁹⁰ which they point out is nothing but appeasement of the minorities for electoral gain. They clamour for equal treatment of the majority Hindu and the other religious minorities by the Constitution.¹⁹¹ Their awkward appeal to all the religious minorities in this country is that they should identify themselves as Hindus. Their justification for such a claim is that Hinduism is basically a way of life. It is a political and geographical identity, to which all who reside in India should subscribe to no matter what the individual's religion is. Whoever resides in 'Hindusthan' (Land of the Hindus-India) are Hindus. People belonging to different religions should accept Hindu culture as their cultural norm.¹⁹² Consequently, Islam and Christianity are considered to be foreign religions. Drawing on the above, the *Sangh Parivar* has a distorted view of the idea of a minority. To them, those who are born in this country are not minorities as they are supposed to join the mainstream of the majority Hindu community and culture. Their goal of making India a mono-cultural entity, i.e. Indian-Hindu culture is behind this distorted view of minority. Secondly, following from such communal agenda and disregard for the minorities, a continuing threat from the *Sangh Parivar* is the persecution of Christians and religious minorities. As these organisations represent a militant, fanatical and extremist side of Hinduism, they have little or no tolerance or respect for other religions.

¹⁹⁰Article 25 of the Indian Constitution gives the right to freely practice, propagate and profess any religion of one's own choice. Article 30 guarantees all the minorities the right to establish and manage their own institutions and the State shall not discriminate against any such institutions in the issue of granting aid. Article 44 allows the laying down of a Uniform Civil Code for all people belonging to different religious groups who have their own religious based civil code. This has not been implemented in view of maintaining the rights and laws of the various minorities regarding public order, marriage, divorce etc. Article 370 gives an autonomous status to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Cf. "Constitution of India," accessed October 4, 2016, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_India.

¹⁹¹M.T.Churian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response*, 324.

¹⁹²Ralte, *Hindus and Hindutva, Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Exclusivism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism*, 100.

2.3.3. *The Rise of Communal Violence and Persecution of Minorities*

One of the prominent organisations under the banner of the *Sangh Parivar* is the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) established in 1925. Its militant and violent exploits are evident from its role in five communal riots in India from 1960-1990.¹⁹³ The association also includes the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP), the religious and social wing, *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), the political wing and other militant outfits.¹⁹⁴ So whenever the BJP has come to power, these fundamentalist groups are passively encouraged to show forth their agendas. It is a well-known fact that the BJP has many ministers and members in their fold who are or were active members of the RSS or one of these fundamentalist outfits. India's present Prime Minister Narendra Modi was a former member of the RSS. Even when the BJP was in power in 1998, persecutions and communal violence against the minorities increased. There were widespread communal riots in Gujarat in the west of India and other places in 2002 between Hindus and Muslims. The rise of communal violence has been recorded as increased to 17% in 2015.¹⁹⁵ Recent incidents, such as the lynching of a Muslim man by a Hindu mob for allegedly eating beef were reported on 28th September, 2015 in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, showing the range of violence that continues.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³For an account of communal rights in India, see Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Communal Riots in Post-Independent India*, 2nd Edition, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1997).

¹⁹⁴Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response*, 5.

¹⁹⁵ Aman Sharma, "Communal Violence up 17% in 2015," *Economic Times* 24th February, 2016, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/communal-violence-up-17-in-2015/articleshow/51125252.cms>.

¹⁹⁶, "Dadri: Outrage after mob lynches man for allegedly consuming beef," *The Indian Express*, 25th December 2015, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/outrage-after-man-lynched-over-rumour-of-storing-beef-in-house/>

2.3.4. *Hindu Fundamentalism and Persecution of Christians*

The BJP continues to be influenced by the *Sangh Parivar* in its national and international policies. The present BJP government formed in 2014 continues to be a threat to the Christians and the other minorities through its discriminatory policies. Several incidents of violence involving destroying churches, mass killings, the rape of nuns, the burning of Christian missionaries and looting were reported. Added to this was the gruesome incident of the burning of an Australian missionary, Graham Steins and his two children-both minors in 1999. The family was working with people affected with leprosy in a village in Orissa (East India). The incident recorded the alleged assault by members of the *Bajrang Dal*, a violent outfit belonging to the *Sangh Parivar*. However, these persecutions against Christians are often blamed on Christians themselves and their work of conversion. The RSS blames the Christians for converting Hindus to their faith through fraud and allurements. Since the right to profess, propagate and practice religion is enshrined in the Indian constitution (Article 25), the *Sangh Parivar* tries to show that all the conversions of the Hindus to Christianity are fraudulent. Further, they allege these conversions to be part of a conspiracy of the West to turn India into a Christian country. They say that the dress, habits, culture and religion of the Christians are an import from the West. They try to accuse Christians of being non-patriotic and anti-national. In response to the conversion movements, they promote *Shuddhi* or reconversion to Hinduism. The *Sangh Parivar* has successfully undergone several ‘reconversion’ movements where Christians and Muslims in some parts of North India have been brought back to

Hinduism. In 2014 such efforts by one of the *Sangh Parivar* outfits were made.¹⁹⁷ The *Sangh* continues to visit the tribal population and poor communities of North India and indoctrinate them into believing that they are actually Hindus and if they have been converted to Christianity, they must come back through *Shuddhi* (*Ghar Vapsi* or Homecoming). The tribal or indigenous people, whether in Northeast India or Central India, have their own religion and spirituality. While their religiosity may somewhat resemble some of the features of popular Hindu religion, it is wrong to brand them as Hindus. This kind of assimilation and absorption has been one of the common weapons of the Hindu fundamentalists.

The churches in the tribal majority belt have had to face such threats of 'reconversion' and subjugation of the tribal cultures by extremist Hinduism. This also involves multiple socio-economic and religious factors. Especially in the *dalit* and tribal areas, sustained oppression of the lower castes by the upper castes continues. Further complications arise in areas where Christian missionaries and Hindu fundamentalist groups are working simultaneously. Through Christian missionary work, the outcastes of any particular community receive an upward social mobility and dignity through conversion, while on the other hand, the same people are threatened with persecution by the fundamentalists if they do not reconvert to Hinduism. Added to this is the inter-caste, inter-tribal conflict due to the upward mobility of some of them, which is looked upon with hatred and jealousy by the other. Ultimately, this situation of conflict and instability is cleverly manoeuvred to blame the Christian missionaries and churches working there since they are easy

¹⁹⁷See the newspaper report by Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "The Reconversion Programs of the Dharam Jagaran Samity and Vishwa Hindu Parishad are Part of a Massive Expansion Plan of the Sangh Parivar," *Frontline* 9th January, 2015, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.frontline.in/the-nation/project-hindutva/article6715464.ece>.

targets. This has been particularly evident in one of the states in East India, Orissa, where in 2007 and 2008 there was considerable communal and ethnic violence, and the people who suffered the most were Christian *dalits* and tribals.¹⁹⁸ There were reports of widespread destruction of churches, the rape of nuns, destruction of houses of tribals and *adivasis* where people had to run for shelter in the hills and forests. Communal conflicts and religious persecutions like these have been responsible for strained relationships between Hindus and Muslims, and Hindus and Christians in the long run.

Another related hurdle for the churches is the so called Freedom of Religion Bills, which is actually a misnomer since these bills, which supposedly give freedom to practice and propagate one's religion are actually attempts to curb religious conversions. In other words, they are actually anti-conversion bills. They are used to check any conversion through force, fraud or allurement. Eight states, namely, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Pradesh, Gujarat, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, have already passed their own anti-conversion bills. These bills can be easily manipulated by Hindu fundamentalists to harass religious minorities. Any service of uplift by the Christian missionaries or others in the field of education, medicine etc. can be misrepresented as allurement or inducement. These bills actually violate Article 25 of the Indian Constitution giving freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion.¹⁹⁹

I have thus outlined why and how Hindu fundamentalism is one of the major threats North India faces. I have noted discrimination towards minorities; violence

¹⁹⁸Chad M. Bauman, "Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007-08 Riots in Orissa" in *MF* 263-286.

¹⁹⁹Ralte, *Hindus and Hindutva, Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Exclusivism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism*, 119.

and atrocities against them including Christians, and the passing of anti-conversion bills, which deny freedom of religion. On the whole, Hindu fundamentalism threatens the very atmosphere of peace, harmony and unity in diversity in the nation, especially in North India. In this atmosphere of animosity it becomes difficult for the churches to carry out their ministry and mission.

2.4. THE 'COLONIAL CAPTIVITY' OF THE CHURCHES IN NORTH INDIA.

The 'colonial captivity'²⁰⁰ of the church seems to be an appropriate nomenclature for the phenomenon that describes the foundation and nature of the North Indian churches. Since the advent of the British in India, till the present times, the churches of different denominations have been very slow in gaining an Indian identity. The structure, worship, liturgy, theology and ministry, all continue to have western resemblance and have little in common with either the culture or religious ethos of India. This has been the cause of much alienation and suspicion between the church and the wider society. Christianity's link with colonialism and its resultant alienating attitude towards Indian religions and cultures have been a significant factor for such misunderstanding to prevail in Indian society. The church in North India is a community with little meaningful and dialogical relationship with the wider society, except through works of educational and medical missions. This is what I call the 'colonial captivity' of the North Indian churches, which prevents them from

²⁰⁰The term is not new and was previously used by Somen Das in the Indian context in his book, *The Church and the World: Towards a Biblical-Ethical Understanding* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 99. The term 'Captivity' is also used regarding Indian theology and the church by Robin Boyd in his recent book entitled *Beyond Captivity: Explorations in Indian Christian History and Theology*, (Bangalore:CFCC, 2014), xvii-xviii.

becoming more open and permissive in their nature and ministry. This has resulted in several challenges and issues, four of which can be identified as relevant for our purposes: firstly, there is a dilemma and complexity regarding Indian Christian identity; secondly, institutionalism; thirdly, divisive denominationalism; and fourthly, an exclusive and otherworldly theological-missiological emphasis.

2.4.1. *The Dilemma and Complexity Regarding Indian Christian Identity:*

The question of identity is an important issue here since the foreignness of the Indian church is a reality as mentioned earlier. This foreign identity is both cherished and treated as a burden by Indian Christians. Let us take the example of CNI, which brings together six denominations with people of different caste, class, tribe and language groups, forming both homogenous and heterogeneous congregations. These congregations are scattered over North India across a pluralist society. In terms of defining their identity, the challenge for the CNI church members is threefold. Firstly, to be true to God's calling among diverse religious convictions. Secondly, maintaining inherited meaningful western traditions, and thirdly, to continue to be critically engaged with the diverse socio-religious character of Indian society. The task of the congregations therefore is to integrate such convictions and realities, and to identify itself as both Indian and Christian.²⁰¹ Here is where congregations find themselves in a dilemma. It is a complex and difficult task to uphold all the above realities together in a healthy balance. This is far more challenging for the majority of Indian Christians who are *dalits* and tribals or *adivasis* who have to reckon with

²⁰¹Sahu, *United and Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, .xv.

discrimination and alienation religio-culturally, economically and socially. As I have shown they seem to live in two worlds, struggling to reconcile their newfound identity as Christians on the one hand and socio-cultural identity as *dalits* or tribals on the other. They seem to be torn between privilege and discrimination, self-determination and an identity crisis. There have been few efforts at easing the situation through indigenisation, inculturation or contextualisation but since there is no definite consensus about these efforts, an ordinary Indian Christian often finds himself / herself in a dilemma.

2.4.2. The Institutionalism of the North Indian Churches:

The churches in North India have succumbed to institutionalism rather than living communities of religio-cultural vitality. Western colonisers brought their structures of churches, administration, hierarchy, bureaucracy and architectural styles, which were quite alien to the Indian situation. Further, considerable time and effort is spent in maintaining and upholding the bureaucratic and institutional structure rather than developing a living spirituality. Funds are often used up in maintaining huge church structures and properties. The legacy of the church's association with colonial power, money and tradition has led to its alienation from its neighbours. Church institutions are often seen serving people of power and influence, but of little service to the minorities and people of other faiths. Therefore, ordinary Indian people are unable to find spiritual vitality in the church, which shares so much power with the

world.²⁰² Such institutionalism has served to maintain the status-quo and the organisational life of the churches, but has contributed little towards church growth and the spiritual development of the people. Rigid institutionalism has also resulted in the church restricting itself to pastoral care and well-being only within the Christian community. Thus, cultural and social alienation have become an inevitable consequence of this rigid institutionalism.²⁰³ Kurien Kunnumpuram, a Jesuit theologian comments that a ‘Christian in India is a person who prefers to occupy the rear-seat in a Church and listens to the word of the minister while remaining unmindful of the Christian’s role and responsibilities.’²⁰⁴ Institutionalism is also seen in the structure and administration of most of the churches. Their ministry is still patriarchal and hierarchical with little space open for the inclusion of power and authority of women and lay-members.²⁰⁵ Due to institutionalisation and bureaucracy, the church has become exclusive and this has become its identity. This often prevents the church from venturing into new structural adjustments, new alliances and subsequently it fails to express itself in plural forms.

2.4.3. *Divisive Denominationalism:*

Indian Christianity comprises diverse denominations, as noted earlier, and in North India these are scattered to a greater or lesser concentration in different states. I have already outlined the different denominations earlier. Such denominational diversity is

²⁰²Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology*, 219-220.

²⁰³Kurien Kunnumpuram, “The Church in India in Search of a New Identity,” 184-186.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 389-390.

²⁰⁵Roshan Jambhale, “Ecumenism in India Today: Church Perspective” in *Ecumenism in India Today: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology and churches and Theological Education in India*, edited by James Massey (Bangalore: BTESSC& SATHRI, 2008),107-109.

rendered more complex as different churches continue to follow different administrative and mission strategies of their own mission founding bodies. They have simply become replicas of Western church mission organisations without much grounding in the socio-religious climate of the people in North India.²⁰⁶ As T.V. Philip argues, the 'Indian churches were burdened with Western ecclesiasticism and the church unity movement was preoccupied with Western denominational problems.'²⁰⁷ The historical reasons behind schisms in the West are of little relevance for many Indians.²⁰⁸ The sacrament of the 'Eucharist was successfully converted into a weapon of exclusion by the denominational churches.'²⁰⁹ Partly, to counteract such schisms there have been efforts at church union. The church union movements of CSI and CNI are prominent examples. The church union movement has its own worth as it brought together diverse denominations and still continues to witness through it, but Limatula Longkumer, an Indian theologian, argues that the ecumenical movement in India is a 'top down model', which included the mainline denominations, but ignored the Pentecostals, Evangelicals and other independent churches. It also neglected the marginalised groups like the *dalits*, tribals and *adivasis* and their concerns.²¹⁰ The true unity of the church in India ought to be manifested at a 'local level across national, ethnic and cultural boundaries' notes Aram Keshishian,²¹¹ but in reality this is not the case. There is little cooperation and solidarity among the older and younger churches even if they choose to work in the same areas. The common people of North India have little understanding of the

²⁰⁶Mathai Zachariah, *Inside the Indian Church* (New Delhi, ISPCK, 1994) 2, 21.

²⁰⁷T.V. Philip, *Ecumenism in Asia* (New Delhi, ISPCK & CSS, 1994), 6.

²⁰⁸Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 55.

²⁰⁹Moses P. Manohar, "Emerging Ecclesia: Societal View," in *Ecumenism in India Today: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology and churches and Theological Education in India*, 97.

²¹⁰Limatula Longkumer, "Wider Ecumenism and Ecclesiology" in *Ecumenism in India Today: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology and churches and Theological Education in India*, 45.

²¹¹Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal*, 55.

diverse and divisive Christian denominationalism and cannot understand how this whole situation fits into the little they know about Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Again the picture of Northeast India, mostly in states with a Christian majority, shows more rigidity and divisiveness regarding denominationalism. Here the denominational pattern of missionary work has led to the establishment of a Christian community divided into several church bodies. Factors such as language, tribe and culture have put strains to ecumenical unity among the churches in this area or region.²¹² The churches are identified as Ao Church, Mizo Church, Khasi Church according to different tribes. Church identity is based on tribal identity and it is very difficult for people here to come out of narrow tribalism. Ecclesial differences are stronger than any efforts at unity. In fact the word ecumenism has a wrong connotation in Northeast India, and it is understood as anti-Christian or liberal. Efforts at ecumenical unity among the North East churches resulted in the formation of The North East India Christian Council (NEICC), but due to differences in culture, ecclesiastical structures, deep rooted denominationalism and conservative theology, it is not very effective. The churches in the Northeast are mission oriented, but the understanding of mission is dominated by church planting, conversion and aggressive evangelism. This way of doing mission creates more denominationalism than unity in the churches, says Longkumer.²¹³ In a multicultural and pluralistic context, divisive and narrow denominationalism is a threat to unity and witness.²¹⁴

²¹²Vanlal chhuanawma, "Ecumenical Realities in Indian Context Today," in *Ecumenism in India Today: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology and churches and Theological Education in India*, 40.

²¹³Longkumer, "Wider Ecumenism and Ecclesiology," in *Ecumenism in India Today: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology and Churches and Theological Education in India*, 47.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, 52.

2.4.4. *Colonial Theology and Missiology:*

Somen Das, a Bengali theologian noted that ‘Historically and empirically, the modern church in India is post-colonial, but psychologically, ethically and theologically it continues to operate within the colonial framework. Colonial captivity of the church is not over.’²¹⁵ Jacob S. Dharmaraj explains what colonial theology means:

[...] colonial theology was conditioned by European political thought and shaped by its cultural elements. The intellectual path that the mission historians and the missionaries often followed in India was drawn from the scientific and colonial theories [...] of the nineteenth century.²¹⁶ [...] It attempted to transplant one particular form of spiritual expression to people of another culture.²¹⁷

Dharmaraj further points out that this kind of theology failed to take into account the struggles of the common people and their aspirations for freedom. It also failed to acknowledge India’s rich cultural heritage, language systems and philosophical thoughts, and sought to replace them with abstract religious formulations.²¹⁸ So what resulted was an emphasis in the churches of other-worldly theology which is still perpetuated. The churches continue to have an idea of ecclesiology and mission similar to the mission-theology of the mission bodies that established them.²¹⁹

²¹⁵Somen Das, *The Church and the World: Towards a Biblical-Ethical Understanding*, 99.

²¹⁶Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Postcolonial Reflections* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 118.

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, 117.

²¹⁸Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Postcolonial Reflection.*, 121.

²¹⁹Valle, “Becoming Indian: Towards an Indian Contextual Ecclesiology,” 17.

James Massey notes that the average Christian in India has a ‘pietistic outlook’ towards life, featuring holiness in personal lives and other-worldly thinking,²²⁰ which encourages a type of individualistic and selfish spirituality unconcerned with the world. In the beginning, the aim of the Protestant movement in India was not to develop an indigenous church, but to ‘save souls.’²²¹ Indian Christians learned therefore that the church’s ultimate goal is to win souls. Somen Das observes that while the missionary era is over, the ‘missionary mentality, mission-compound syndrome,’ arrogant, aggressive attitude and superiority complex still prevails.²²² This understanding of the church further makes it an exclusive, narrow and self-centred community, which is only interested in proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ and the Christian faith. This creates suspicion and a false notion in the minds of the other communities that the church is only interested in proselytisation. Relationships of mutual enriching, living dialogue with people of other faiths are yet to be practiced widely in and through the churches.

SECTION THREE: INTRODUCING THE CASE FOR A PERMEABLE ECCLESIOLOGY AND ITS PNEUMATOLOGICAL SHAPE

I have vividly described the context of North India in the previous two sections. In this section I will introduce the case for a permeable ecclesiology and its pneumatological shape briefly so that it can be taken up in depth in the next chapter. The context of North India gives a vivid picture of the immense diversity and

²²⁰ James Massey, “Christianity to be Renewed? Rethinking Theology” in *Rethinking Theology in India: Christianity in the Twenty First Century*, 65.

²²¹T.V. Philip, “Ecclesiological Discussions in India during the Last Twenty-Five years”, July 21, 2016, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/25-3-4_172.pdf .

²²²Somen Das, *The Church and the World: Towards a Biblical-Ethical Understanding*, 100

complexity of the entire region along with its struggles and challenges for the churches. This has multi-faceted implications. The ethno-linguistic variety of the people demands that the gospel proclaimed by the churches and their ministries should be intelligible and grounded in the very particular ethnic or linguistic setting of the people. Again, the particular religio-cultural setting of each location demands that the ministries of the church be sensitive to the surrounding religious and cultural norms of the people. The socio-political environment of each region within North India varies. There are both regions of conflict and of harmonious living, and the churches must consider the challenges and opportunities in both environments. The diversity and plurality of the North Indian situation is something that always has to be highlighted against the homogenising and hegemonising attempts of the Hindu fundamentalists. One of the aspects that repeatedly emerge in the North Indian situation is the overlapping of boundaries; the fluidity and dual or multiple religio-cultural belonging. This is a significant question regarding the identity of the Christian community in North India.

A considerable challenge for the church is how to keep its particular Christian identity; yet be open and engaging with the ethno-linguistic, religio-cultural and socio-political life of the region. Similarly, there is also the challenge regarding the foreignness or Western nature of the church. The foreign missionary movement has sought to establish a church in India that was conceived and 'manufactured' in the West, with its own ideas of nature, ministry and mission. The challenge before the church in North India is how to maintain the Christian character of the church, yet redeem itself from the colonial captivity and simultaneously open itself up to the religio-cultural-social environment and ethos of the people. This is crucial because

the churches no longer ought to be accused of foreignness, and the churches need to be an Indian church in all intents and purposes.

Another considerable challenge regards the response to the marginalised communities who constitute the majority in the church in North India. The church's solidarity with the marginalised and the oppressed is a much called for response, if they seek to be communities of justice and peace. This solidarity inevitably brings with it conflicts with the 'powers' and the 'oppressors'. The challenge here is how to pursue 'just-peace' between the oppressor and the oppressed within the church and without. Such varied concerns and challenges of the church demands that the churches in North India ought to be open to diverse understandings of itself in relation to the diverse environment that characterises this region. This possibly indicates that the church has to negotiate its borders, while keeping its distinctiveness and particular identity in the North Indian soil. The struggle for the churches is to be both truly Indian and truly Christian. The struggle to be Indian possibly demands the characteristic of *relationality* in terms of being able to relate to its surrounding situation and challenges, not patronisingly but dialogically. The particular type of relationality required here is Christianity or the Church's relationship to the world in egalitarian terms that would tend to avoid the superior, imperialist and proselytising tendencies of Christianity. The churches in India have been relational in terms of their philanthropic and spiritual mission, but have not considered the other religions and cultures in India on an equal footing or as contributing to the kingdom of God. This kind of hierarchical relationality continues to create barriers between Christians and other communities. Thus, I argue for an egalitarian approach to relationality.

On the other hand, the struggle to be truly Christian is to be true to the *distinctive* calling and Gospel of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, manifested collectively and concretely in the nature, ministry and mission of the church. The distinctiveness of the Christian community can be maintained through the witness of the living community, the church. It also can be maintained in terms of its response to the world. The Church's relationality with the world does not prevent it from being critical of the world, particularly its assumptions and policies that dehumanise and destroy lives. This envisages a relational community which is distinctive, particular and having a critical edge. This indicates interplay of the dialectics of what may be called 'relational-distinctiveness'²²³ in our ecclesiological thinking. I term this as permeability. In the following chapter I will develop this notion of permeability in terms of this relational-distinctive dialectics and arrive at a particular shape of a permeable church.

²²³ The category of 'relational-distinctiveness' in Christian theology is not new. S.J. Samartha used it in his book *One Christ Many Religions* (1991). He uses this term in the sense of Christ being relational with other faiths and at the same time Christianity along with other religions ought to have distinctive responses to the mystery of God. See *One Christ Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 76,77. However, while not denying the above meaning I have used this as a dialectics favouring an ecclesiological permeability ensured by the joint working of the Spirit and Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CASE FOR A PERMEABLE ECCLESIOLOGY AND ITS PNEUMATOLOGICAL SHAPE

In the previous chapter I vividly described the context of North India. In the concluding section I briefly introduced the case for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology proposing a relational-distinctiveness dialectics. In the following pages I will move forward, determining what constitutes the notion of porous borders or ‘permeability’ in terms of this relational-distinctiveness dialectics. This will constitute the first section of this chapter. In the second section, I will explore various models of ecclesiology in order to search for a suitable basis for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. In this section, I will begin by exploring a Social Trinitarian model with the Spirit ecclesiology of Moltmann. Thereafter, I will briefly highlight the strengths of Moltmann’s Spirit ecclesiology while exposing its weaknesses and drawbacks. Following this, I will explore an ecclesiocentric model with Stanley Hauerwas from the post-liberal school. I will similarly highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Hauerwas’s model. Thereafter I will explore the Christo-theocentric model of Kathryn Tanner from the Yale school which will stand as a critique of both Moltmann and Hauerwas’s models. Subsequently I will show that while Tanner’s model leans towards a permeable ecclesiology, it is not fully adequate for developing a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. In the third section, therefore, I will offer the Spirit ecclesiology of Amos Yong, a Malaysia-born American Pentecostal theologian, based on Irenaeus’ metaphor of the two hands of the Father, the Spirit and the Word, as a suitable basis for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. I will show that Yong’s

ecclesiology is Spirit-driven while Christologically conditioned and features the relational-distinctiveness dialectics in terms of universal-particular, spiritual-concrete, static-dynamic, unity-in-diversity in the nature, ministry and mission of the church. In the fourth section I will conclude with a brief summary of the findings and look forward to the task of the following chapter.

SECTION ONE: THE CHARACTER OF PERMEABILITY

The notion of permeability refers to the phenomenon of the passage of things through porous borders or boundaries.²²⁴ This means that it recognises the presence of a border while determining what type of border it is, i.e. porous. When applied in the context of the church, it would mean that it ought to have borders or boundaries, but those are porous, allowing selective passage of, say, perspectives and people. The recognition of porosity in the church's borders can be broadly conceived through the concept of relationality, while borders can be conceived in terms of providing the character of distinctiveness to the church. However, as porosity and borders cannot be conceived separately, the concept of relationality and distinctiveness cannot operate separately. In other words, borders need porosity to be permeable, while porosity cannot be conceived without borders. This calls for a dialectical understanding of relational-distinctiveness. The permeability of the church would depend on these relational-distinctiveness dialectics. What this would mean for the church is that relationality of the church cannot be conceived without its counterpart, i.e. distinctiveness and the distinctiveness of the church cannot be expressed without

²²⁴ The dictionary meaning of the term is already discussed in the Introduction to the thesis.

being relational. Relationality and distinctiveness would work together to complete the cycle of permeability of the church. Relationality would seem to qualify distinctiveness and in turn is qualified by the latter.

Relationality, as a counterpart of the relational-distinctiveness dialectics will have two characteristics: dialogical mutuality and critical particularity. This is a nuanced understanding of relationality. This is a relationality which can be termed as *distinctively relational*. In this kind of nuanced understanding of relationality the criterion of dialogical mutuality would require the partners to be in an egalitarian relationship where exchange occurs mutually and not from one side only. This posits that the relationality of the church with other communities or the world would be non-hierarchical or egalitarian, allowing exchange or passage of perspectives and people both ways. While being thus relational, permeability demands that this relationality is also critically particular. What this means is that this relationality is not simply unqualified without a selective or critical edge; nor is it a bland universality without concreteness and particularity. This *distinctively relational* character would be clearer when we discuss it in relation to the particular context of North India.

When we refer to the status of the North Indian ecclesial relationship with other communities, we do find a form of relationality, but it differs from the one that I am arguing the churches should have. The church in North India has always been a relational church in terms of being a missionary church - a church that reaches out to the world, to other communities, seeking to transform and bring people to the saving knowledge of Christ. It has reached out to the poor, the suffering and the uneducated through spiritual, medical and educational missions. However, this relationality has

not been mutual in the sense that the church has always considered itself as the giver and not the receiver, the teacher and not the learner, the repository of truth and salvation *vis-à-vis* communities that supposedly sat in darkness and ignorance. In other words, the relationality between the Church and other communities has been one-sided and not mutual. In addition, the church's link with the colonial powers resulted in a supremacist, imperialist and patronising tendency in its ministry and mission. It was a hierarchical and not a dialogical relationship. A dialogical relationship would always consider the equal status of partners however different and diverse; otherwise it ceases to be a dialogical encounter. The Christian church in India has prided itself on bringing a superior religion and superior culture to a 'heathen people' who did not seem to know God and whose culture is devilish at best. It has assumed that the Spirit of God was not at work before Christianity came to India. A proselytising tendency even lurked behind the church's education and medical missions. I have shown in the previous chapter that this created religious, social and cultural alienation between Christians and other communities. The attitude of colonial Christianity still remains in these post-colonial times, resulting in continued alienation of the Christian community with respect to others. I have also shown that this alienation has created a false understanding of Christianity as a foreign religion; the religion of the West. People of other faiths often admire and appreciate Jesus and some even seek to follow him, but the foreign nature of the church and Christianity and their claims of supremacy have made it unattractive to Indians. Therefore, I argue that relationality as explained in terms of dialogical mutuality is an absolute requirement for the churches in North India. In the North Indian situation, the passage of perspectives and people between the church, other

communities and the world would involve mutual learning, mutual enrichment, mutual conversion and mutual journeying in search for truth in an egalitarian framework. In this phenomenon of mutual exchange of perspectives and mutual collaboration between peoples, a space is bound to open up for people that will feature heterogeneity and inclusivity. This space might be particularly conducive for people who prefer, or, are in a position of liminality or transcending of religio-cultural-social boundaries. I have shown in the previous chapter that many people in India, especially from the marginalised communities including Christians, live in fluid boundaries or practice dual or multiple religio belonging.²²⁵

On the other hand, I argue that the North Indian churches need to have the character of critical particularity in their relationships with other communities. What this would mean is that the church's relational engagement with other communities and the world will be that of a critical engagement. In other words, it would include working out of those relationships in concrete and particular contexts while being self-critical and also critical towards the world. The effort at ensuring particularity of the churches would be in developing concrete relationships in each ethno-linguistic, religio-cultural and socio-political context. This would rescue the churches from the colonial captivity, on the one hand, by trying to root them in the North Indian context, and on the other, by avoiding vague universalism. In the church's interfaith relations, for example, critical engagement would mean engaging with other traditions in mutual dialogue where both commonalities and particularities are borne in mind. It will not be an effort simply to search for the commonalities, but for the unique contributions that each tradition can offer to the pool of religious resources.

²²⁵I will have occasion to return to this issue of multiple religious belonging at a later stage in the project.

The question that arises here is how could the churches be permeable in terms of a relationality that demands dialogical mutuality and critical particularity? What theological resources can be drawn on in order to make the church relational in this sense? I suggest that a pneumatological perspective of the church could be helpful in part for ensuring the kind of relationality I am arguing for. I will return to what this pneumatological perspective of the church would mean in the broader project of permeability later in this chapter. In the meantime, I will turn to the other counterpart of permeability: the question of borders.

Previously I have argued that porosity cannot work without borders. The question is what sort of borders are we looking for? Are the borders hard or soft? I have shown earlier how the dialectics of relational-distinctiveness works through a nuanced relationality, i.e., *distinctively relational*, conceived in terms of dialogical mutuality and critical particularity. The same dialectics would seem to work for the question of borders, but the other way round. If we aim at softening the borders, the dialectics would work particularly well in terms of a nuanced understanding of distinctiveness, which can be termed *relationally distinct*. This nuanced understanding of distinctiveness is required as it can counteract the alienation caused by hard borders. Here, on the one hand, relationality is sought to be qualified by the presence of definite borders; while on the other, the borders themselves are qualified by a sort of relationality that makes them softer. The reason relationality has to be qualified or conditioned by borders in the first place is because of the question of identity. Dharendra K. Sahu argues that ‘any group forms its identity by marking its boundaries.’²²⁶ While mutual intermingling and exchange goes on between various

²²⁶ D.K. Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), xi.

communities on an egalitarian level, as previously argued, an important question arises as to what particularly distinguishes each community? In our bid to be relational does each community end up compromising its distinctive identity? More precisely: can the church in its relation to the world and other communities still maintain its identity in such a porous exchange? Is a permeable church conceivable which is relational with the world and other communities, yet holds its distinctive identity? In the North Indian context, the question of identity is a crucial issue. The dilemma regarding the identity of the churches in India is: first, struggling to be an Indian Christian church in the continued colonial captivity; and second, the struggle to maintain its Christian witness amidst a multi-cultural, multi-religious context and in the face of hegemonising and homogenising Hindu fundamentalist forces. Thus, while the church seeks to be relational, it has to be equally careful about maintaining its identity in the face of the challenges highlighted above and in the context described in the previous chapter.

With regard to the issue of the need for softening of hard borders, it can be said that in the North Indian context, the church has always had hard borders. It has well-defined, distinct boundaries as has been shown in the previous chapter in two respects: Christological-soteriological and an emphasis on being a separated community. In the first respect, the church in India has successfully managed to determine its contours through the affirmation that it has only one Lord Jesus Christ and that salvation is possible through no other. In the second, the church left no stone unturned in claiming that in Christ Christians are a chosen community, consecrated, called and separated from the world. This separation has typically resulted in ghettoising the Christian community, often spatially and spiritually, from

communities of other faiths. Again the separation of the church and the world was deepened when other-worldly spirituality pervaded and continues to pervade among Christians in India. Essentially, the hard boundaries in question made the church an exclusive community to all intents and purposes. The question arises here as to whether such hard borders, which have made the church an exclusive community, are justifiable in a plural society like North India? Can the softening of the borders be the route to being more *relationally distinct*? Thus, is it possible for the church to be Christologically identified and still be open to accommodating the insights and contributions of Indian religio-cultural contexts? Is it possible for the church as a community to continue to be a consecrated witness for Christ and yet overcome the separation and alienation caused by the colonial project? The answer to these questions could well be in softening of the borders. This can be appropriate for the counterpart of *relationally distinct* dimension of permeability.

While I have suggested that a *distinctively relational* dimension of permeability can be conceived by recourse to a pneumatological perspective of the church, I suggest that a *relationally distinct* dimension of permeability can be conceived through a Christological dimension, manifested in and through the ecclesial community in its distinct witness and critical character. Here the development of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology would depend on applying both the *distinctively relational* and *relationally distinct* counterparts of permeability. In other words, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology would be an ecclesiology with a pneumatological perspective and Christological dimension.

In the preceding discussion I have determined the character of permeability and developed the criteria of relational-distinctiveness towards conceiving a permeable

Spirit ecclesiology. In the following section I will move on to search for a model or basis for such a permeable Spirit ecclesiology on which to build. I will begin by first considering a Social Trinitarian model of ecclesiology with the ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann.

SECTION TWO: SEARCH FOR SUITABLE MODELS FOR A PERMEABLE SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY

2.1. A Social Trinitarian Model of Ecclesiology with Jürgen Moltmann

The ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann, the German Reformed theologian can be said to be basically a ‘relational ecclesiology,’²²⁷ grounded on Social Trinity with a pneumatological perspective and an eschatological orientation. The reason for taking up an ecclesiology based on the Social Trinity is that this approach has been in vogue for a while with the emergence of interest in Pneumatology and Trinitarian theology.²²⁸ As I proceed towards discussing Moltmann’s ecclesiology, it will be evident how his conceptions of the Social Trinity, pneumatology and eschatology have influenced his understanding of a relational church where little distinction is maintained between God, church and the world, and how it has led to the lack of particularity and concreteness in his theology and ecclesiology as a whole. Subsequently, it will be evident that Moltmann’s relational ecclesiology is unsuitable for the kind of permeable Spirit ecclesiology that I am seeking to develop.

²²⁷ Moltmann describes his ecclesiology as ‘relational ecclesiology,’ alternatively to ‘messianic ecclesiology.’ See *CPS* 20 and its sub-title. Also see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: T& T Clark, 1995), 122.

²²⁸ See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 11-20.

2.1.1. The Basis of the Church

Moltmann's ecclesiology is relational on the basis of Social Trinity, his pneumatological perspective and eschatological orientation. These combine together to bring God, church and the world into relationship.²²⁹ Moltmann essentially understands the Trinity as 'being-in-relationship.'²³⁰ The Trinity is in relationship within and with the world. Moltmann's models, namely Monarchical, Historical / Eschatological, Eucharistic and Doxological, all show the three persons of the Trinity taking up their roles in turn in their relationship to the world. The Father sends both the Son and the Spirit into the world, and the Spirit along with other Persons plays active roles in the history of the world and in the eschatological consummation of creation, which ultimately results in the eschatological glorification of God.²³¹

One of the concepts that Moltmann uses to express the notion of relationality is that of *perichoresis* or circumincession (later circuminsession), a term originating from the Greek Fathers, which essentially means the co-inhering or mutual indwelling or circular movement of the Trinitarian persons.²³² He uses this term to safeguard inner-Trinitarian relationality and mutuality, but at the same time against

²²⁹ Richard Bauckham maintains that in Moltmann's Trinitarian conceptions of the church, the complementary and competing perspectives of the Christological, pneumatological and eschatological are at play. See Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 124.

²³⁰ SOL 289-306.

²³¹ SOL 289-306.

²³² 'Perichoresis' was derived from the root verb *perichorein* (*peri*-round about, *chorein*- make room for another) introduced into Christological language by Gregory of Nazianzen (ca. 389) and the noun *perichoresis* by Maximus the Confessor (ca. 662). Both were extended into Trinitarian language by Pseudo-Cyril (anonymous author, ca. 650) and popularised by John of Damascus (ca.749). See Michael G. Lawler, "Perichoresis: New Theological Wine in Old Theological Wineskin," *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theological Society*, Vol. 2, Issue 01 (Spring 1995):49-66.

modalism and subordination of the Persons of the Trinity.²³³ For Moltmann, *perichoresis*, in its relational potential, continues to provide a background to the relationship between immanent and economic trinity. Richard Bauckham suggests that in Moltmann, the ‘mutual relationships of the three persons of the Trinity as a perichoretic union become the context for the relationships between God and the world.’²³⁴ The point of contact between the immanent and the economic Trinity is established Christologically and pneumatologically. Christologically, the Cross stands at the centre of both the economic and immanent Trinity. In other words, it is the Cross of Christ, which gives us an understanding of the inner life of the Trinity.²³⁵ He further argues that if Trinity is open to history through the cross, then the immanent Trinity is influenced by the external history of God through the cross. He goes to the extent of saying that ‘the economic Trinity not only reveals the immanent Trinity; it also has a retroactive effect on it.’²³⁶ Moltmann insists that ‘the pain of the Cross determines the inner life of the Triune God from eternity to eternity.’²³⁷ In other words, the suffering of the Son on the cross pains even the Father, so the ‘Father suffers this disaster inwardly in himself.’²³⁸ The love of God only becomes meaningful when communicated like this. Moltmann is thus of the view that ‘*opera trinitatis ad extra* corresponds to the *passiones trinitatis ad intra*’;²³⁹ however, Moltmann is quick to point that the Father neither suffers as the Son nor dies like

²³³ TK 175.

²³⁴Richard Bauckham, “Jurgen Moltmann” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third Edition, edited by David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, (Blackwell: Oxford, 2005), 149.

²³⁵See Randall Otto, “Moltmann and the Anti-Monothelist Movement,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3/3 (2003): 294,306-7 cited in Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God’s Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2012), 21.

²³⁶TK 161.

²³⁷Ibid., 161.

²³⁸Ibid.,160.

²³⁹Ibid.,160.

him, but the Father and the Son are in a kenotic relationship.²⁴⁰ Pneumatologically, both God and human beings are perichoretically transcendent and immanent in each other. Moltmann contends that ‘The possibility of perceiving God in all things, and all things in God, is grounded theologically on an understanding of the Spirit of God as the power of creation and the well-spring of life.’²⁴¹

Related to this is the idea of the Jewish concept of *Shekinah*,²⁴² which Moltmann uses. *Shekinah* is the ‘descent and indwelling of God in space and time, at a particular place and a particular era of earthly beings in their history.’²⁴³ For him, *Shekinah* means: first, affirming the personhood and agency of the Holy Spirit in God’s indwelling; and second, *kenosis* of the Spirit where God is able to suffer and identify with the suffering creation through the Spirit. Christologically, *Shekinah* would mean that ‘in Christ the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.’²⁴⁴ Thus *Shekinah* can incorporate the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, through which the infinite God is able to dwell in his finite creation.²⁴⁵ Pneumatologically, *Shekinah* is the continued presence of God even in wayward humanity however estranged, so that it can bring humanity back to God once again.²⁴⁶

Thus while perichoretic relationality allows the church to participate in the inner life of the Trinity, the *Shekinah* or the indwelling of God in Christ, through the Spirit in the world allows God to continue to relate to human beings and creation. It is evident that Moltmann draws a close relationship between the sufferings of God in Christ with the sufferings of humanity as found in the world. He seems to suggest

²⁴⁰ *CG* 271, 207, 204.

²⁴¹ *SOL* 7, 35.

²⁴² Moltmann draws from the Jewish theology of Franz Rosenzweig and Gershom Scholem.

See *CG* xi.

²⁴³ *SOL* 47.

²⁴⁴ *ET* 323.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *SOL* 50.

close relationality between God and the world on the basis of common suffering between God in Christ and the world. This happens because of his proposal of the centrality of the Cross in both immanent and economic Trinity. The close relationship between the immanent and the economic trinity, which is a central assumption of the Social Trinity, allows the church to be involved in the Trinitarian involvement of God in the world. Moltmann writes that, ‘The church is called to participate in such a Trinitarian history of God. It participates in the Trinitarian history of ‘gathering, uniting and glorifying of the world in God and of God in the world’.²⁴⁷

Having outlined the basis of the Social Trinity for the church in terms of perichoretic relationships between the God and the world, I will now show what this basis implies for understanding the character of a Spirit ecclesiology in terms of the nature, ministry and mission of the church.

2.1.2. Shape of the Church

2.1.2.1. *The Nature of Spirit Ecclesiology*

I have shown that Social Trinity allows the church to participate in the Trinitarian involvement of God in the world. In Moltmann, this Trinitarian involvement also draws in the implications of the church in terms of the eschatological future of God. In other words, as the church is caught up in Trinitarian relationship, it is also caught up with God’s eschatological future in relation to the world. Along with its Social Trinitarian basis, the eschatological orientation allows the church to be open, dynamic and forward looking. Therefore Moltmann holds that the church’s nature or the particular question of ‘what is the church?’ cannot be determined universally. He

²⁴⁷CPS 60.

argues instead that we at least know ‘where the church happens’ or is present. It is ‘present wherever the manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7) takes place’.²⁴⁸ This accounts for the dynamic character of the church. For Moltmann, this eschatological church in its dynamism constitutes an ‘exodus community,’ which finds itself in the movement of the kingdom of God, but not greater than the latter.²⁴⁹ This also carries with it a sort of provisionality in understanding the church. Moltmann argues that the church of the Kingdom of God should realise itself in tension between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ character of the kingdom. In this sense, it must realise its provisional nature in history and the anticipation of the future new creation.²⁵⁰ Moltmann writes, ‘In provisional finality and in final provisionality the church, Christendom and Christianity witness to the kingdom of God as the goal of history in the midst of history. In this sense the church of Jesus Christ is *the people of the kingdom of God.*’²⁵¹ Richard Bauckham argues that the pneumatological perspective of the church in Moltmann facilitates such a conception of the church as he notes that it is the pneumatological dimension that allows an emphasis on the ‘eschatological fulfilment of the history of Christ; it is the Holy Spirit who mediates eschatology and history and the church.’²⁵² Thus in Moltmann, the shape of the church is determined by Social Trinity as the foundation along with a pneumatological perspective and an eschatological orientation.

Moltmann articulates this shape in terms of his understanding of the four marks of the church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. In these four marks, the close relationship between God, church and the world in its eschatological orientation

²⁴⁸ *CPS* 65.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 83, 84.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 189-195.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁵² Bauckham, *The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann*, 123,124.

is evident. A dynamic character is also evident in such an understanding. The suffering of God and humanity occupy a central place in God-world relationship, as I have shown, and Moltmann seeks to address this relationship through a liberationist understanding. He argues that the unity or oneness of the church derives from the unity of Christ and this unity is in ‘freedom and diversity of the gathered congregation in proclamation, calling and sacraments.’²⁵³ The church is said to be Holy in the sense that it understands itself as in continual forgiveness, sanctification and reformation, whose holiness is derived from the holiness of God and looks forward to its full sanctification in the *eschaton*. This holiness does not put the church onto a higher or separate pedestal, but in relationship of fellowship with others, especially the poor and the suffering.²⁵⁴ The church is catholic in the sense that it corresponds to its inner wholeness and spatial wholeness in its relation to the world and eschatologically with God’s coming kingdom. The church is also catholic in the sense that it seeks to restore the lost, rejected and the oppressed.²⁵⁵ The church is apostolic in the sense that its ‘gospel and doctrine is founded on the testimony of the first apostles [...] and it exists in carrying out of the apostolic proclamation, the missionary charge.’²⁵⁶ So it ‘denotes both the church’s foundation and its commission’ and is strongly determined eschatologically by the risen Christ and ‘suffering and sacrifice in the discipleship of Christ.’²⁵⁷ Thus the shape of the church in terms of the four marks brings together aspects of fellowship with the world, suffering in solidarity with the oppressed, and universality in terms of the eschatological goal of the Kingdom of God.

²⁵³*CPS* 337-347.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 352-357.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 352.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 358.

²⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 358-361.

2.1.2.2. *Ministry of a Spirit Ecclesiology*

The ministry of such a Spirit ecclesiology based on Social Trinity, with a pneumatological perspective and eschatological orientation has an egalitarian shape. In this church the powers and gifts of the Spirit are for all and not for a select few.²⁵⁸ This egalitarian character is manifested through the proclamation of the Word, worship and sacraments. For Moltmann, proclamation is a broad category not exclusively limited to preaching of the Word in the church, but includes the whole witness of a believer of the truth of Jesus Christ in the varied relationships of life.²⁵⁹ It is a church of the community, a participatory congregation where there is no hierarchy between the clergy and the laity; a church that links generations, genders and diverse groups together.²⁶⁰ The scope of the ‘charismata of the Spirit,’ Moltmann contends, is not limited to specific groups of people or only to office-bearers but to all people. Though there are functional differences, the gifts of the Spirit make for an egalitarian community. Moltmann writes, ‘The widow who exercises mercy is acting just as charismatically as a bishop.’²⁶¹ Moltmann also draws from eschatological pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2) and the Pentecost event (Acts 2), principles of non-hierarchy and egalitarianism. Moltmann’s reflection on the ‘pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh’ leads towards an understanding of a community based on justice for women, young people, the old and the outcast.²⁶² The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper also reflect an egalitarian and

²⁵⁸*CPS* 198.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 206, 225.

²⁶⁰ *SOL* 235-245.

²⁶¹ *CPS* 298.

²⁶² *SOL* 57.

liberationist character. Baptism sets us in the triune history of God. It is a public witness and a ‘liberating event’ in Christ’s fellowship, taking us into a life in the Spirit with believers in Christ towards a new creation. Baptism is a call through the proclamation of the gospel to the rule of God in personal and communal life.²⁶³ The Lord’s Supper is understood as a ‘repeatable *sign of hope*’ and a ‘*sign of being on the way.*’²⁶⁴ It is the open invitation of Christ that reaches beyond denominations and even beyond the church to the weak, the sinners and the nations in the kingdom of God (Isaiah 25:6-8).²⁶⁵ In sum, the ministries of the church in the Spirit based on a Social Trinitarian model reflect the egalitarian, inclusive and liberationist character.

2.1.2.3. *Mission of a Spirit Ecclesiology*

The mission of the church based on Social Trinity is eschatologically expansive in the Spirit and includes interfaith and cosmic perspectives. Moltmann argues that the church has a ‘messianic mission’ that draws from the messianic mission of Jesus through his death and resurrection. Through participation in the death and resurrection, the church becomes the church of the kingdom and human liberation.²⁶⁶ Moltmann reminds us that ‘It is not the church [that] has a mission [but] it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way.’²⁶⁷

The church’s mission importantly includes the church’s or Christianity’s relationship with other world religions. Moltmann suggests a dialogical approach that

²⁶³*CPS* 226. See Moltmann’s discussion on Baptism from 226-242

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 243.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 246,248, 249,259

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 85.

²⁶⁷*CPS* 65.

would recognise other religions as being on a par with Christianity and appreciates the richness of other religions by becoming a part of ‘the wider framework of liberation of the whole creation for the coming of the kingdom.’²⁶⁸ The mission of the church goes beyond to include the earth and the cosmos. Using the Pentecostal pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh as a perspective, Moltmann highlights its universal, eschatological and cosmic appeal which includes the whole creation. The charismatic power through the Spirit’s outpouring is the power of the world to come which renews all of the present creation in eschatological anticipation of the future. This leads to a cosmic eschatology that conceives the redemption *of* the body and the world in contrast to the Gnostic doctrine of redemption *from* the world or the body.²⁶⁹ In this sense, he essentially understands the redemption of human beings to include the redemption of creation. He writes that, ‘it is impossible to conceive of any salvation for men and women without the ‘new heaven and a new earth.’²⁷⁰

In the preceding paragraphs, I have described the shape of a Spirit ecclesiology based on Social Trinity with a pneumatological perspective and eschatological orientation. This Spirit ecclesiology has some strong points as measured against the model I seek for in a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. There are obvious gains in terms of relationality, openness and inclusivity in this ecclesiology. Moltmann’s open church has the potentiality in the Spirit to include diverse groups of people. Its dynamic nature stands as critique of institutionalism and the static nature of the church. The ministry of the church is egalitarian and through the Spirit allows access to participation for various groups of people. The Spirit’s ecclesiological mission includes other religions and expands its horizon to new

²⁶⁸Ibid. 163.

²⁶⁹COG 259.

²⁷⁰Ibid., 260.

creation. Moltmann shows some inclination to a liberationist perspective while remaining largely superficial, without concreteness and specificity. Some of these features can contribute to the permeable Spirit ecclesiological model that I am seeking to construct. Setting aside these strong points, the very basis of Social Trinity unfortunately creates a problematic paradigm for understanding human relations in the church. In the following I will show the drawbacks of conceptualising the church on the basis of a Social Trinitarian model.

2.1.3. *Drawbacks of a Social Trinitarian Model for the Church*

The primary problem with the model of the Social Trinity is in its handling of God-church-world relationship. The Social Trinity essentially conflates God's inner Trinitarian relationship and God's relationship with the world and fails to maintain the distinctiveness necessary for the relational-distinctiveness dialectics of a permeable ecclesiology to work. Gary Badcock contends that for Moltmann there seems to be no essential distinction between who 'God is in himself' and who 'God is for us.'²⁷¹ The question is whether God's indwelling in his inner life and God's dwelling in us are the same. In other words, is the nature of God's perichoretic unity or indwelling in Trinity the same as the *perichoresis* through which God is related to us? Trevor Hart argues that it is not. He maintains that there ought to be a distinction between how God relates within the Trinity and how God relates to human beings, the world and the entirety of creation. Hart notes that this happens at two levels, between 'that in God which is participable by humans and that which is

²⁷¹ Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K., 1997), 206-207. See Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life*, 151-152.

not...between *Koinonia* and *perichoresis*.’²⁷² Hart maintains that *perichoresis* is different from *koinonia*, and this differentiation is intended to be safeguarded by the word *homoousion*.²⁷³ Stephen R. Holmes notes that in terms of the relationship between immanent and economic trinity, Moltmann takes Rahner’s axiom of ‘The immanent trinity is the economic trinity and vice-versa’²⁷⁴ to the extreme. The standard complaint is that this surrenders God’s aseity and freedom where God becomes caused by the world.²⁷⁵ Others suggest that this reduces God’s inner life into God’s activity in history and therefore divine transcendence is put in question.²⁷⁶ Karen Kilby points out the problematic method of ‘projection’ which social Trinitarianism seems to employ in that to project notions of the human community onto relationships of the Trinity and questions the surety of our knowledge about the inner life of the Trinity.²⁷⁷

The particular use of the notion of *perichoresis* as used by Moltmann is also questionable. For example, Moltmann’s use of the idea varies from that of the Greek Fathers (Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus) from whom the concept originated.²⁷⁸ In fact the idea of *perichoresis* found in Greek fathers accommodates both asymmetry and symmetry in God’s relation to the

²⁷²Trevor Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 114

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1977, original 1970), 22.

²⁷⁵Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God’s Life*, 21.

²⁷⁶ See Mann Park, “Jurgen Moltmann’s Theology of the Trinity and its Significance for contemporary Social Questions: A Dialogical Approach,” 126. Accessed July 20.

<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10516/1/NQ54052.pdf>.

See also Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God’s Life*, 22.

²⁷⁷ See Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,”

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²⁷⁸*ET* 316.

world.²⁷⁹ The Greek Fathers' idea of *perichoresis* and the relationship between God and the world accommodates both the transcendence and immanence of God with no hint of God's life being contingent on the world; there is both discontinuity and continuity in God's relationship to the world. The discontinuity is in terms of God's transcendence, initiative and freedom. The continuity is in terms of affirming that the Trinity is an open and outgoing relationship in and through the indwelling of God's Spirit (*Shekinah*) in the world.²⁸⁰ Kilby suggests that often the concept of *perichoresis* is rather filled out with qualities and virtues about human relationships.²⁸¹

On the other hand, questions regarding the hierarchical or egalitarian nature of the church can be dealt with from another angle. It can be shown that even the hierarchical, institutional structure and ministries of the church are derivatively and functionally the work of the Spirit and Christ. Roger Haight, in an article entitled *The Structures of the Church*, argues from a socio-historical perspective that even hierarchical institutions may be measured on their functionality in terms of their abilities to mediate ministry. From a theological angle, the offices of the church like Bishops, Priests and Deacons can be said to be 'divinely instituted' in terms of being derivatively inspired through the gifts of the Spirit and therefore valid.²⁸² On the other hand, Joseph Fitzmyer, reflecting on the structured ministry of the church from

²⁷⁹ Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria (ca.650) in his *De Sacrosanta Trinitate* discusses *perichoresis* in terms of the incarnation of the divine and the deification of humans. But he brings the idea of a certain kind of asymmetry in that this union is taken to be achieved or initiated by the divine and not the human. In this case incarnational *perichoresis* is fully not mutual. The asymmetry as in John of Damascus maintains God's transcendence and initiative in the relationship between God and the world. While the symmetry lies as far as the paradox of the divine incarnation in humans is involved. See Verna Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35:1 (1991), 62.
²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ See Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," 432-445.

²⁸² Roger Haight, "The Structures of the Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30: 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1993), 403.

the Pastoral Epistles notes the importance of the hierarchical ministries of the church. He notes that ‘Although the Pastorals contain counsels that promote the respect for fellow Christians and for unity, the idea of the church as *koinonia* is wholly absent from them.’²⁸³ Thus the question is, can the principles of egalitarianism and hierarchy go together? Is church as an institution compatible with the church constituted of Spirit and Christ?

Miroslav Volf argues that it is commonplace in Protestant circles to pit the Spirit of God against church institutions. Institutions are most often thought of as ‘mechanisms of repression,’²⁸⁴ but he argues that the essential sociality of the church requires institutions and the question is not ‘*whether* the church is an institution, but rather *what* kind of institution it is.’²⁸⁵ Volf contends that ‘the church needs the vivifying presence of the Spirit, and without this presence, even a church with a decentralized participative structure and culture will become sterile, and perhaps more sterile even than a hierarchical church.’²⁸⁶ Haight argues that the idea of divine institutions does not mean that they are not changeable or cannot be diverse. This focuses on the dynamic character of the institutions whose functional validity depends on the ministry that is needed according to the changing times.²⁸⁷ Thus a hierarchical structure of the church with egalitarian principles, which is dynamic and open to change, seems to hold more promise.

Moltmann’s proposals regarding open invitation to the Lord’s Supper implied on Trinitarian and eschatological grounds are open to controversies. It is not clear

²⁸³Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Structured Ministries of the Church in the Pastoral Epistles,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* I 66 (2004): 584.

²⁸⁴Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan /Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 234.

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 235.

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 257.

²⁸⁷Haight, “The Structures of the Church,” 413.

whether this openness is implied with respect to other Christian denominations or other religious communities. Do the same criteria hold for both Christians and people of other faiths ? He does not explain whether different liturgies are needed for the unchurched or the unbaptised. Further consideration regarding the church traditions of the past two centuries is perhaps needed. Is there a way of having an open Eucharist, without neglecting the tradition that stresses ‘Christian formation’ and ‘catechumenal processes’? ²⁸⁸

2.2. An Ecclesiocentric Model from Stanley Hauerwas

Stanley Hauerwas’s ecclesiology occupies the central place in his entire project. He aims to integrate ethics and theology, and respond to contemporary concrete issues of the world from the particular vantage point of ecclesiology.²⁸⁹ Stanley Hauerwas’s project, with his background from the Yale school is a critical response to post-Enlightenment liberalism with its privatisation of religion, its co-option of religion as an instrument of the State and its devaluation of the church as a community. His ecclesiological project aims to secure a distinct place for the church as an ‘alternative community’ in contrast to the world. Not only that, Hauerwas seeks to highlight the fact that the church has something distinct to say to the world, a different and unique story to tell. Hauerwas maintains that the church’s task is to be the church and show the world what it is, and that the world cannot set agendas for the church. Hauerwas

²⁸⁸ See Melissa Marie Hartley, “The 1979 Book of Common Prayer and the Practice of the Open Table in the Episcopal Church”, (Ph.D. Thesis, New Jersey: Drew University, 2012); Rowena J. Ropelt, “Ecclesiology of the Open Table: Intercommunion in the Church of England, An Historical and Theological Analyses,” (Ph.D. Thesis, Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003).

²⁸⁹ See Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction. Interventions* (Grand Rapids/Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014) 17-38.

places a strong emphasis on the embodied character of Christianity, particularly in the church and its practices. Also being a theologian with a strong ethical emphasis, Hauerwas highlights the importance of these two disciplines working together.²⁹⁰ I will now highlight Hauerwas' ecclesiology in terms of its nature, ministry and mission.

2.2.1. *Nature and Ministry of the Church*

Hauerwas's idea of the church as an alternative community arises, as I have noted earlier, in reaction to modernity's project of liberalism and thereby strives for an alternative politics. Thus Hauerwas strongly argues for a distinctive politics to counteract this force of liberalism and the instrument best suited to do this is no other than the church. Hauerwas writes, 'Christianity is mostly a matter of politics - politics as defined by the gospel. The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a countercultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called church.'²⁹¹ The distinct nature of the church is brought about in contrast to so called 'Constantinianism.'²⁹² Constantinianism is the decisive shift in the nature and understanding of the church that took place when the church turned from a minority sect to the majority religion of the State after the reign of Constantine. Hauerwas notes that the problem with Constantinianism is its liberal universalism with its power to forge a set of principles which is taken for granted by the church.²⁹³ Hauerwas suggests that the church must develop a distinctive politics in contrast to such Constantinianism. This distinctive politics presupposes that the church is distinct or

²⁹⁰See *CC* 1 and *TT* 8.

²⁹¹*RA* 30.

²⁹²Hauerwas borrows this term from John Howard Yoder. See Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A Very Critical Introduction. Interventions*, 35.

²⁹³*AC* 18-19.

different from the world. He claims that, ‘The world cannot be the church, for the world, while still God’s good creation, is a realm that knows not God and is thus characterised by the fears that constantly fuel the fires of violence.’²⁹⁴

Where does the distinctiveness of the church lie? Hauerwas claims that the church’s distinctiveness from the world lies in the ‘virtue of the distinctive narrative that forms their community.’²⁹⁵ While admitting that every community has its own narrative or story that shapes it,²⁹⁶ the Church becomes distinctive by the particular nature of the overarching narrative.²⁹⁷ The church’s distinctive narrative is the narrative of God’s dealings with Israel, with a Christocentric perspective where the death and resurrection of Jesus becomes central.²⁹⁸ Hauerwas writes that ‘Jesus is the story that forms the church’.²⁹⁹

In a recent monograph entitled *The Holy Spirit* (2015), Hauerwas also shows that the Holy Spirit, who rests on Christ’s body, ensures the embodiedness of the church, by helping believers to live out the story. Moreover, he shows that it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that believers can witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit calls the church into existence, and through it the church avoids the polarity of the docetic³⁰⁰ and the ebionite³⁰¹ understandings.³⁰²

The story that makes the church distinct also enables the church to be living witnesses to the truth of the narrative through its practices. Hauerwas therefore, holds that salvation is integrally related to the church because he believes that truth or

²⁹⁴CC 109.

²⁹⁵PK 60.

²⁹⁶CC 121.

²⁹⁷Ibid., 4.

²⁹⁸PK 24-29.

²⁹⁹CC 50.

³⁰⁰The understanding of the church as a purely spiritual institution.

³⁰¹The church as purely a human institution.

³⁰²See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

falsity of Christian convictions cannot be addressed with doctrines and dogmas, but through the practices of the church as an embodied political community.³⁰³ In this sense, he writes, ‘For Christians, without the church there is no possibility of salvation and even less of morality and politics.’³⁰⁴ The statement ‘outside the church there is no salvation’ is actually about the nature of salvation that proclaims the Lordship of Christ to all creation.³⁰⁵ Hauerwas further maintains that for this truth or story to be told and lived, liturgy is more important than doctrine or creeds;³⁰⁶ therefore, his understanding of the marks of the church centres on preaching of the Word, sacraments and the life of the congregation. Baptism, for him, is the rite of initiation through which we become part of the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Eucharist, on the other hand, is an eschatological meal, which makes possible ‘a people of peace.’³⁰⁷

Hauerwas insists that the church’s distinctiveness also lies in the use of a different language, which can only be learnt through participation in the church. It is only by learning the language of the church that one can notice how that is different from the ‘language of the state.’³⁰⁸ This is also what discipleship is, which is learning different practices of a different community rather than merely a matter of ‘new or changed self-understanding.’³⁰⁹ In other words, Hauerwas endorses a strong community character to discipleship. For him it seems that one cannot be a true follower of Jesus without the church. Hauerwas cites the example of the disciples, called by Jesus, who were called to leave all that they had. This was a call to a

³⁰³AC 18.

³⁰⁴Ibid.

³⁰⁵AC 37.

³⁰⁶CC 240.

³⁰⁷Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” in *THR* 383.

³⁰⁸Hauerwas, “Why the Sectarian Temptation Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson (1988)” in *THR* 102.

³⁰⁹AC 107.

‘radical break with security and possessions, with the customs and habits of everyday life.’³¹⁰ Understood in terms of a radical break, a line is therefore drawn between the church and the world depending on those who confess Jesus as Lord and those who do not.³¹¹

Hauerwas proposes that the church is a social ethic, but challenges the notion that in being so the church should rally around others on the basis of common moral commitment and action. Instead, the church’s distinctive role is to show the world what it ought to be as God’s creation and he emphasises that it is only the church that can do this and nobody else.³¹² The church does not have a social ethic, it is a social ethic.³¹³

Hauerwas’s understanding of the church as a distinct and alternative community brought for him the charge of ‘sectarianism.’³¹⁴ He responds to it by negating that he ever suggested Christians should withdraw from the world, but that more positively Christians should ‘recover the church as the locus of habits of speech to sustain [...] lives in service to the world.’³¹⁵ In this regard Hauerwas proposes that the church be a tactic, not a strategy.³¹⁶ The church as a tactic does not withdraw from the world in terms of carving out a separate place for itself. The church remains within the space of the other and operates within the law of the space. It does not have the power to

³¹⁰Hauerwas, “Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom (1983),” in *THR* 133.

³¹¹ Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” in *THR* 375.

³¹²*Ibid.*

³¹³*RA* 43, *PK* 99.

³¹⁴See discussions in Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, Interventions,; John B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation*, Aldershot: Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology & Biblical Studies, 2003.

³¹⁵*AC* 6-7.

³¹⁶This concept of the distinction between tactic and strategy is drawn by Hauerwas from Michel de Certeau’s, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Stephen Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 35-36.

form a general strategy, but operates on its own as opportunity arises.³¹⁷ Nevertheless Hauerwas admits that the church is imperfect and has been unfaithful, but he maintains that ‘Holiness exists even in our unfaithfulness’.³¹⁸ He contends that the church’s unfaithfulness is no disqualification for it to being a witness to God’s kingdom.³¹⁹

2.2.2. *Mission of the Church*

For Hauerwas, the mission of the church follows from the above distinct nature of the church. On the one hand, it nurtures a distinctive people of peace as opposed to the world’s ways of coercion and violence, and on the other, it opens up the way for the care for strangers and the earth. The church’s mission is essentially an eschatological task towards building the kingdom of God. Hauerwas’s call for the integrity of the church does not mean that the church should withdraw from the economic, social, legal, and political life of our societies but the difference is in the nature of participation. He writes, ‘the most important political service the church does for any society is to be a community capable of developing people of virtue.’³²⁰ In this way the church provides the skills and interpretative space to ‘help us recognize the possibilities and limits of our society.’³²¹

Hauerwas is against abstract rights or theories of justice. In his opinion, issues of justice should spring from our distinct witness for God, which allows us to approach the issue of justice from a different angle than from where Post-enlightenment would

³¹⁷AC 18.

³¹⁸STT 10.

³¹⁹Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” in *THR* 373.

³²⁰CET 13.

³²¹CC 74.

stand.³²² In other words, the church's relation to the wider society is that of critical engagement, not simply taking society's norms and principles for granted. For the Christian, the distinctive story of Christ provides the 'means for recognizing and critically appropriating other stories that claim our lives.'³²³ For example, the church is expected to especially withhold cooperation with the forces (of the State) that resort to violence.³²⁴ In an essay published in 1985, entitled 'Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church,' he writes about how a church as a community of forgiveness can approach peace amidst the church and peace with the world by confronting the 'false peace' that the world has.³²⁵

Hauerwas sees the Kingdom of God as an eschatological reality and as a wider context of the church's mission. He agrees with the dynamic and eschatological character of the church. He writes, 'The church [...] can never be limited to the present moment but reaches back into history and forward into the future, as both directions provide an indication of what we ought to be.'³²⁶ In the church's relation with the kingdom of God eschatologically, I argue, Hauerwas could silence his critics regarding the charge of sectarianism. Hauerwas recognises that the kingdom of God is broader than the church.³²⁷ He maintains that Jesus's eschatological kingdom is a kingdom of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, and as members of this kingdom we are called to 'extend God's peace through the care and protection of his creation.'³²⁸ The openness of the church through the kingdom of God is further brought out when he writes, 'For the Church does not possess Christ, his presence is

³²²AC 45-68.

³²³CC 96.

³²⁴THR 104-105.

³²⁵Hauerwas, "Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church," in *THR* 325.

³²⁶CC 109.

³²⁷Hauerwas, "Why the Sectarian Temptation Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson (1988)" in *THR* 108.

³²⁸Hauerwas, "The Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom (1983)," in *THR*, 134.

not confined to the church. Rather it is in the church that we learn to recognise Christ's presence outside the church.'³²⁹ The church, on the other hand, has 'no right to determine the boundaries of God's kingdom,'³³⁰ and so it is our 'happy task [as Christians] to acknowledge God's power to make his kingdom present in most surprising places and ways.'³³¹

An interfaith engagement is implicit in this affirmation, but unfortunately Hauerwas does not proceed towards such an engagement. Instead he reacts against religious freedom or freedom of religion in the modern world, arguing that it dilutes the particular witness of particular religions and makes religious convictions a matter of private confession rather than a community affair.³³² Hauerwas's church is open to the outsider and the stranger as he argues that Jesus was himself a 'stranger'.³³³ He believes that the particularity of Jesus's story breaks down false boundaries and enables regard for the other and makes the church truly universal. He writes, 'The universality of the church is based on the particularity of Jesus's story and on the fact that this story trains us to see one another as God's people.'³³⁴ Furthermore, he suggests that there is no reason to believe that the church is superior to other communities. He writes that the church's narrative does not 'underwrite the assumptions of superiority or Christian dominance,' but 'to remind the Christians of the radicalness of the gospel.'³³⁵

Hauerwas's ecclesiology outlined above shows a clear ecclesiocentric model. His ecclesiocentric model secures for the church a distinct identity and ensures an

³²⁹Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," in *THR*, 372

³³⁰*Ibid.*, 377.

³³¹*PK*, 101.

³³²*AC*, 69-92.

³³³ Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," in *THR*, 385.

³³⁴*CC*, 51.

³³⁵*PK* 60.

alternative community in contrast to the world. An ecclesiocentric model clearly has its benefits in terms of ensuring a distinct witness for Christ in its proclamation of the unique narrative of Christ's death and resurrection. It shows the importance of a concrete community living out such a witness through worship, liturgy and practices of the church. His stress on discipleship and witness of the community for Christ is very relevant for any church for that matter. It also has a critical edge with respect to responding to the assumptions of the world. While all these benefits can be reaped from Hauerwas's ecclesiology, there are drawbacks especially when this ecclesiocentric model is situated in the North Indian context and particularly when seeking to develop a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with a relational-distinctiveness dialectics.

2.2.3. Drawbacks of Stanley Hauerwas's Ecclesiocentric Model

Hauerwas' ecclesiological project seeks to emphasise the church as a contrastive community with ideals and affirmations different to that of the world and the State. He seeks to secure a distinct witness for the church as a separate community. Although I have noted its values and strengths, Hauerwas's concept when uncritically applied in the North Indian context could lead to problematic results. The church in North India has different concerns compared to that of the West, as I have noted in the previous chapter. The churches in North India are not troubled by the challenges of Enlightenment liberalism, the modernist project of rationalism or individualism, nor non-religious secularism, philosophies or cultural ideologies and traditions of the West. Instead one of the struggles of the church in India is its foreign nature which

has resulted in the alienation and separation of Christian communities from their North Indian culture, tradition and the wider community. This alienation has continued for centuries and while such separation and distinction has successfully made the church a distinct community, it has failed miserably in its witness. No wonder the church in North India continues to be a miniscule minority after two millennia of Christian presence. It is clear from the above context that while North Indians admired Jesus, they were extremely critical of the foreign, colonial and alien nature of the church on North Indian soil. In other words, there needs to be recognition more of continuity than discontinuity between Indian church and wider society.

Hauerwas's project affirms that it is only through the faithful witness of the church as an embodied community and through its practices that the unique story of the death and resurrection of Jesus can be proclaimed. This solely ecclesiocentric witness of the gospel is also problematic when viewed in relation the North Indian context. The question has to be asked as to what kind of witness for the gospel the church, in its nexus with colonialism, has given through two centuries of subjugation, domination and exploitation of the Indian people? According to Hauerwas's argument, it would follow that if the church fails to witness faithfully to the gospel, the gospel itself is discredited as the church is the primary locus for such a witness. In the North Indian scene, it is clear that the church has failed its witness, as the gospel mediated by the church was discarded by the people. However, Hauerwas is only partly right because the gospel seems to have travelled different routes, through unofficial channels, through missionaries' sacrificial efforts and labours of love,

through education and medical missions³³⁶ and created communities, who believed in Christ, but who were not willing to be part of the imperial and colonial church. This again shows that there could be ways and practices that are not bound to the church's institutional practices, which can be an effective witness to the gospel too. Moreover, Hauerwas' contrastive ecclesiology seems to have handicapped him in his relations with the wider society. The only relation that the church seems to have is a critical relation to the world without any space for amicable engagements. His theology on behalf of strangers and others seems to be peripheral at best and simply an add-on to his ecclesiology. In the North Indian context, with the history of alienation and separation between different communities, the church needs to build bridges with other religions and cultures to develop integral relationships with them so that the damage that was done during the colonial times is rectified.

Again Hauerwas's ecclesiology seems to be inadequate for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology since his ecclesiology does not show the potential of a dialectical engagement with other communities and the world, which is required for our project. Nor does it emphasise the perspective of the Spirit adequately in order to develop a Spirit ecclesiology. His ecclesiology seems to be lopsided in terms of the distinctiveness based on the Christological basis of the Church while neglecting that the Spirit of God is at work even beyond the church. In his ecclesiology, God is somehow bound within the church.

In the preceding discussion I dealt with Moltmann and Hauerwas' models and approaches and offered general critiques for the same. In the following I will

³³⁶See the chapter on mass movements and medical and technical missions in India in C.B. Firth, *Introduction to Indian Church History*, 197-214.

proceed to discuss a Christo-theocentric model with Kathryn Tanner which will also be a critique and alternative to both the above models.

2.3. A Christo-Theocentric Model with Kathryn Tanner

Kathryn Tanner has not explicitly discussed the church in her writings.³³⁷ However, in most of her works clear models for the human community are recognisable. In the ‘Introduction’ to a recent book entitled *The Gift of Theology: The Contribution of Kathryn Tanner* (2015), she is classed as a ‘constructive theologian;’ among those who deal with the question of whether theology has anything important to say to the world and our way of life.³³⁸ In her own words Tanner’s theology concerns ‘how might a contemporary Christian theology promote (or not) a more adequate understanding of the world and a more just way of living?’³³⁹ Tanner’s model for the human community can be described as Christo-theocentric since it is based on the transcendence of God and the emphasis on the link between God and humanity, the incarnation of Christ. This forms an important basis for nearly all her theology. In this section my focus will be to draw out this Christo-theocentric model for the human community from her writings and point out the ecclesiology inherent in them. Tanner’s approach will be shown here as a critique and an alternative for both

³³⁷ See Brad East, “An Undefensive Presence: The Mission and Identity of the Church in Kathryn Tanner and John Howard Yoder”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68 (3) (2015): 328, 329.

³³⁸ Rosemary P. Carbine and Hilda P. Koster, “Introduction: The Gift of Kathryn Tanner’s Imagination,” in *The Gift of Theology: The Contribution of Kathryn Tanner*, edited by Rosemary P. Carbine and Hilda P. Koster, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) xxvi.

³³⁹ Kathryn Tanner, “How My Mind Has Changed: Christian Claims,” *Christian Century* 127, no. 4 (2010): 40 cited in *The Gift of Theology: The Contribution of Kathryn Tanner* , xxvi.

Moltmann's Social Trinitarian model and Hauerwas' ecclesiocentric post-liberal approach.

2.3.1. *Tanner's Christo-Theocentric Model as Critique of Social Trinitarianism*

Tanner's Christo-theocentric model will be dealt with first as a critique of the Social Trinitarian model as in Moltmann. In her work, *Christ the Key*, she highlights several problems about Social Trinity. Firstly, she argues that the claim that Trinitarianism is better than monotheism for socio-political purposes is faulty. This is because Trinitarianism has not always been an egalitarian construct, as Tanner shows that it rose in 'tandem with Christian support for an increasingly centralised Roman emperor'³⁴⁰ after Constantine. Instead, monotheism could well suggest rightly that no one, no earthly Lord, shares or stands in as God's representative.³⁴¹ Secondly, she fears that, without some sort of Tritheism it is not possible to translate relationships among the Trinity to distinct and separable relationships among human individuals.³⁴² Thirdly, following on from the above, a mistaken notion emerges that divine persons, constitutive of their relations and acts, could easily square with fostering an egalitarian community. In fact, the divine persons themselves seem to have a hierarchical relationship. Tanner notes that 'Order among the divine persons is thereby ripe for justification of hierarchy. It easily supports claims of fixed social roles, and the idea that people are equal despite the disparity of their assignment to such roles' is faulty.³⁴³ Fourthly, even if divine genders are not understood strictly

³⁴⁰CK 208-209.

³⁴¹Ibid.

³⁴²Ibid., 210, 211.

³⁴³Ibid., 211.

or even if one completely does away with them, there remains the problem of ‘unassigned genders’³⁴⁴ leading to ‘heterosexism’³⁴⁵ and the consequent inappropriateness of such models for the human community.³⁴⁶ Thus Tanner shows that Trinitarianism could be as dangerous as monotheism. Further, she points out that this rules out the ‘progressive political’ potentials of monotheistic religions like Judaism and Islam and thus drives an unrealistic wedge between monotheism and Christian Trinitarianism;³⁴⁷ only a particular type of Trinitarianism could be viable if at all. For this she refers to the ‘politically progressive theologians’³⁴⁸ proposal of a perichoretic relationship among the trinity as a viable model. While acknowledging that it has social and political implications, she asks how this perichoretic relationality is compatible especially with the Father-Son hierarchical relationship in the economy.³⁴⁹

Further, the increasing modification of this perichoretic relationship by theologians in terms of redefining the persons and relations ultimately shows that Trinitarianism can be modified in accordance with one’s own inclinations and thereby risking the loss of Trinity’s unique characteristics. Ultimately, it gets to the stage where we know no more about the Trinity than we do about human relationships and Trinitarianism as a concept then ceases to contribute anything new.³⁵⁰ A significant problem Tanner highlights, as pointed out earlier is that we are not absolutely sure what we mean by our affirmations of the Trinity, especially in terms of persons or relations or the *perichoretic* nature of it. This is due to our

³⁴⁴Ibid., 216

³⁴⁵Ibid.

³⁴⁶CK 216.

³⁴⁷Ibid., 217.

³⁴⁸She takes Moltmann as an example.

³⁴⁹CK 217,218, 219.

³⁵⁰CK 220-221.

finitude, sin and suffering existence that is different from the life of God. This is also because the perichoretic co-inherence of divine persons cannot be taken for granted for human relations.³⁵¹

Thus Tanner suggests an alternative model to Social Trinity for the church or human community. It will be seen that in this Christo-theocentric model, the transcendence of God, our limitation as sinful human beings and our hope of being taken up into the Trinity by grace through Christ's incarnation provide a basis for the human community or the church in two different ways. It provides a paradigm for the believing community to be in relationship with its Creator through reverence, worship and adoration while simultaneously providing a model in Jesus to be followed.

Tanner argues that Christology drawn from the relationships of the second person of the Trinity is a better, simpler and more direct way of expressing the God-church-world relationship.³⁵² To counteract the problems mentioned so far, Tanner suggests that the Trinity in the economy, the second person of the trinity should be our model. The essential premise of this model is the difference or contrast between God, 'the wholly other', and ourselves. Tanner argues that in this scheme there is no effort to close the gap between the Trinity and human beings. Rather it opens up an avenue to look at what the Trinity has done for us in Christ. She writes,

The trinity does not do so, however, in the way the previous strategy (Social Trinity) suggested – by showing us a form of itself that we can hope to approach and thereby providing us with an external model to which we might more easily conform. The trinity in the economy does not close the gap by making trinitarian relations something like human ones, but by actually incorporating the human into its very own life through the incarnation. We are therefore not called to imitate

³⁵¹Ibid., 222-224.

³⁵²Ibid., 207-208.

the trinity by way of the incarnation but brought to participate in it.³⁵³

Tanner actually points out with Richard Bauckham that there is no biblical basis that suggests human relationships ought to reflect Trinitarian relationships and argues that the N.T. theme about the image of God is not to be used in this way.³⁵⁴ Here the differences between the Trinity and us fuel the hope of us being taken up into the Trinity's life through the second person. The fact of our finitude and sinfulness does not stop us being united with God through Christ. Here the Trinity does not have to stoop to become like us, but we are called to become like Christ.³⁵⁵ She writes, 'The Second Person of the trinity takes the humanity united to it into its own relations with Father and Spirit; and we are to enjoy those same relations through him by the power of the Spirit.'³⁵⁶ The gap between the Trinitarian relations and the human relations are not closed up by assuming that both those relations are similar but by joining the two different human and divine relations together into one in Christ in his incarnation.³⁵⁷ Tanner argues that this avoids two problems in the earlier model of Social Trinity. One, it avoids the problem of superfluity and redundancy in the scheme of Social Trinity, which ultimately comes to the point where Trinitarian relations resembles so adequately human relationships that there is nothing new to know from the former. Second, it avoids the presumptive hope that Trinitarian relations are close enough to be imitated by human relations.³⁵⁸ How this entire scheme works out is that human

³⁵³ *CK* 234.

³⁵⁴ See Richard Bauckham, "Moltmann's Trinity and the Kingdom of God," 160, cited in *CK*, 234.

³⁵⁵ *CK* 235,236.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *CK* 235.

beings while remaining fully human are made into the image of God not by their nature, but by being participants in the Trinitarian life through Christ.³⁵⁹

Tanner however contends that modelling our relationships on the Second Person of the Trinity has to be further qualified. Are we to look at the Son's relationship with the Father for our human relationships or Son's relationship in the flesh with human beings? Tanner argues that, in the first place, the Son's relationship with the Father and the Spirit cannot be assumed to be similar to Jesus's relationship with other human beings. She suggests that Jesus's relationship with the Father can only be imitated in terms of 'relations of worshipful dedication to the Father's mission, empowered by the Spirit'³⁶⁰ but Jesus' relationship with other human beings can be actually a model for our relationships. Tanner writes:

Jesus' life in short, exhibits not just the sort of relations that humans, in the image of the Son, are to have with the Father and the Spirit-relations of worshipful dedication to the Father's mission, empowered by the Spirit-but, in his relations with other people, Jesus also shows how those relations with the Father and the Spirit are to work themselves out in community with other people. If one wants to know how a trinitarian life impacts one's relations with other people, this second part of the story is very obviously the place to look: Jesus' relations with other people constitute the sort of human relations that the economy of the trinity itself specifies. Jesus' way of life toward other people as we share in it is the trinitarian form of human social life.³⁶¹

Tanner moves further to suggest that through Christ and the work of grace, Christians as a body are taken up into the Trinitarian dynamic of oneness and diversity and

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 236.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

moves together rather than the Trinitarian relationship itself becoming a model for the human community's unity and diversity.³⁶²

Tanner further argues that the incarnation can be a better analogy for the Kingdom of God than the Trinity. The Trinity suggests that the Kingdom of God ought to be life-affirming, Spirit-filled community for the utmost flourishing of all. It suggests a community of mutual fulfilment for one and all. Tanner contends that incarnation does this and more in a different manner. Tanner argues that it 'sets up kinship, in this case between humanity and divinity, a community of now mutual fulfilment in that the human is to benefit from what the divine already enjoys'.³⁶³ She maintains that through Christ we are brought into an 'unnatural' community where diverse people once divided are brought together and made one in Christ in the same way as the humanity and divinity of Christ.³⁶⁴ Thus, modelling the human community or the church on the Second Person's relationship with the Father and the Son brings us closer to evaluating the goals of a particular community. The evaluation can be in the nature of:

Are those communities dedicated to anything like what Jesus was dedicated to in his relations with other people? Are they dedicated to policies ensuring the comprehensive well-being of all their members, especially the disempowered, following Jesus' own concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of the poor and suffering?³⁶⁵

In the above discussion I have shown how Tanner's Christo-theocentric model models the human community on the relationships of the Second Person of the Trinity. I showed that it is premised on the transcendence of God which removes a lot of problems of the Social Trinitarian model and allows an easier avenue for us to

³⁶² CK, 238.

³⁶³ Ibid., 241.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 241.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 243.

model the human community or the church on. I will further show that the same Christo-theocentric model in terms of God's transcendence, our status as God's creatures and Christ forms the basis for Tanner's arguments for a human community or church with elements of self-critique, social justice and a relational community of diversity and particularity. It will be seen that this form of human community with post-modern leanings is in contrast with the post-liberal assumptions found in Hauerwas.

2.3.2. *Tanner's Christo-Theocentric Model as Building a Community of Socio-Economic Justice.*

In Tanner's Christo-theocentric model, the concept of the transcendence of God serves as the basis for conceiving of a human community or church that is concerned with 'cosmoswide transformation of the broadest possible socio-economic and political sort.'³⁶⁶ God's transcendence and God's grace correspond in Tanner to provide alternative socio-economic structures. This is encapsulated in the notion of God as the giver of all good gifts.³⁶⁷ Tanner stresses that God's gifts to humanity and the world are unconditional and they ought to elicit Christian social responsibility towards others.³⁶⁸ Particularly, she explores the contradictions of God's gifts and God's grace in the inequalities and competitive culture created by

³⁶⁶ Kathryn Tanner, "The Church and Action for the World: A Response to Amy Pauw," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57/2 (2004): 228.

³⁶⁷ *POG* 155.

³⁶⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *The Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005). See See Carbine and Hilda P. Koster, "Introduction: The Gift of Kathryn Tanner's Imagination," xxx.

global capitalism. God's gracious gifts of grace imply that gifts are for all and to be equally shared in contrast to capitalistic assumptions of selfish ownership.³⁶⁹

The notion of divine transcendence is also used in a different sense by Tanner. This transcendence also recognises the finite nature of human ideas, proposals and norms, their historical and social conditioning and their fallible character.³⁷⁰ It stands as a protest against all absolute and unconditional claims. God's transcendence and therefore the illogicality of absolutising any particular social or political agenda or movement provide resources for Tanner for a progressive social agenda with radical and revolutionary effects.³⁷¹ Using the notion of divine transcendence Tanner makes a case for Christian opposition to fixed hierarchies of superiors and subordinates, and to oppressive relations of dominance and oppression and intolerance towards others.³⁷²

Tanner's Christo-theocentric model of divine transcendence and the corresponding respect due as God's creatures, along with a postmodern perspective helps her to conceive of a community featuring diversity and particularity, while critiquing the post-liberal assumptions of the Christian community. This also shows that Tanner leans towards a permeable character of the Christian community. Tanner argues that all God's creatures due to their relationship with God are to be respected. This means that a decent life is a question of right for all God's creatures. This includes a critical self-reflection of the society or particular community so that the

³⁶⁹ This is the central argument in Tanner's book *Economy of Grace*.

³⁷⁰ *POG*, 56-57, 66-69.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 130-132.

rights of health-care, housing, and a decent wage etc can be met.³⁷³ Tanner correlates respect for others as God's creatures with the respect for particularity. She writes,

The claim that human beings are due respect as creatures of God is a standard for respect for all but it is not a standard that requires anyone to renounce her or his particularity by conforming to it[...] My standard for respect points away from itself, therefore, to distribute a worthiness for respect to the distinctive particularities of others.³⁷⁴

The basic notion of the otherness of God and the respect due as God's creatures fuels Tanner's motivations towards justice. She writes that the 'fundamental implication of the simple claim of living lives under God, a concern for justice should be part of all those ends to which human beings are called.'³⁷⁵ The respect owed as creatures of God blocks motivations for assimilating others to oneself. As God is the other, one's relation with God is the relation of difference or plurality in which the other is recognised as the other. In this scheme others are allowed to be others without coercion or which is the foundation of respectful relations with others.³⁷⁶

2.3.3. *Tanner's Christo-Theocentric Model as Critique of Hauerwas' Post-liberalism*

Drawing on God's transcendence, Tanner's critique of post-liberal assumptions is basically against discontinuity between the Christian community and the world or the wider society or culture. Post-liberalism conceives of culturally defined social groups, and particularly Christian communities as distinct units whose identity is built out of discontinuity with the wider society or culture. Tanner notes that this

³⁷³ *POG* 179-180.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 193-224.

form of identity building is unreal as the church is also part of the society or culture in which it belongs. Contrary to post-liberal assumptions, she maintains that ‘Christian identity itself is relational’ and that it cannot be secured by sharp boundaries. Essentially, from a postmodern perspective Tanner maintains that sharp cultural boundaries do not establish a distinctive way of life as the post-liberals affirm. ‘Boundaries are determined [...] by how a Christian way of life is situated within a whole field of alternatives.’³⁷⁷ She shows that drawing sharp boundaries does not settle anything because essentially there are elements in religious society that are borrowed from the wider culture. She contends that ‘Christian social practices form a voluntary association within a wider society, rather than a separate society in and of themselves.’³⁷⁸ Tanner is in favour of a church that is

analogous to a new social movement, an association with a social agenda (but not exclusively so), that takes people in in order to change their ways (say, by consciousness-raising) but that also intends to shake up the social practices of those outside, and not just by bringing them into the fold.³⁷⁹

In this way she prefers to think of the Christian community as essentially relational. She argues that ‘A Christian way of life is [...] essentially parasitic; it has to establish relations with other ways of life, it has to take from them, in order to be one itself.’³⁸⁰ Tanner argues that the church’s identity is essentially hybrid and is determined at its boundary. She opines that,

The boundary [...] allows Christian identity to be essentially impure and mixed, the identity of a hybrid that always shares cultural forms with its wider host culture and other

³⁷⁷ *TOC* 111.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

religions.’³⁸¹ ‘[...] the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not much formed *by* the boundary as *at it*,’³⁸²

Tanner’s conceptions of the church thus move away from an ecclesiocentrism found in Hauerwas. The church for her is where God continues to be central and Christ’s work in the Spirit is highlighted. She manifests her Christo-theocentricity when she defends her theological stance putting emphasis on Christ’s work through the Spirit in and beyond the church. She explains:

I have therefore tried my best to stress the difference between humans and Christ, and to give the privilege to him (not the church) as our means of access to the fount of goodness he calls Father by the power of the Spirit – Christ’s powers are never transferred to Christians as their own property. I have also strongly stressed the universal reach of Christ’s work in ways that would not limit Christ’s influence to that of the church; there is every reason to think that, on my account, the Holy Spirit works to bind human life to that of Christ beyond the reach of explicitly Christian worship and witness.³⁸³

Brad East captures Tanner’s ecclesiology succinctly. He maintains that,

Kathryn Tanner’s ecclesiology is marked by a theocentric universalism of radical gift-giving, epitomised in the free grace of the Word incarnate and manifested in a human community as messy as any other, but which for just that reason remains resistant to all attempts to arrest or subdue God’s freedom. Turned towards the world in unanxious mission, the church becomes ‘a community of mutual fulfillment’; in the gracious cycle of baptism, eucharist, commission and return, human persons are caught up into the life of the triune God, blessing as they have been blessed, performing (out of) the indiscriminate economy of grace.³⁸⁴

In other words, Tanner’s ecclesiology talks about a human community where God’s grace and the Word are active and manifest in the life of the community. Yet such

³⁸¹ *TOC* 114.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁸⁴ Brad East, “An undefensive presence: the mission and identity of the church in Kathryn Tanner and John Howard Yoder” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68 (3) (2015): 332.

divine manifestation does not take away God's freedom and otherness. On the other hand, through participation in the ministry and mission of the church, believers are caught up into the triune life of God by grace.

As we sum up Tanner's position for our purposes, her Christo-theocentric model therefore provides the church on the one hand with an easier structure in the Second Person of the Trinity as a route to conceiving human relations in contrast to the problematic model of Social Trinitarianism. Tanner's model based on the transcendence of God and dignity of God's creatures provide avenues for a self-critical stance and a socio-political critique of the society towards human social justice. It also upholds the dignity of the particular and the other in human relations. It rescues the Christian community from the exclusivity and rigid boundaries and provides a relational character to the same. It presents a solution to several of the problems encountered in the Social Trinitarian model (as in Moltmann) and adequately resolves the non-relationality of Hauerwas's ecclesiocentric model.

2.3.4. Drawbacks of Tanner's Model

The above discussion brings out the significance and strengths of Tanner's model for the human community or the church. Now the question is; is Tanner's model fully adequate to develop a permeable Spirit ecclesiology? I have shown that her model leans towards a permeable ecclesiology in terms of negotiable borders between the Christian community and other communities with regards to intercultural exchange. It also holds out a theology of particularity and the other and seeks to find a basis of socio-economic justice in the human community. However, Tanner's model is not

fully adequate for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology for the following reasons: first, Tanner's does not fully flesh out what her model would mean for developing an ecclesiology. In other words, Tanner does not have a full-fledged ecclesiology which could be delineated in terms of nature, ministry and mission of the church. Second, her model as I mentioned can be described as Christo-theocentric and places little emphasis on the work of the Spirit. She of course develops the mutuality of the Father, Son and the Spirit in her understanding of the Trinitarian relations³⁸⁵ but this dynamic fails to be explicit in the economy of God's relationship with the world concretely. In a Spirit ecclesiology, the Spirit's role will be important to consider along with the Son. In her model the Spirit's presence and work in the world are not equally emphasised. Third, although Tanner tries to develop a theology of diversity, and particularity, what is missing is a dialectical emphasis integrating universality-particularity and unity and diversity. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology would essentially need to integrate the above dialectics into its scheme. Fourth, her concern for socio-economic justice and critic of society based on the otherness of God is commendable but there is a lacuna concerning the Spirit's role as liberator or Christ's death and resurrection as reinforcing people's freedom from unjust structures. Fifth, she does not have an explicit theology of religions or interfaith relations in her theology which is important for the relationality aspect in the North Indian context.

For these reasons I will examine another model which will hope to fulfil the criteria for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology and provide the dynamics that are lacking in the above models. The following section focuses on determining the particular shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with the Spirit ecclesiology of Amos Yong.

³⁸⁵ See *CK*, 140-206.

SECTION THREE: THE SHAPE OF A PERMEABLE SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY WITH AMOS YONG

3.1 Exploring Irenaeus's Metaphor as a Model for a Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology

I have previously argued that for permeability of the church the relational-distinctiveness dialectics is needed and that can be supplied by a joint working of the Spirit and Christ. The working of this dialectics could be more nuanced than simply assuming that the Spirit's role is the relational dimension while role of the Word or Logos is the particular and the distinct. That is why a particular understanding of the Irenaean metaphor is called for which suggests that the Spirit and the Word *each* supplies both relational and distinctive dimensions. In other words, as the Spirit ensures the universal and the particular dimensions, so is the Logos or the Word both particular and universal. This is needed to ground the complex *distinctively relational* and *relationally distinct* dialectics that I have been arguing for which are necessary to develop a permeable church in North India. I will show that Amos Yong's efforts have been similar in terms of exploring the Irenaean metaphor to highlight the distinct, yet relational economies of both the Spirit and the Word in the world.

Originally, Amos Yong's concern was to acknowledge the particular role of the Spirit in God's economy so that it is not subordinated to that of the Word. His effort is to emphasise the distinct economies of both the Spirit and the Word, in addition to their reciprocity and conjunction; the latter always being highlighted in the Western

Christian tradition.³⁸⁶ Moltmann also seeks to maintain both distinction and mutuality in his Trinitarian understanding of the immanent Trinity, but as we have seen he fails to maintain their distinctiveness in the economic Trinity. Yong's apprehension is that, an emphasis on reciprocity over distinct economies subordinates the economy of the Spirit to that of the Son. To correct such an overemphasis and to bring a balance between the economies of the Spirit and the Son, he turns to Irenaeus's metaphor of the 'two hands of the Father.'³⁸⁷ Of course, Yong admits that Irenaeus originally used this metaphor to argue for the distinction between the soul and the flesh against his Gnostic critics. Nevertheless, as Yong suggests, this was done to carve out a distinct mission for the Son, to be incarnate; and the Spirit's mission was to apply the implications of the incarnation to the world.³⁸⁸ Yong suggests that the Irenaean metaphor allows us to recognise the economies of the Word and the Spirit as 'overlapping dimensionally.'³⁸⁹ He explains:

This allows for the interrelationship as well as distinction between both economies to be further defined as we gain theological, ontological and historical precision. At the same time, non-Christian faiths can be understood as belonging to both economies, but in different respects. For starters, then, it

³⁸⁶ The Western tradition has always highlighted the fact that the external works of God are undivided (Latin, *opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt*) The question of Trinitarian unity has largely overshadowed its diversity in the Western tradition.

³⁸⁷ The original text is as follows: "Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. *For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit* (italics mine), man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God" Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter VI, New Advent, accessed 28th September, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103506.htm>. For a detailed discussion on the thoughts of Irenaeus see Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997).

³⁸⁸ *DS* 61, 62.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 62. Yong's choice of the notion of dimension here is to avoid spatialisation of hierchialisation of reality in the recognition of unity above conflicts. See footnote 5, *DS* 62

allows that they be conceived in pneumatological terms, related but not subordinated to or redefined by the Word.³⁹⁰

Yong contends that the failure to differentiate between the economies leads to a definition of soteriology in ecclesiological terms, while acknowledging the distinction enables a 'robust trinitarian and cosmological understanding of soteriology to emerge in the long run.'³⁹¹ Yong thereby attempts to maintain both the relational and distinct components in the working of the Word and Spirit in the world by developing a 'Trinitarian metaphysics of creation.'³⁹² The reason for Yong's interest in developing such metaphysics is that it can prove to have potential for highlighting the relationship between one and the many, the unity in relationship to plurality. I have shown that there is conspicuous lack of discussion of the dialectic of unity in diversity in Moltmann, Tanner and Hauerwas. Although Moltmann somewhat emphasises on the diverse nature of the ministry of the church, he too fails to develop a particular orientation and basis for diversity while seeking relationality and unity. Yong shows why turning to such a Trinitarian metaphysics of creation is suitable for his project of emphasising relational, but distinct economies of the Spirit and the Word. He writes:

Most pertinent for our purposes is the perennial connection made between the Spirit and universality in the history of Christian thought [...] the Christian encounter with the non-Christian religions in the twentieth century has led many to align the domain of the Spirit with that of the cosmos or creation at large even as that of Christ's has been more strictly delimited to the incarnation and the church. What we have in common with everything and everyone else, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or gender, is our createdness-our dependence on something other than ourselves.³⁹³

³⁹⁰*DS* 62

³⁹¹*Ibid.*, 64.

³⁹²*Ibid.*, 104.

³⁹³*Ibid.*, 105.

To develop such metaphysics, Yong turns to Robert Neville, a philosophical theologian in the American pragmatist tradition. Yong draws from him his theory of creation *ex nihilo* in particularly addressing the problem of the relationship between the one and the many. Neville begins by exploring what the pluralities of the world are and that they are held together. Yong notes Neville's suggestion that 'the manyness of the world is held together in relative unity rather than being simply a welter of chaotic pluralities.'³⁹⁴ Yong agrees with Neville that 'a thing is what it is only by virtue of its being determinate relative to other things, and what relates any two things is itself a third.'³⁹⁵ Neville posits that God is the indeterminate, who holds together the pluralities of this universe. Yong argues that in this sense God is the indeterminate, the transcendent creator of all things *ex nihilo*. Creation is distinct from God in terms of being determinate by its relationship to other things, but Yong argues with Neville that the creative act of God is Trinitarian in character. Yong agrees with Neville that 'an analysis of the creative act itself reveals creator, created, and the power of creating that mediates between the two.'³⁹⁶ Conceived from another angle, this Trinitarian character unveils a harmonious configuration of pluralities bound together by norms of determinateness. These normativities in themselves are entirely transcendent and indeterminate since they are prior to all harmonies that exist. Yong explains what this implies when expressed in terms of the Logos / Word and the Spirit trajectory. He writes: 'What we have then is God as the aboriginal source, the Logos as the norm, and the Spirit as the power of the

³⁹⁴DS 105.

³⁹⁵Ibid.

³⁹⁶Ibid., 108.

eternal creative act, each relative to the created order.³⁹⁷ Yong contends that in this way it is possible to avoid the difficult conjectures of the immanent Trinity while at the same time understanding the Trinitarian act of God in creation clearly expressed through the joint working of the Spirit and the Word.³⁹⁸

Moving on further, Yong adopts and modifies the metaphysics of the American pragmatic philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, which categorises reality in terms of *firstness*, the quality of a thing in itself; *secondness*, the factuality of things in relation to others; and *thirdness*, the norms and generalities that mediate between the above two.³⁹⁹ Yong further explains thirdness thus: on an ontological level *thirdness* is relationality and process; on a metaphysical level it is rationality and legality that points to the Spirit as the divine wisdom or mind; on the logical level it is generality and vagueness. Yong elaborates the last as:

[. . .] suggestive of reality and of the relationship between the one and the many, the universal and particular. This is the Spirit as the universal-particular and particular-universal, the perennial hidden member of the divine trinity, always pointing away from the Spirit to the Father and the Son.⁴⁰⁰

Further, elaborating on such metaphysics Yong shows that the Spirit can be understood as ‘divine law that endowed reality with continuity and as the divine interpretant that is God’s experiencing, cognizing, evaluating and responding to the world.’⁴⁰¹ Thus applying Trinitarian relations to Peircean metaphysics, Yong maintains that the Father is the ‘qualitative source of creative efficacy’ and the Son is ‘the decisive sign or image of the Father through whom the Godhead is embodied

³⁹⁷DS 108.

³⁹⁸Ibid., 108-109.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 111.

and efficaciously interacts with the world,’ and the Spirit is ‘the interpretant of the divine relationality both ad intra and ad extra.’⁴⁰² Thus the firstness, with its attendant abstraction is correlated with the Father, the secondness with the concreteness of the Son, and the thirdness with the dynamism of the Spirit. William Oliverio notes that against Hegelian dialectics or dualism, Yong’s dependence on Pierce’s metaphysics leads him to claim that a relational pneumatology ‘mediates the poles of abstract and concrete as an essential third force.’⁴⁰³

Yong claims that the Spirit helps us to know reality by interpreting the symbolic in creation for us. ‘Every determination of being therefore reveals the divine through the Word and by the Spirit, at least partially. The more intense the concentrations of the form of the Logos in any field of the Spirit, the more harmonious the determination of being.’⁴⁰⁴ Yong is convinced that pneumatological relationality⁴⁰⁵ is crucial in order to understand the relationship of one and many, universality and particularity, God’s relationship to the world and vice-versa.⁴⁰⁶ He

⁴⁰²SWC 95.

⁴⁰³ L.W. Oliverio, Jr. “An Interpretive Review Essay on Amos Yong’s Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2009): 306.

⁴⁰⁴ DS 118.

⁴⁰⁵ To highlight pneumatological relationality Yong also takes recourse to Augustinian mutual love model. He takes clues from David Coffey and Thomas Weinandy to highlight the Spirit’s relationality to Trinity. For Coffey, see *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011) and *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For Weinandy, see *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995). Yong draws three implications from the mutual love model for pneumatology and the Trinity. First, as the mutual love of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit brings the triune life to fullness. Second, both the Irenaean and Augustinian models preserve the Spirit’s unique mission in both the immanent and economic Trinity, without subordinating it to the Son’s and Father’s roles. Third, the relationality of the Spirit plays a vital role in the doctrine of trinitarian coinherence. As the Father and Son’s mutual love, the Holy Spirit completes the triune identity of God; the Spirit emerges as a distinct person and as the one who fulfills the Father and Son’s communion. See SWC 73-75 cited and discussed in Steven M. Stuebaker, ‘Towards a Pneumatological Trinitarian Theology: Amos Yong, the Spirit and Trinity,’ in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship, Passion for the Spirit*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt, in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*, edited by Andrew Davies and William Kay, Vol. 14, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013) 87.

⁴⁰⁶SWC 59.

notes that ‘Pneumatological relationality, however, is a distinctively complex form of interrelationality which includes duality, transcends and yet preserves the distinctiveness of the transcended dyad even while such transcendence posits the third precisely as imminent in the dyad.’⁴⁰⁷ Yong quotes James Loder to further clarify the aspect of relationality of the Spirit:

That God is Spirit (John 4) and that the Spirit is also one member of the Trinity (John 17, Eph.2:18, 4:4-6) is not a contradiction. The potential confusion is resolved if it is recognized that it is inherent in the nature of the Spirit to be relational and at the same time to relate to itself. That is, both God is Spirit and has Spirit.⁴⁰⁸

Yong claims that a pneumatological theology holds dialectics in tension. He writes:

While pneumatology in abstraction gives rise precisely to the theological and philosophical wrong turns of speculative or absolute idealism (Hegel), a robust pneumatological theology brings vagueness and generality together with the distinctiveness, particularity, and individuality of concrete actualities. Here the subject-object distinction or difference is not only preserved but insisted upon, yet not in the Cartesian sense of re-asserting a metaphysical dualism between the knower and the known.⁴⁰⁹

While highlighting how a pneumatological theology brings together the universality and the particularity, Yong argues that the historical particularity of the incarnation of the Logos goes hand in hand with the cosmic universality of the Spirit. But on the other hand there is also a universal dimension to Logos as the particular dimension of the Spirit.⁴¹⁰ In order to elaborate on the above functionally, Yong describes the

⁴⁰⁷SWC 75.

⁴⁰⁸James Loder, *The Logic of Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989) 195 cited in SWC 57.

⁴⁰⁹SWC 104.

⁴¹⁰DS 116. Yong refers to Colin Gunton’s work here. See Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 180-209.

dimension of the Word as ‘the thisness and whatness of things [...]’; that of the Spirit is the howness and relatedness of things-their continuity and significance.’⁴¹¹ Yong explains that ‘the Logos as concretely manifest in Jesus is revealed to us by the Spirit. [...] Apart from the Logos, the Spirit is impotent and empty [...] whereas Logos-Christology accounts for the what of incarnation, the Spirit-Christology answers the question of how.’⁴¹² In other words, Yong claims that the determination of beings in creation is a joint action of the Word and the Spirit. He writes that both Word and Spirit are ‘universally present and active because they are at the heart of every particular determination of being, albeit in different ways.’⁴¹³ This correspondence between Word and the Spirit is supremely shown in Jesus’ incarnation. Yong writes:

Every determination of being exhibits the presence and activity of the divine being: Father creating something through the Logos by the Spirit. The person of Jesus is simply the most complete instance of this. It should therefore be clear that even as pneumatology needs Christology, so is the reverse true. Apart from the Spirit, the Word remains indeterminate.⁴¹⁴

In other words, every living being is determined by God’s presence in Word and Spirit, but it is only in Jesus that this mutuality is revealed perfectly. In terms of Logos Christology, following Neville, Yong argues that to say Jesus was the incarnation of the Logos is to say that the character of God is epitomised in Jesus in the ‘form, components, actuality and value’ of God in some perfect way.⁴¹⁵ In terms of Spirit Christology, Yong contends that the Holy Spirit is ‘the measure of divine

⁴¹¹*DS*, 116.

⁴¹²*Ibid.*, 119.

⁴¹³*Ibid.*, 116.

⁴¹⁴*DS*, 120.

⁴¹⁵*Ibid.*, 116-17. Cf. Robert Cummings Neville, *A Theology Primer* (Albany, NY: State University New York Press, 1991) 45.

activity, the guarantee of continuity in the divine plan of salvation, the legal guardian of the divine intentions, the mediator of the Logos to the world, and the presentational reality of God to the human inferential perception, illuminating especially to those who have faith.’⁴¹⁶ What this means is that the presence and activity of the Logos in Jesus and derivatively in creation is set within the movement of the force fields of the Spirit: ‘The Logos is the concrete form or pattern of each thing even as the Spirit is the power of its actualization and instantiation.’⁴¹⁷

Setting this dialectic in the context of the church, Yong explains that the church continues to be influenced by the life of Jesus, which releases a powerful force field, through the resurrection power of the Spirit. Yong suggests that the church has both continuity and discontinuity between itself and the incarnation through the Spirit. The continuity is in terms of the norms, ideals and values most completely revealed in the person Jesus. We get a heightened sense of the Spirit’s presence through our participation in Christ’s body. The discontinuity is in the imperfection of the church in following such norms. However, Yong claims that in the incarnation of Jesus and the Church, the actualisation of the Logos occurs by the working of the Spirit.⁴¹⁸ Oliverio admits that in this way the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete, the unity and plurality, the universality and the particularity works in Yong’s theology. He writes:

Yong’s understanding of the dynamism of reality [...exists] alongside concreteness and abstraction. Such a dynamic and relational metaphysic entails both unity and continuation in truth and plurality, difference, and change. Yong’s

⁴¹⁶*DS* 117. Yong shows this drawing on the charismatic Jesuit theologian Donald Gelpi’s pneumatological appropriation of C.S. Pierce’s categories as mentioned earlier.

⁴¹⁷*DS* 118.

⁴¹⁸*DS* 123.

metaphysics gives account of *both* the oneness *and* plurality of things.⁴¹⁹

In the preceding section, I have explored the potential of the Irenaean metaphor⁴²⁰ as the ground for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology and showed its usefulness in maintaining the dialectics of relational-distinctiveness in terms of the universal and particular, the spiritual and concrete, and unity and diversity. Now I will show how this dialectics plays out in the conception of the nature, ministry and mission of the church in Yong.

⁴¹⁹ L. William Oliverio, Jr, “The One and the Many: Amos Yong and the Pluralism and Dissolution of Late Modernity”, in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship, Passion for the Spirit*, 57.

⁴²⁰ Yong has been criticised for his use of Irenaeus’ model. Steven Studebaker points out that Yong’s use of the Irenaean metaphor of the two hands of the Father to highlight two distinct economies of the Son and the Spirit and an emphasis on the latter is controversial. At times it seems that the Spirit’s role, for example, in a theology of religions could proceed without a functional dependence on Christology. Though Yong emphasizes on the mutuality of the two economies generally, it seems that Christology comes after pneumatology instead of being simultaneous. But Veli Mati Kärkäinen observes that Yong essentially broadens the framework especially of his theology of religions through pneumatology but does not separate Christology from pneumatology. Yong has been commended for his efforts however to show that a pneumatological theology “grants God’s redemptive and empowering presence through Christ implicitly greater breadth” and for highlighting the Spirit’s witness to Jesus outside the boundaries of the church. But on the other hand, Pentecostal theologian Simon Chan observes that Yong does not represent the deepest Pentecostal instinct as he seems to surrender the particularity of Christ to the expansiveness of the Spirit. There are others who disagree. Ritchie notes that Yong might be representing the inclusive genre of the Pentecostals while Chan represents the exclusivist. For a critique of Amos Yong’s theology see *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship, Passion for the Spirit*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt, in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*, edited by Andrew Davies and William Kay, Vol. 14, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013)

3.2. Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology in Yong

3.2.1. *The Nature of Spirit Ecclesiology in Yong*

One of Yong's central theses on Spirit ecclesiology is found in his book *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*,⁴²¹ which states that 'the church is an organic, dynamic, and eschatological people of God called after the name of Jesus and constituted in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.'⁴²²

In terms of conceiving the nature of the church, one of the ways Yong maintains the dialectics we have previously mentioned is by holding together varied and even contrasting traditions of understanding the church. Yong tries to hold the classical, Reformation and contemporary understandings of the church in tension and contends that all these concerns should be taken into account when developing a contemporary ecclesiology. He begins by classifying ecclesiology historically and theologically into four types: 'classical', 'free churches', 'spiritual body' and 'post liberal ecclesiology.'⁴²³ The classical type holds that there is an integral link between Baptism and salvation, and the church's prerogative for baptism as initiation into the Christian community successfully accommodated the notion of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.⁴²⁴ The free-church ecclesiologies, following from the Reformation and through the idea of the priesthood of all believers, emerged as more congregationalist and democratic institution and through their pietistic influence emphasised an individualistic understanding of salvation of Christ instead of salvation mediated

⁴²¹*The Spirit Poured Out On All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic,2005)

⁴²²*SPOAF* 22.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴²⁴*SPOAF* 128. 'Outside the Church no Salvation'.

exclusively through the church.⁴²⁵ On the other hand, those who understand the church as a spiritual body, in Yong's terms, 'soteriological inclusivists,'⁴²⁶ share a notion of the church not as a visible, hierarchical and institutional body, but a church that is a spiritual reality.

This mystical-spiritual body of Christ, the church, therefore, would include those who explicitly confess the name of Christ and even those who are not aware of the name of Christ, yet are spiritually united to him by the power of the Spirit.⁴²⁷ The post-liberal ecclesiologies stress that the church should not be defined by outside forces, neither Constantinian (church as controlled by the secular state) or post-Enlightenment dictates of reason and liberalism. Rather, Christians and the church should be an alternative community, distinct with their own ethical principles, narratives and virtues that help to distinguish the church and also make the world aware of what it is.⁴²⁸ This parallels Hauerwas's ecclesiology as discussed earlier. Yong thinks that all of the above ecclesiological perspectives make valid contributions, which should not be brushed aside. Thus for Yong, conceiving the nature of the church includes a critical appropriation and holding of all these traditions in tension.

Yong claims that,

The classical ecclesiologies can no longer be simply dismissed in our ecumenical age, just as free-church ecclesiologies cannot be uncritically repeated. Further, the Pentecostal disposition toward spiritualizing the nature of the church demands that the promise and challenges of soteriological inclusivism be confronted. Finally, the

⁴²⁵*SPOAF* 128-129.

⁴²⁶*Ibid.*, 130.

⁴²⁷*Ibid.*, 130.

⁴²⁸*Ibid.*, 130-131. Yong in fact refers to Stanley Hauerwas and George Lindbeck while explaining this category.

embodied and communal vision of postliberal ecclesiologies is attractive for various reasons today.⁴²⁹

In other words, Yong seeks to open interactive spaces for conversation between different ecclesiologies. Various ecclesiologies have their contribution to make if one wants to build a contemporary ecclesiology. The classical ecclesiologies cannot be simply dismissed simply because they are time-worn. On the other hand the free-church ecclesiologies can be critically appropriated. The Pentecostal ecclesiologies with their inclination towards spiritualising ought also to be soteriologically inclusive. Moreover, the postliberal ecclesiologies can be relevant due to its particular stress on embodiedness.

From the perspective of a permeable ecclesiology with porous and softened borders, the above consideration- holding different traditions of understanding the church in tension- holds promises for softening of the borders of the churches between them. A possibility is opened here for more ecumenical dialogue and cooperation between the churches as they are led to consider and respect the positions and perspectives of others while holding onto their own. This opens the way for enriching each other's traditions through mutual dialogue and sharing of perspectives. Here it will be interesting to consider whether Yong's ecclesiological framework can accommodate or hold in tension Moltmann's Social Trinitarian model, Hauerwas' ecclesiocentric model and Tanner's Christo-theocentric models. Situating their models in the Irenaean paradigm would mean that Moltmann's relational character of ecclesiology in the Spirit would be complemented by the embodied contrastive character of Hauerwas's church; further qualified by the

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 131.

Christo-theocentric nature of the human community dependent on God and modelled on Jesus' life.

Yong moves on to deal with the four marks of the church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, in terms of the dialectics of universality-particularity, spiritual-concrete, unity-diversity and static-dynamic. Yong discusses the four marks drawing from Yves Congar's pneumatological ecclesiology, but goes beyond it.⁴³⁰ Yong's concept of oneness and unity recognises the essential diversity in the church and the world while affirming unity in the Spirit. Yong's concern is rather that unity should not be centred on a particular church and that both the spiritual and embodied realities of the church are upheld. In this endeavour, Yong uses and goes beyond Yves Congar's proposals of pneumatological ecclesiology, emphasising unity in terms of the centrality of the Spirit and Christ in contrast to the particular Roman Catholic self-understanding of unity only under the Roman Catholic Church.⁴³¹ In the Roman Catholic conception, the church is essentially understood to be united in the Petrine office, which Yong points out as a 'scandal of particularity in the ecumenical church's self-understanding.'⁴³² Instead, Yong contends that a pneumatological / Pentecostal ecclesiology would deny that the unity of the church is solely based on any one episcopate. Unity is both spiritual and concrete in Yong: he explains that unity is to be concretely manifested through the recognition of diversity among different forms of the church.⁴³³ Here the unity of the Spirit in the Church links itself to the concreteness of the manifested Word incarnated in the church through its embodiedness.

⁴³⁰See Yves Congar, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury/London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) in *SPOAF* 133.

⁴³¹*SPOAF* 135.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

Yong further notes that this unity is not the abstract unity of the so called ‘universal’ or ‘invisible’ church. It remains spiritual, but that does not negate the church’s eschatological, particularistic and sacramental aspects. Yong holds that there is an aspect of ‘Pentecostal sacramentality,’⁴³⁴ not in the sense of salvation mediated through priesthood or sacraments, but through the presence of the Spirit as in Jesus, in terms of an ‘incarnational logic’⁴³⁵ palpably, through ‘the materiality of personal embodiment and congregational life.’⁴³⁶ While concreteness and particularity is thus evidenced, the Spirit poured out eschatologically, the ‘Word made flesh and the Spirit breathing and making the Word real’⁴³⁷ in and through the church constitutes the one work of the triune God. Here, ecclesial unity is envisaged as both spiritual and embodied and exemplifies the notion of unity in diversity.⁴³⁸ However, this unity is not static as it is eschatological in the recognition of our status as being united, but also in a process of continued efforts at unity until its perfection is reached at the eschaton. Yong proposes that ‘the church is one only even while she is being made one’⁴³⁹ and at present, we have only a foretaste of this communion through the Holy Spirit in the church.⁴⁴⁰

A further dimension to unity of the churches and beyond is brought about by Yong’s linking of unity with the idea of hospitality of God. He states that ‘the Christian practice of hospitality is the means through which Christians encounter the *poiesis*⁴⁴¹ of the Spirit not only in and through other Christian movements (the

⁴³⁴Ibid., 136

⁴³⁵Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 136,137

⁴³⁸*SPOAF* 136,137.

⁴³⁹Ibid., 139

⁴⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Creativity.

ecumenical context), but also through those outside the church.⁴⁴² Yong explains ecumenical unity occurs through the pouring out of the Spirit ensuring that ‘the many tongues and many gifts of the Spirit are particular expressions of the church universal, each with its own role in the wider church and indispensable regardless of how small or insignificant such may appear.’⁴⁴³ Yong proposes a pneumatological solution to the challenges of ecumenism. He states that:

[...] if the challenges posed by ecumenical division do not seem capable of being resolved either through structural-institutional organization or through doctrinal-theological agreement, perhaps the many tongues of Pentecost is suggestive of a new model of ecumenical relationship which features unity precisely through diversity.⁴⁴⁴

Yong’s suggestion of the unity of the church centred on the Spirit and Christ following from the Irenaeus metaphor ensures, on the one hand, that the church’s institution and constitution is grounded on God. On the other hand, it rescues the church from ecclesiocentrism that prioritises one church over the other, which is a barrier to ecumenism. His holding in tension of the spiritual-concrete and the universal-particular dialectics of the nature of the church gives room for negotiating and softening of the borders among the churches that hold either of the poles. Actually Yong’s concept of unity and ecumenism somewhat resembles Moltmann’s dependence on the unity in the Spirit brought about by the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. Moltmann does not use the concept of hospitality to conceptualise unity as Yong does, however.

⁴⁴²HO 62.

⁴⁴³IDC 94.

⁴⁴⁴SPOAF 22. See Jakob D. Dodson, *Divine Hospitality and Human Diversity* in Amos Yong and the Foundations of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship, Passion for the Spirit*, 133.

Further dialectics are brought in with regard to Yong's understanding of the holiness of the church. This holds in tension the static and the dynamic, the individual and the corporate and an idea of sanctification that features a separated community while still engaging as a distinctively prophetic one. Yong agrees with Congar that a pneumatological / Pentecostal⁴⁴⁵ ecclesiology would hold the Spirit to be both the principle and sanctifying agent of the church, but reminds us that holiness is brought about as a dynamic eschatological gift.⁴⁴⁶ Sanctification is understood here as the setting apart of members of the body of Christ from the world by the Spirit for the work of the kingdom. The Spirit empowers believers with 'power from on high' (Luke 24:49; Acts. 1:8) in order for them to be witnesses for the kingdom.⁴⁴⁷ In this aspect, holiness becomes a dynamic reality while considered within the wider ambit of the Kingdom of God. This view of holiness also mediates between individual holiness- as in free-church traditions -and corporate ones, through participation in the practices of the church as in postliberal ecclesiologies.⁴⁴⁸ Yong's concept of holiness in the Spirit is concretised through the building up of an egalitarian community but with a distinguishing mark. Yong suggests that the pouring out of the Spirit has an eschatological dimension (Joel 2) that levels out 'socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender differences even while these [...] identify, mark and guide the people of God.'⁴⁴⁹ The distinguishing marks of the community here are the witness of Christ through the *kerygma*, but also the prophetic engagement and socio-ethically, its care for the least and the vulnerable.⁴⁵⁰ This understanding of

⁴⁴⁵In his corpus Yong uses pneumatological and Pentecostal ecclesiology interchangeably.

⁴⁴⁶*SPOAF* 139.

⁴⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁴⁸*SPOAF* 141.

⁴⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 140.

dynamic holiness has the potential to bring the churches together, appreciating each other's journey towards the goal of the kingdom, while avoiding complacency and a sense of superiority in inter-church relations. While on the journey of holiness, the church in the Spirit develops a critical and prophetic edge in its relation to the world. Yong thus comes fairly close to Moltmann in his view holiness as dynamic, and he also shares with Moltmann as sense that the building of an egalitarian community is dynamic.

Regarding the catholicity of the church, Yong once more brings forward the dialectics of the static and dynamic; particular (locality or concreteness) and universal. Yong's emphasis on catholicity is based on the eschatological universality of the Kingdom of God. These concepts are similar to Moltmann's understanding of Catholicity. In this sense a pneumatological / Pentecostal ecclesiology would affirm that the catholicity of the church cannot be separated from the universality of the kingdom which will be fully manifested in the end (Rev.21:22-26). Yong holds that this catholicity is both static and dynamic as 'the church is catholic and being made catholic.'⁴⁵¹ This catholicity is universal as the church extends the mission of Jesus in the Spirit to various peoples, tribes and nations, signifying the 'whole faith' as belonging to 'the whole body of Christ for the whole world.'⁴⁵² This universality is also particular as the church situates itself in diverse cultural / national contexts bound together by 'the experiences of Jesus in the power of the Spirit.'⁴⁵³ In this sense, the church's catholicity is integrally connected to missiological efforts that situate the Gospel in a particular culture, language and context. Here the basic assumption is that the gospel belongs to all peoples and particular peoples and that its

⁴⁵¹*SPOAF* 144.

⁴⁵²*Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁵³*Ibid* 145.

reception should be in one's own indigenous terms.⁴⁵⁴ This cultural mutuality on the other hand, argues Yong, provides 'theological rationale for embracing cultural diversity' that is 'embodied and environmentally rooted.'⁴⁵⁵ Yong holds that 'catholicity neither excludes nor minimises particularity; rather, each particular is caught up into the church catholic by the Spirit poured out on all flesh. In this way, the church's catholicity is informed concretely by her historicity and locality.'⁴⁵⁶

In terms of apostolicity, Yong understands it as following on from the apostles, and the proclamation by the members of the church of the apostolic message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Yong agrees with Congar that the Spirit empowers this missionary charge and the Spirit enables the correct faith to be preserved from error. Yong contends that 'the Spirit is [...] given to the Church as its transcendent principle of faithfulness.'⁴⁵⁷ Yong's effort of holding divergent views in tension is evident again as he addresses the controversial question of the apostolic succession of the papal office of Peter from a pneumatological perspective and seeks to build a bridge between the Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. Yong claims, through a rereading of the Jerusalem Council account (Acts 15; 16-18, especially the 15:28) that it was ultimately the charismatic illumination of the Spirit that sanctioned the apostolic authority to reach a final decision on the dispute and not the other way round.⁴⁵⁸ He hopes that in so far as the 'magisterium is led by the Spirit' there should not be a hindrance among other Christians to recognising the 'provisional authority

⁴⁵⁴Ibid., 145

⁴⁵⁵ Amos Yong "Poured Out on All Flesh: The Spirit, World Pentecostalism, and the Renewal of Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century," *PentecoStudies* 6, no. 1 (2007), 33-34.

⁴⁵⁶*SPOAF* 146.

⁴⁵⁷*SPOAF* 146.

⁴⁵⁸Ibid., 150.

of the Pope (or episcopate) as a symbolic re-presentation of the apostolic faith⁴⁵⁹ and in eschatological anticipation of its full realisation in the '*pleroma* of Christ' (Eph. 4:11-13).⁴⁶⁰ Yong claims that there is potential in the pneumatological perspective to build a bridge between different confessions that is divided on dichotomies in theology and practice. He argues that,

[...] it is perhaps only from a pneumatological perspective that the dichotomies between apostolic succession and restoration, between Episcopal and congregational structures, between tradition as past and as presently instantiated, between councils/creeds and kerygmatic proclamation, and so forth, might be overcome.⁴⁶¹

In the preceding discussion of the nature of the church, it is clearly evident that the relational-distinctiveness dialectics are played out in terms of universal and particular, spiritual-concrete, unity-diversity, static-dynamic and a bringing together of different traditions and perspectives of the church. This enables the church to be relational in the Spirit with other churches and traditions, yet brings a distinct and particular character regarding its own traditions. On the other hand, it enables the church to be particular and distinct regarding the witness of Christ while being relational in terms of its particular context. Here the distinctively relational and relationally distinct dialectics come into play leading to a permeable church in the Spirit.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 151.

3.2.2. *The Ministries of the Church in the Spirit*

In the ministries of the Church a clear joint working of the Spirit and Christ manifests itself through the church's liturgy and the sacraments. Here the ministries of the Spirit lead the believer into a deeper relationship with Christ. Yong understands the church to be a sacrament with the Spirit operative in and through worship, liturgy, baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is the presence and action of the Spirit that makes the whole church sacramental in its 'structures, institutions, practices, congregations and individuals, all inspired by the Spirit of God for the purposes of establishing the kingdom of God.'⁴⁶² Sacraments are not here limited to baptism and Lord's Supper, as in the Protestant thought.⁴⁶³ The acts of the Spirit in the church become all comprehensive as the entire liturgy or worship becomes a 'sacrament of the Spirit.'⁴⁶⁴ This notion of *church as sacrament* is not new. This type of ecclesiology began with Cyprian and Augustine, and was followed up by Aquinas among others.⁴⁶⁵ Avery Dulles argues that this model is especially useful to bring together an institutional and mystical (spiritual) model of the church and serves to solve the problem of the relationship between a visible community and a 'communion of grace.'⁴⁶⁶ In Yong the church as a sacrament becomes both spiritual and concrete through the joint action of the Spirit and the Word. In this sense, through the Holy Spirit, the

⁴⁶² *SPOAF* 156.

⁴⁶³ The Roman Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, Penance, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick.

⁴⁶⁴ Yong draws this phrase from 'Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000,' *The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life*, translated by Agostino Bono (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 92 and Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

⁴⁶⁵ See Avery Cardinal Dulles SJ, *Models of the Church*, Expanded Edition (New York: Doubleday, 2002) 55.

⁴⁶⁶ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 65.

eschatological resurrection power of Christ is made present in the worshipping community that is transformed progressively into the image of Christ.⁴⁶⁷

The presence and action of the Spirit enables ‘testimony, confessional praise, manifestation of charisms, of word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and tongues and their interpretations.’⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, in and through the liturgy and the Word of Christ, in the power of the Spirit, the church ‘accomplishes transformation, grants forgiveness, provides release, reconciles the estranged’ and ‘exorcises the demonic’ in our daily lives,⁴⁶⁹ emphasising both the spiritual and material (bodily) aspects. Thus a pneumatological theology of liturgy emphasises the ‘centrality of the Spirit’s presence and activity’ in the worship of God even as the Word of Christ quickens through the Spirit to give life to people not only in worship but in daily life.⁴⁷⁰ Here liturgy and worship though spiritual become embodied and concrete in the real lives of the people.

Yong’s understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper also holds in tension the action of the Spirit and the Word. In terms of Baptism he holds the significance of both water and Spirit baptism together. Yong upholds the role of the Spirit in both, along with its Christological implications. Following on from the document of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM),⁴⁷¹ Yong explains baptism. Baptism as a Christian rite includes the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit and their reception, and our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.⁴⁷² It includes the corresponding transforming act of God’s

⁴⁶⁷*SPOAF* 161.

⁴⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁷¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982)

⁴⁷²*SPOAF* 158-159.

grace on the community of faith in the 'entire process of initiation, confirmation, discipleship and ongoing...conversion.'⁴⁷³ Yong particularly stresses Spirit baptism along with this. He affirms that Spirit Baptism is an open invitation by Jesus to all (Jn. 16:7-8); including repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38); being justified, sanctified and made righteous through the Spirit's raising of Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:25). It also unites and empowers believers in the resurrected power of Christ in the Spirit and is the down payment for the eschatological redemption of God (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:21-22), which also implies redemption through *theosis* (deification) and consequent participation in the divine nature.⁴⁷⁴ What is evident in separately outlining the implications of water and Spirit baptism in the above is that while water baptism ensures participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and the community of new creation, the church, Spirit baptism actually enables repentance and transformation, and empowers this participation and sanctification of the baptised in Christ. Here one cannot occur without the other as both contribute to salvation.

Regarding the Lord's Supper, Yong understands it as creating an alternative community, providing prophetic direction and counter-discourse. He writes that the Lord's Supper 'celebrates its constitution through the transgression of all legal, class, gender, sexual, ethnic, and national boundaries.'⁴⁷⁵ This is the relational aspect of the Lord's Supper that creates an egalitarian community brought about by the action of the Spirit. This has parallels to the egalitarian community envisaged in Moltmann's Spirit ecclesiology. This same community with its prophetic Word introduces an

⁴⁷³Ibid., 160.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid., 102.

⁴⁷⁵SPOAF 165

alternative way of life and a counter discourse in contrast to the world.⁴⁷⁶ The Spirit also works simultaneously to make the community prophetic and to liberate individuals and communities in Christ ‘to enact the kingdom of the future in the present.’⁴⁷⁷

3.2.3 *Mission of the Church in the Spirit*

Yong’s concept of the mission of the church involves the broad spectrum from interfaith engagement to creation and cosmos. Here too it will be evident that Yong continues to maintain the dialectics of relational-distinctiveness in the church’s mission to other religions as well as to creation and the earth. Yong’s inter-religious engagement is built on the joint working of the Spirit and Christ in a Trinitarian framework. Here the relational aspect with other religions can be said to have been expressed in his development of the concept of ‘foundational pneumatology’ and a common human experience, which he terms ‘pneumatological imagination.’ Again it is evident that the universality found in this enterprise also includes concreteness and particularity. On the other hand, the distinctive and critical aspect of Christianity’s relationship with other religions is its continuing struggle to search for the criteria of discernment, which occupies a crucial position in his theology of religions.

Yong seeks to engage with other religions on the basis of his concept of foundational pneumatology.⁴⁷⁸ He deals with the particular nature of such

⁴⁷⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸Yong claims to have arrived at a Christ-centred and Spirit-driven theology and ecclesiology inspired by the work of the Roman Catholic theologian Adam Mohler to start with. But he goes beyond Mohler into what he calls ‘shifting foundationalism’ in a foundational pneumatology in the

foundational pneumatology in *Beyond the Impasse*,⁴⁷⁹ drawing on Donald Gelpi's⁴⁸⁰ foundational pneumatology but with a difference. Foundational pneumatology in Gelpi meant 'a fundamental category of reality, including God, as descriptive of human experience, and as both prescriptive and normative for the ways in which Christians (and others) have and should experience God.'⁴⁸¹ Gelpi took Christian conversion experience as normative, which Yong rejects as narrow and proposes instead a 'pneumatological imagination' as human experience.⁴⁸² The proposal of a common experience in terms of pneumatological imagination shows a holding in tension of several aspects of the dialectics of human experience. He writes that it is:

[. . .] a way of seeing God, self, and the world that is inspired by the [...] experience of the Spirit (and includes the dialectics of) Scripture and experience, of thought and practice, of theology and doxology, of reason and narrative, of object and subject, of a priori rationality and posterior empiricism, of the self and its sociohistoric location, in community, in all knowledge.⁴⁸³

The claim here seems to be that there is a general experience of God in humans through the presence and action of the Spirit, in its universality and particularity that can be a source of relationships and engagement between different communities and especially between the church and other communities beyond the church. What this kind of foundational pneumatology essentially does, according to Yong, is that it highlights the 'common themes of human religious quest'⁴⁸⁴ and experiences, and

direction of assigning particular agency to the Spirit in a Trinitarian framework, which Mohler could not ultimately arrive at, as Yong argues.

⁴⁷⁹Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: A Pneumatological Theology of Religions*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003). (Henceforth, *BI*)

⁴⁸⁰See Donald L. Gelpi, S.J. *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984)

⁴⁸¹*BI* 59-60.

⁴⁸²*BI* 60- 64.

⁴⁸³*BI* 64,65.

⁴⁸⁴*BI* 68-71.

encourages correspondence and contrasts with common human epistemological categories and natural sciences, thereby moving from a notion of ‘truth as coherence to truth as correspondence.’⁴⁸⁵ The aspect of searching for truth as correspondence opens the way for dialectical and dialogical relationships between religious communities. This aspect of foundational pneumatology seems to bring together people of different communities into a journey of searching and sharing of truth in collaboration with one another. While this suggests a sort of universalism, Yong claims that this approach is also particular as it tries to be applicable to particular contexts and traditions. He writes that such an approach of foundational pneumatology ‘in its aspiration to be globally accountable and applicable [...] makes itself contextually particular to each religious-cultural-linguistic tradition.’⁴⁸⁶ The concreteness of the common experiences of the Spirit is mediated through traditions, religions and the sciences, in fact through our entire lives. In proposing a foundational pneumatology Yong actually highlights one of the important bases of inter-religious engagement, which is the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. He argues that the awareness of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit particularly in a plural setting can lead us to the truth wherever it may be found beyond Western categorisations. Yong claims:

The universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit speaks of the universality of truth. Christian theology that claims to be true and universally applicable cannot continue operating according to the parochial categories of a Western, institutionalised Christendom. [...] In a multi-religio-cultural world, a Christian theology aware of the universal and prevenient presence and activity of the Spirit cannot but be open to the truths of the Spirit wherever they may be found.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵Ibid. 68-71.

⁴⁸⁶Ibid., 71.

⁴⁸⁷DS, 318.

Yet Yong does not stop at this initial attempt of foundational pneumatology as basis for interfaith engagement. Yong goes further and proposes a pneumatological theology of religions. His tentative propositions for such a theology of religions show the dependence on the joint working of the Spirit and the Word / Christ and holding dualities in tension: Yong contends that understanding this effort in the above framework enables the churches to recognise religions as created by God through Word and Spirit. This framework would enable us to hold general human experience and the experience of salvation in particular in tension. Yong claims that ‘Non-Christian faiths can be regarded as salvific in the Christian sense when the Spirit’s presence and activity in and through them are evident.’⁴⁸⁸ This theology of religions would acknowledge the complexity of religions as both consisting of the spiritual forces of the divine and the demonic, and should be able to discern between the two. Such a theology of religions would be able to learn from other religions, seek interreligious dialogue and participation while continuing to proclaim the Christian gospel of Christ in the eschatological horizon of the Spirit.⁴⁸⁹

The distinctive and critical edge to this pneumatological theology of religions is provided by taking seriously the question of discernment in terms of Christian relationship with people of other faiths and even in situations that suggest divine absence and plural spirits at work.⁴⁹⁰ Here he also acknowledges the working of both the Spirit and the Word / Christ. For Yong the criteria for discernment is both Christologically and pneumatologically conditioned.

⁴⁸⁸Ibid., 312.

⁴⁸⁹*DS*, 311-313.

⁴⁹⁰Yong deals with this topic of discernment in *DS*, 243-255 and in his later book *BI*, 129-162, where he seeks to develop a pneumatological theology of discernment

He affirms that,

[...] all things and events can and should be evaluated both pneumatologically and christologically [sic]. In fact, a more thorough understanding of anything or event cannot be attained apart from the acknowledgement and assessment of the contributions of both hands of the Father. [...] All pneumatological criteria, however, have their corresponding Christological dimension.⁴⁹¹

Yong correlates such a pneumatological theology of religions to the concept of the hospitality of God in Jesus. Through the concept of hospitality he seeks to widen the engagement to include diverse people seeking unity in the Spirit. This shows the emphasis of unity in diversity in his inter-religious engagement. He claims that,

[. . .] only a pneumatological approach to the religions enables us to hold in tension the distinctive confessional claims of Christian faith alongside the actual claims of the religions themselves, because the Spirit's being poured out upon all flesh does not cancel out but instead preserves the diversity of human voices.⁴⁹²

In the *Hospitality and the Other*, Yong explores this further through his theology of 'hospitality.' He shows that through the radical hospitality of Jesus and the early church practices, participation in the hospitality of God involves the reconciliation of aliens and strangers to God.⁴⁹³ Yong suggests here a 'stranger-centred' rather than a 'church-centred theology.'⁴⁹⁴ There is a particular emphasis on inclusiveness and diversity here. According to him, a reading of Acts 2 could be that the early church was beginning to understand itself as the new people of God, no longer limited to the Jews, but incorporates the gentiles also. Herein, the borders of

⁴⁹¹DS 315.

⁴⁹²SPOAF 236.

⁴⁹³HO 131 citing John Navone, 'Divine and Human Hospitality,' *New Blackfriars* 85(2004): 329-40.

⁴⁹⁴HO 132 citing Charles Maahs, 'Hospitality, Power, and Mission: A Review of the Writings and Leadership of Roger W. Fjeld', in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no.3 (2003): 168-72, esp. 168.

the church were extended from Jerusalem, Judea to the rest of the world.⁴⁹⁵ Referring to episodes from the Old Testament, Yong holds that the Spirit's anointing power is not limited to any particular people as the Spirit came upon Balaam, the Macedonian soothsayer (Num.24:2), and Cyrus, a Chaldean ruler (Is.45:1).⁴⁹⁶ This breaks the assumption regarding who is thought to be 'in' or who is 'out' of the kingdom of God. Yong writes, 'Christian mission is not only about bringing Christ to our neighbours of other faiths, but may also serve the important purpose of our meeting Christ in them.'⁴⁹⁷ In this sense he points out the possibility of conversion without a change of religion, thus signifying dual or multiple religious belonging and views the religious other as equal, though he does not elaborate on it further.⁴⁹⁸

In terms of the cosmic mission of the church, Yong shows that cosmic and eschatological salvation are both spiritual and material or bodily, both universal and particular, united in diversity.⁴⁹⁹ Yong also sees the resurrection of the body as a critique of the present world order and an inauguration of the eschatological kingdom of God.⁵⁰⁰ Again, the nature of the eschatological universal salvation cannot bypass the particular salvation of a particular community whether it is Israel or the Church. Yong suggests that the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit is for both Jews and Gentiles, where the universal salvation does not 'revoke the distinctiveness of Israel's role and place in God's providential history.'⁵⁰¹ Yong maintains, therefore, that the Lukan narrative of the Pentecost brings unity in diversity as 'the Spirit's outpouring on Jews (with multiple identities and many tongues) and proselytes in the

⁴⁹⁵ Amos Yong, "Poured out on all Flesh: The Spirit, World Pentecostalism and the Renewal of Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century," 17.

⁴⁹⁶ *SWC* 47, 48.

⁴⁹⁷ *HO* 152.

⁴⁹⁸ *HO* 82, 83.

⁴⁹⁹ *SPOAF* 95, 96.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁵⁰¹ *IDC* 2010, 333.

last days preserves the multiplicity of diasporic Jewish identity, with each difference enriching the whole.’⁵⁰² Thus in this case, Yong contends that ‘no particular nation can displace the role of the church, and any exaltation of a nation as more elect than others in the contemporary political landscape is in danger of idolizing a state rather than acknowledging the supremacy and lordship of Christ and YHWH’.⁵⁰³ Yong argues that the Spirit brings solidarity among various groups of people. But this solidarity has an eschatological future in that we come together and be transformed not only for the present but for the divine future that awaits us. He claims that the,

[. . .] solidarity across peoples, tribes and nations, and brings about the harmony of many otherwise opposing voices for the glory of God. The result is not the end but the redemption of history; not an escape from the world’s(coming) tribulations but an empowered perseverance in view of its eschatological transformation; not a temporary human accomplishment in the present but the opportunity to participate in the apocalyptic (revelatory) in-breaking of the Spirit from the (heretofore hidden) divine future.⁵⁰⁴

Thus I have shown that even in his conceptions of the mission of the church Yong holds onto the dialectics of relational-distinctiveness based on the model of the Spirit and the Word / Christ working together in terms of unity in diversity and universality and particularity in its interfaith and cosmic-eschatological engagement.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSION AND LOOKING FURTHER

Thus, through the preceding arguments of the entire chapter I have been able to make a case for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology and have arrived at a shape for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology in terms of nature, ministry and mission of the church.

⁵⁰²Ibid., 2010, 334.

⁵⁰³Ibid., 337

⁵⁰⁴*IDC* 342, 343.

I have explored the relational Spirit ecclesiology of Moltmann with its pneumatological emphasis and eschatological orientation based on Social Trinity. It was found that Moltmann's Spirit ecclesiology has several merits. His formulations of an open and dynamic church in the Spirit would be helpful as a counter to the rigidly institutionalised churches of North India. His proposition of an egalitarian ministry also challenges the prioritisation of the offices of the church over lay ministry. The mission of the church also extends from inter-religious dialogue to ecological and cosmic redemption along with human beings. All these positive strengths have been articulated with a pneumatological emphasis and eschatological orientation on the basis of Social Trinity. I have also shown that in many respects Moltmann parallels Yong. However, I have shown that the Social Trinity itself is a highly problematic model for the church or human relationships. Social Trinity provides relationality but it essentially fails to provide any distinctiveness, particularity and concreteness to conceiving God-church-world relationship.

An ecclesiocentric model was also explored through the distinctive and contrastive model of Stanley Hauerwas. Several aspects of this model are valuable as regards the Indian context. Especially commendable is his view of the church as a community of virtue, the embodied character, the need for witness and discipleship, the critical attitude to the world and the distinctive element of the narrative of the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While these strengths are particularly helpful for witness to Christ in a diverse and pluralistic setting, they can also lead to the negative features of alienation, separation and triumphalistic attitude of one community with respect to the other. The last thing that the North Indian community wants is alienation of different groups of people on the basis of

religion or caste. Moreover, an ecclesiocentric model puts the church at the centre instead of God or the Kingdom of God within the mission of the Son and the Spirit which is narrow and exclusive.

Tanner's Christo-theocentric model was also explored and its strengths found in avoiding many of the problems of the Social Trinitarian model and in critique of an ecclesiocentric model. The strengths of Tanner's model can be particularly helpful in Indian situations where Christological particularity needs to be explored in terms of witness, mission and an ethical model for the community. In a diverse religio-cultural environment, in situations of ambiguity and dilemma, Jesus's life becomes the model to be followed by the individual Christian and the church. Tanner's model reminds us that in Christ the church is identified and its essence is constituted. On the other hand her model emphasises on particularity and the other and yet facilitates a socio-economic critique of the human community and self-critic of the church leading to a community of justice. Tanner's model also leans towards permeability in terms of the negotiable borders of a Christian community. In spite of these strengths, Tanner's model does not hold out a developed ecclesiology and the question of permeable borders of the Christian community is not worked out further in developing a theology of religions or theology of dialogue. There is a significant lack as I mentioned earlier of the dialectic of Spirit and the Word working together in the economy which would have facilitated the relational-distinctiveness dialectics.

Comparably, it was evident that Yong's Spirit ecclesiology has a truly permeable character in its nature, ministry and mission and complements the lack of the previous approaches. Building up his ecclesiology on the basis of the Spirit and the Word / Christ he has managed to uphold the complex relational-distinctiveness

dialectics required for a permeable ecclesiology. His pneumatological emphasis has shown relational potential as well as offering a basis for particularity and concreteness. For Yong, the presence and work of the Spirit in the church and the world open the church to engage with other communities. This is the porosity that contributes to permeability. On the other hand, the Christological dimension has provided the distinctive and particular character of the church along with a prophetic and critical edge. Yet these borders determined by the Christological dimension are softened in terms of the recognition of the work of the Logos in human beings and creation. The borders are further softened by the encompassing hospitality of God in Jesus. All throughout, the Spirit becomes the driving force behind the church's engagement with the world in Christ. A pneumatological turn to his ecclesiology has avoided ecclesiocentrism or Christomonism in his approach. On the other hand, any pneumatomonism in his ecclesiology is counteracted by correspondingly turning to the Christological dimension. In this sense the Spirit and Christ being the foundation of the church together, offer a justified model for ecclesiology. Broadly speaking, Yong's approach brings the distinctiveness that Moltmann lacks, the relationality that Hauerwas lacks and the emphasis on the dialectics of the Spirit and the Word/ Christ which Tanner lacks.

Thus, I have arrived at the conclusion of this chapter with a particular shape of ecclesiology: a permeable Spirit ecclesiology based on Yong's theology. However, it remains to be seen whether such an ecclesiology is fully adequate for the North Indian context and Indian theological perceptions. At this stage this question is crucial because an effort to develop a North Indian ecclesiology cannot bypass the contributions and thoughts of Indian theologians on this topic. I am sure that the

views of Indian theologians will contribute significantly towards reshaping and revising the permeable Spirit ecclesiology in focus. To this crucial task I now turn in the following chapter considering select Indian Christian theologians.

CHAPTER THREE

A PERMEABLE SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF NORTH INDIA

In the previous chapter I made the case for a permeable ecclesiology and its pneumatological shape. I argued that a permeable ecclesiology requires relational-distinctiveness dialectics to address the complex relationship of the church with other communities in India. After exploring several models, I have shown that a pneumatological perspective of the church with Christological dimension in terms of joint working of the Spirit and Christ in the church and the World is a viable way forward for the churches in North India. I have shown how the Spirit ecclesiology of Amos Yong based on the above model is suitable for the churches. However in the conclusion to the previous chapter I argued that developing an ecclesiology for India without recourse to insights from Indian theologians does not do justice to the project. I ended the chapter with the hope that Indian theologians will have significant insights to offer to this project through their theologies and ecclesiologies and perhaps help revise the already conceived permeable Spirit ecclesiology.

In the present chapter I will present several approaches of Indian thinkers and theologians towards Christianity and the church, and subsequently suggest a suitable Indian Christian approach which would satisfy the criteria for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology in the North Indian context. But before I do that I want to offer a very brief survey of the development of Indian Christian theology so that the

following sections which deal with Indian Christian theologians can be adequately grasped.

The development of Indian Christian theology can be broadly divided into two eras: the 19th century to early 20th century period and the contemporary period. The 19th century to early 20th century was crucial for the beginning of Indian Christian theological reflections. This period was preceded by the missionary era of Catholic and Protestant missions, during the 16th and 17th centuries, both of which introduced into Indian Christianity an exclusive missiological theology which asserted that the only means of salvation is through the Christian faith.⁵⁰⁵ However this attitude impacted the Indian church in both negative and positive ways. Negatively it drove a wedge between Christianity and Hinduism. Positively, it gradually led to the crucial period of 19th century emergence of the Neo-Hindu movements in dialogue with western culture and Christianity.⁵⁰⁶ Here, mainly from Bengal, Maharashtra and other parts of South India, both intellectual Hindus and Hindu converts to Christianity made significant contributions to the development of Indian Christian theological thinking. Mention may be made of Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), P.C. Mozoomdar (1840-1905), Krishna Mohan Banerji (1813-1815), Lal Behari Day (1824-1894) and Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907) from Bengal. There are others like Nehemiah Goreh (1825-1895), Narayana Vamana Tilak (1862-1919) and Manilal Parekh (1885-1967) from Maharashtra and Aiyadurai Jesudasan Appasamy (1891-1975) from Tamilnadu. The significant group from Madras known as *Rethinking*

⁵⁰⁵ M.M. Thomas and P.T. Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, (Tiruvalla: The New Day Publications of India, 1992), 2.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

Group included Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959), Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958) and others.⁵⁰⁷

The general trend of theological thinking in this period was relating Hinduism to Christianity seeking to express the Christian faith in God, Christ and the Church in relation to people's own past Hindu tradition in the setting of Indian national self-awakening.⁵⁰⁸ Most of them used Hindu philosophical categories to express Christ and the Christian faith. A glance at Robin Boyd's survey of Indian theological thought clearly reveals three important strands of the *Advaitic*, *Bhakti* and *Shakti* prevalent among Indian Christian theologians.⁵⁰⁹ Brahmabandhav can be linked with Shankara (the advaitic strand), Appasamy with *Bhakti* and Chenchiah with *Shakti*.⁵¹⁰ It is therefore evident how 19th century played a crucial role in Indian theological thinking. This is also the reason one of the representatives from this period is chosen for our project. It is important to note here that many theologians of this era were critical of the organised church and of its foreignness. Moreover, nationalistic tendencies coloured their theological thinking. For our purposes, it should be noted that in the Indian context the notion of the existence and universality of the Spirit was always taken for granted. Yet the difficulty in reconciling the universality of the Spirit to the particularity of Christ and the identity of the Christian community in Indian theology continued to be a challenge.⁵¹¹ However, theologies of many theologians of this period were primary Christological while the

⁵⁰⁷ This is not at all meant to be an exhaustive list. For a helpful survey of Indian Christian theologians from different periods refer to Thomas and Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers* and Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (referred here as ICT).

⁵⁰⁸ Thomas and Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, 4.

⁵⁰⁹ ICT 228-254.

⁵¹⁰ ICT 230.

⁵¹¹ MIS 235

pneumatological potential of the Indian thinking were yet to be adequately expressed. Amidst this it was theologians like Chakkarai and Chenchiah who managed to have an emphasis on the Spirit. Even among these two Chenchiah was the one who realised in his time that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit may become the corner-stone of Indian Christian theology.⁵¹² Therefore, one of the primary justifications for our choice of Chenchiah above others. He combines the nationalistic aspect, the indignisation and decolonisation of the church and a wider interreligious engagement in the Spirit.

In the contemporary era (20th to 21st centuries) emergence of new theological strands particularly in the nature of contextual theology has been seen. While Hindu-Christian dialogical encounter continued and still has vigour in terms of Hindu philosophical categories in personalities like Raymond Panikkar, Stanley Samartha, Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz and others, there are other emerging theologies. K.P. Aleaz is one who follows in the line of Brahmabandhav and Samartha in his Vedantic perspective while expressing the potential of understanding God-human-creation relationship through the Advaitic oneness of the Supreme Atman or the Spirit. His theology blends his Eastern Orthodox (Syrian Orthodox) background with his Advaitic Christian philosophy. Thus, he was one of the primary choice for our project. Contextual theologies in the form of indigenous feminist proponents like Gabriele Dietrich, Aruna Gnanadasan; proponents of *Adivasi* theology like Nirmal Minz; Tribal theology from the Northeast represented by Wati Longchar from Nagaland or K. Thanzauva from Mizoram and Dalit theology by A.P. Nirmal, Sathianathan Clarke, Peniel Rajkumar, Joseph Prabhakar Dayam and others should

⁵¹² ICT 241.

be mentioned. Here Samuel Rayan and Sebastian Kappen are well-known for bringing an Indian perspective of liberation theology. Samuel Rayan however is a liberation theologian with a difference as his theology is thoroughly pneumatological and his concepts of liberation are pneumatologically driven. Hence our choice for Samuel Rayan above others in this genre. This brief survey of the development of Indian Christian theology from the 19th century to the present is in no way exhaustive but serves to set our project and our Indian theologians in question into helpful categories for benefit of greater comprehension. This leads us to the main sections of the chapter which will deal with the Indian theologians.

I will present the substance of the chapter in five sections: the first section will deal with a representative of one of the pioneering approaches of Indian Christian thinkers towards Christianity and the Church; the second section will deal with a representative of one of the contemporary approaches; the third section will deal with a comparative analyses of both the above approaches; the fourth section will deal with a suitable approach that will satisfy the criteria of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology for the North Indian context; the fifth or concluding section will be a comparative analysis to show how the Spirit ecclesiology of the fourth approach is more appropriate to that of the preceding approaches discussed so far in the North Indian context. My hope is that a comparative discussion of the above approaches will provide a definite revised shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology suitable for the context of North India.

SECTION ONE:

PANDIPEDDI CHENCHIAH AS REPRESENTING ONE OF THE PIONEER APPROACHES IN INDIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

This section will be representative of how prominent intellectual Hindu converts to Christianity thought about Christianity and the organised church in the context of Indian nationalism and in the face of British colonialism. There was a wave of rethinking Christianity in terms of Indian religion and culture, especially Hinduism, due to the influence of Western education and the Hindu Renaissance. The wave was especially prominent during the early 19th to 20th century.⁵¹³ Representatives of Indian Christian approaches in the context of colonialism and nationalism is especially useful for the present project since I have shown earlier that the colonial captivity of the churches in India continues even during these post-colonial times. Dealing with one of these approaches will help us understand why Christianity and the Church have been conceived in a particular manner in the Indian context and how different it is from those of their Western counterparts. This will give us a picture of the motivations and concerns of Indian Christian thinking. Without dealing with one of these primary approaches, the contemporary approaches towards Christianity and the Church will be difficult to gauge. I will highlight such an approach through the contribution of Pandipeddi Chenchiah. A brief biographical note here will suffice for our purposes.

⁵¹³I have already described in the First Chapter how movements of indigenization of the church continued in this period.

Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959) was born in Nellore,⁵¹⁴ a city in the present state of Andhra Pradesh, which was part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency during British rule. He converted to Christianity at a young age and later became a lawyer, but eventually began to engage himself in religion and politics; and to identify intellectually with the national movement of India's independence. He was a prominent member of the Madras *Rethinking Group*⁵¹⁵ and along with others sought to articulate an Indian understanding of Christianity. Chenchiah did not publish any books himself, so his theological writings have to be drawn from two chief books in which he collaborated, *Rethinking Christianity in India*⁵¹⁶ and *Asramas Past and Present*.⁵¹⁷ Chenchiah stood at the cross-roads of the Indian history of pre- and post-Independence religious thinking. His original efforts at making sense of Christianity in a particularly Hindu context and in the context of nationalism remain challenging in the present times. Desiring to see an independent India, he stressed communion, fellowship and collaboration between not only Christians but other religious communities. In his writings, a passion to understand Christianity in the wider framework of the spiritual longing of India towards fuller humanisation is very prominent. Post-independence, however, Chenchiah moved beyond the 'philosophical-theological frameworks'⁵¹⁸ to develop a commitment to building an Indian Christian community.⁵¹⁹ Chenchiah, in his later writings, was aware that post-Independence, and the absence of British Raj meant that 'Christians must rely on the

⁵¹⁴TC iii.

⁵¹⁵Apart from Chenchiah it included Vengal Chakkarai, A.N. Sundarisanam, G.V. Job and others.

⁵¹⁶G.V. Job, D.M. Devashayam and A.N. Sundarisanam, et al., eds., *Rethinking Christianity in India* (Madras: Sudarisanam, 1938). (Henceforth, *RCI*).

⁵¹⁷P. Chenchiah, V.Chakkarai, and A.N.Sudarisanam eds., *Asramas Past and Present* (Madras: CLS, 1996).

⁵¹⁸Nigel Ajay Kumar, *What is Religion?: A Theological Answer*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 122.(Henceforth, *WR*)

⁵¹⁹Ibid.

Holy Spirit' in looking for guidance.⁵²⁰ Thus his basic motivation was to build an inclusive community in the Spirit where people from all backgrounds could participate. His theology shows a consistent pneumatological perspective. This is one of the prominent reasons for choosing Chenchiah above others in the same genre. Again, he was vehemently critical of the organised church and often considered it as a barrier to reaching Christ, though he himself was a church member until his death. This is another reason for choosing him. His criticism of the organised church can be taken as the basis of a broad paradigm for a decolonisation attitude towards the Indian church. Again, as a convert from Hinduism he can be said to represent the majority of Hindu intellectual and their community's view of the church and Christianity since pre-Independence times.

1.1. Building Christian Theology on Indian Foundations

During the 19th century there was a conscious effort on the part of Indian intellectuals to understand Christianity in terms of Hindu philosophical and spiritual traditions and practices.⁵²¹ Chenchiah was no different. He draws philosophical concepts from Hindu philosophers and also takes Hindu practices and transforms them into Christian ones. This is seen in his treatment of the concept of *Yoga*.⁵²² Chenchiah draws Christian principles from the evolutionary ideas⁵²³ of Sri Aurobindo⁵²⁴ - a

⁵²⁰Chenchiah, "Christian Message in a Hindu Environment," *Guardian* 9 (February 1950):84-85,100-101. See also *WR*, 122.

⁵²¹Some of the prominent thinkers were Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), Keshab Chandra Sen (1834-1884), Nehemiah Goreh (1825-1895), Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), A.J. Appasamy (1891 – 1975), Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958).

⁵²²The word *yoga* has developed several meanings in the West. However for Patanjali (2nd century B.C.) the founder of Yoga system it is 'a methodical effort to attain perfection, through the control of different elements of human nature, physical and psychical.' See Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 453.

⁵²³Nigel Ajay Kumar notes that there were at least two types of evolutionary methodologies in religion that were prominent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One was evolution understood as

nationalist-turned philosopher who developed the method of Integral Yoga.⁵²⁵ In this concept Aurobindo suggested a synthesis of the different streams of Hindu yoga⁵²⁶ to achieve revolutionary change, so that the soul is converted from a natural life to a divine being.⁵²⁷ Aurobindo believed that the potential for evolution existed within humanity to evolve into ‘supermanhood.’⁵²⁸ He recognised the crisis of humanity and the need for a ‘New Man’ and the ultimate goal of liberation from bondage.⁵²⁹ While Chenchiah drew from all these concepts he differed from Aurobindo in terms of bringing Christ and the Spirit into the picture. For Chenchiah, the evolutionary process means that creation has been characterised by critical stages of evolution, each of which represents a revolution and the product of the latest revolution is the ‘New Man’ who is Jesus himself.⁵³⁰ Christianity in ‘Jesus is a step higher, and in him we are made the Sons of God.’⁵³¹ In contrast to Aurobindo, Chenchiah thought that evolution comes as a result of the revolution of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit from above and is not a continuation to something higher and not from

within the scientific/naturalist method that focused on the biological development of the cosmos. The other was evolution as a philosophical principle that governed human phenomena. See *WR* 63.

⁵²⁴Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is well-known for his spiritual practice known as *Integral Yoga*. He was initially involved in the Indian freedom movement and was imprisoned by the British for writing articles against them. He had spiritual experiences at this time after which he moved to Pondicherry and according to such experiences he propagated the evolution of human life into divine life. This was the practice of integral yoga which he promulgated through establishing an *Ashram* known as Sri Aurobindo Ashram. See “Aurobindo Ashram,” accessed September 29, 2016, http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/ashram/sriuro/life_sketch.php.

⁵²⁵See Indira Sen, ed., *Sri Aurobindo on Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1980), 9-10. See also *WR* 63.

⁵²⁶The Yoga gives the ‘eightfold method of abstention, observance, posture, breath-control, withdrawal of senses, fixed attention, contemplation, and concentration’. See Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 453.

⁵²⁷See Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1918), xxvii, 39-40. See also *WR* 79.

⁵²⁸See Aurobindo, *The Superman* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1920), 2. See also *WR* 174.

⁵²⁹*WR* 174, 175.

⁵³⁰Chenchiah, “Who is Jesus? A Study of Jesus in Terms of the Creative Process,” *Guardian* (5 August, 1943): 364, 389.

⁵³¹Chenchiah, “Who is Jesus? A Study of Jesus in Terms of the Creative Process,” 389.

human effort alone.⁵³² So how does this evolution take place? Chenchiah believes it is achieved through a mystical union with Christ described as *sayuja*, where the believer somehow transforms and becomes Christ-like. Now this transformation comes through union with Jesus or direct experience of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. He notes that there is a desire for ‘direct contact with Jesus’ (*Pratyaksha*)⁵³³ and an aspiration for rebirth; i.e. to be born as sons or daughters of God in the image of Jesus (*Punarjanma*) in India.⁵³⁴ It is not so much a desire to be a Christian i.e., a follower of Christ, as to be identified with Christ- for *Sayujiya* (union) with Jesus, a longing that made Paul say, ‘I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.’⁵³⁵

D. A. Thangasamy notes that there is a certain amount of ambiguity in Chenchiah, regarding ‘the new humanity as the product of both evolution and new creation.’⁵³⁶ At times it is a ‘biological mutation of the whole species,’ but at other times it is the ‘creative transforming activity of the Holy Spirit’⁵³⁷ within the ‘existing biological state.’⁵³⁸ Thangasamy concludes that the doctrine of new creation for Chenchiah was ‘a matter of faith and hope in God and not an intellectual certainty or rational deduction.’⁵³⁹ However, evaluating Chenchiah’s concepts of evolution and new creation, H. Wagner, notes that it is a ‘double synthesis, the synthesis of his Indian cultural heritage with the Biblical message, and also that of the Biblical

⁵³² Ibid., 378.

⁵³³ TC 4.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ TC 4.

⁵³⁶ TC 23.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

message with the neo-naturalistic philosophy of the West of his day.’⁵⁴⁰ Searching for a practical discipline concerning the union of humans with Christ through the Holy Spirit brought about by evolution, Chenchiah falls back on the Hindu practices of Yoga. He transforms this Hindu practice into a Christian discipline of the Yoga of the Spirit.⁵⁴¹ He names it *Amrita Yoga*. Chenchiah generally understood Yoga as a psycho-physical discipline and technique for attaining the spiritual end of union or communion with God.⁵⁴² Chenchiah rejects traditional *yoga*⁵⁴³ because of its elements of annihilation of creation, but stresses on a practice that takes human beings and creation towards consummation and perfection.⁵⁴⁴ Chenchiah argues that the yoga of surrender is more appropriate for Christian spirituality than the yoga of concentration. In this connection, *Prema Yoga*, which concentrates on the love of God and love for humans, deserves the attention of Christians.⁵⁴⁵ Thus Christians can adopt the *Bhakti Yoga*⁵⁴⁶ in the church and *Prema Yoga* outside the church.

In this *yoga*, during prayer, talking is replaced by listening to God and silence and stillness are needed here as a prerequisite. In *Amrita Yoga*, the practice of inner surrender to let the Holy Spirit work in us is important. It allows both reception and

⁵⁴⁰H. Wagner, *ErstgestalteneinerEinheimischenTheologie in Sudindien* (Munchen, 1963), 195, cited in Robin H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 146,153. (Henceforth, *ICT*)

⁵⁴¹See Chenchiah, “Christians and yoga: A Study of the Technique of Realisation in Relation to the Aims and Objects of Christianity,” *Guardian* (23 March 1944):136 in *TC* 263.

⁵⁴²*Ibid.*

⁵⁴³For a discussion of Yoga philosophy especially as developed by Patanjali, see *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, ed by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957) 453-485.

⁵⁴⁴Chenchiah, “Christians and Yoga:A Study of the Technique of Realisation in Relation to the Aims and Objects of Christianity,” 283.

⁵⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 267.

⁵⁴⁶Love and devotion to a personal God in the Hindu tradition. They are to be found in the Hindu Scriptures of the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavat Purana and Puranas.

submission to the Spirit's guidance.⁵⁴⁷ Chenchiah admits that the *yoga* that creates new life is of pure grace from above where surrender is the essence and concentration is a bi-product that comes in incidentally.⁵⁴⁸ In this connection Chenchiah thought that the conception of the guru should be grasped by the Christian. Gurus should be seen as transmitters of the Spirit, but interestingly, such a guru can be outside the Christian fold yet be able to awaken in us the consciousness of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴⁹ Chenchiah holds that Jesus is the guru who can transmit life, but he can also send gurus from among Hindus and Muslims as well as Christians. In Chenchiah's Christian *yoga*, we also need a guru and we look forward to the reception of the Spirit. Chenchiah says, 'The desire for becoming the sons [and daughters] of God, the yearning to meet Jesus as guru, the longing to possess Holy Spirit should become the all engrossing preoccupation of mind, heart and soul.'⁵⁵⁰

1.2. Developing Indian Christology and Soteriology in the Spirit

Chenchiah seeks to build Indian Christology and Soteriology drawing from Hindu philosophical concepts and evolutionary idea with pneumatology as the driving factor. It will be seen that in Chenchiah, pneumatology becomes the interpretative framework to forge Christology and Soteriology in Indian terms.

Chenchiah's evolutionary ideas lead him to speculate on a cosmic Christology. For Chenchiah, cosmic Christology is not particularly the understanding that Christ

⁵⁴⁷Chenchiah, , "Christians and Yoga:A Study of the Technique of Realisation in Relation to the Aims and Objects of Christianity,"287.

⁵⁴⁸Ibid., 278.

⁵⁴⁹Ibid., 276.

⁵⁵⁰Ibid.,287.

is the creator of the universe ‘through whom are all things and through whom all things exist.’(Col.1:15, 17).⁵⁵¹ Cosmic Christology for Chenchiah makes Christ actively present within history and in creation through the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus enters the created order permanently and resides in us through the Holy Spirit. Chenchiah sees Jesus’s virgin birth as the culmination of the evolutionary process through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit thereafter would continue to preside over the new creation and live in the sons and daughters of God as their *atman* (spirit).⁵⁵²

Again, Chenchiah draws on the pre-Aryan Hindu concept of *Shakti*⁵⁵³ to denote the power of the Spirit working in Creation and Christ. He contends that ‘Jesus is the manifestation of a new creative effort of God, in which the cosmic energy or *Shakti* is the Holy Spirit; the new creation is Christ and the new life order, the kingdom of God.’⁵⁵⁴ Chenchiah claims that the effort of the Christian is to realise this new creation in the world-order by appropriating this new power.⁵⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit is the energy through which Christ would recreate heaven and earth and liberate people from *Samsara* (the cycle of birth and death). The preaching of Jesus as an all-enfolding Spirit is what was needed instead of Jesus as merely flesh, Chenchiah claims.⁵⁵⁶ Chenchiah’s dependence on the concepts of new creation leads him to dwell on the resurrection of Christ more than the Cross or death of Christ. He believes that ‘Christianity would have been a still-born child if Jesus did not rise

⁵⁵¹Chenchiah, “The Holy Spirit: Meaning and Significance of Christianity: Bible Studies,” *Guardian* (11 October 1932):324. Also see (30 June, 1932): 252, (21 July 1932): 287.

⁵⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵⁵³*Shakti* basically means power. It is personified as the divine feminine creative power or cosmic energy.

⁵⁵⁴*TC* 173.

⁵⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶*TC* 90.

from the grave.’⁵⁵⁷ He maintains that through the Spirit and through the event of resurrection, Jesus had the power to bring about the new birth and new creation.⁵⁵⁸

Chenchiah’s pneumatology conditions his Christology for the Indian quest for truth. In this aspect Chenchiah sometimes maintains little distinction between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He sometimes views Jesus as the Spirit. Chenchiah’s main motivation in understanding Christ as Spirit is that the ‘Indian interpretation of Jesus is not merely acclimatization of Christianity in India. The Indian quest involves discoveries of new truths about Christ, additions to the sum of existing knowledge of Christ.’⁵⁵⁹ Here the Spirit provides the interpretative Indian framework. It is in this framework that he thinks of an universal Jesus. He projects the openness and universality of the Spirit on Jesus. For Chenchiah, the Holy Spirit becomes the universal Jesus. He develops the idea that Jesus becomes universal ‘by drawing other people to his likeness; or other religions developing principles of Christianity in themselves.’⁵⁶⁰ Here is an attempt to ‘bring partial aspects from different religions together which is not syncretic in itself but a struggle born out to make the historic, universal.’⁵⁶¹ He seems to see more hope in ‘syncretism, if a charge is brought of that kind, as a movement of union than sectarianism.’⁵⁶² He argues that Jesus, in his physical being, was limited to time and space, yet, Jesus as the Holy Spirit transcends those barriers and becomes *Paramapurusha* (The Eternal Man) and *Antharyamin* (The Indweller). This particular understanding of Christology is based on his conception of the need of humanity. He says that ‘we need as a remedy for our ill-

⁵⁵⁷TC 128.

⁵⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹Chenchiah, “Who is Jesus? A Study of Jesus in Terms of the Creative Process,” *Guardian* (29 July 1943): 352, 353 ff., TC 108.

⁵⁶⁰Chenchiah, “Professor Kraemer and Syncretism,” *Guardian* (19 April 1951):188f; 200f , TC 179, 180.

⁵⁶¹Ibid.

⁵⁶²Ibid.

not an absolute-but a God with us, Emmanuel.⁵⁶³ Therefore, he does not subscribe to the concept of Jesus as the absolute. He prefers to think of Jesus as God in relation to humanity who is always present with us and not a God of crisis. Chenchiah thus asks us to go in search for God who is willing to come and live with us.⁵⁶⁴

Chenchiah's Christology understood in the interpretative framework of the Spirit conditions his soteriology too. For Chenchiah, the enduring presence of Jesus with us through the Holy Spirit in itself becomes redemptive rather than a particular act of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. In other words we are continually being saved by Jesus's presence.⁵⁶⁵ This redirects his theology from the traditional starting point of understanding Christ's work as propitiation, which seems merely juridical to him to reinterpreting salvation as 'attaining Christhood.'⁵⁶⁶ To Chenchiah, Indians cannot get into the heart of Christianity by the juridical understanding of Christ's atonement, but it is the 'genetic or creative aspects of Jesus; it is the Holy Spirit as a creative energy that takes the Indian into the new 'given' in Jesus'.⁵⁶⁷ Chenchiah argues that the 'construction of Christianity making law, disobedience, sin, cross, propitiation, judgement misses the beauty and the newness of the Gospels, while a poetry that stresses love, resurrection, service, communion, sonship [sic], gets nearer to the Master.'⁵⁶⁸

It is clearly evident in the above how Chenchiah sought to develop an Indian understanding of Christology and soteriology drawing from Hindu religious

⁵⁶³*TC* 90.

⁵⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵Chenchiah, "Who is Jesus? A Study of Jesus in Terms of the Creative Process," in *TC* 102.

⁵⁶⁶*RCI* appendix, 26f, in *TC* 92-93.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸Chenchiah, "Review of Estborn's *The Religion of Tagore in the Light of Gospel*," *Guardian* (March 2, 1950) in *TC*, 13.

concepts. His pneumatologically driven Christology and Soteriology sought to bring Christ closer to the people in India in terms of Christ's immanence in the Spirit.

1.3. Chenchiah's Indian Ecclesiology in the Spirit

Before discussing Chenchiah's positive contributions regarding the Church, ecumenism and interfaith relationships; his criticisms about the Church need to be highlighted. This is because he stands in the genre of those pioneering Hindu converts and intellectuals who have vehemently criticised the organised church for its Western nature and its relationship with colonialism. This is also crucial because he, along with others, blazed a trail that is now followed by contemporary Indian theologians in a bid to decolonise⁵⁶⁹ the church and situate the church on Indian soil.

1.3.1. *A Decolonisation Approach to the Indian Church*

Chenchiah is one of the precursors of the decolonisation approach to Indian churches because he is perhaps one of the most vehement and extreme in his criticism of the organised, institutional church. This is not to endorse Chenchiah's stance in its entirety, but that he seems to provide an opportunity for us to rethink the nature and

⁵⁶⁹The Oxford English Dictionary defines "decolonise" or "decolonization" as "the withdrawal from its colonies of a colonial power; the acquisition of political or economic independence by such colonies." See "decoloni'zation," *OED Online*. September 2016. Oxford University Press. accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/48333?redirectedFrom=decolonisation>. However, decolonization not only refers to the complete "removal of the domination of non-indigenous forces" within the geographical space and different institutions of the colonized, but it also refers to the "decolonizing of the mind" from the colonizer's ideas that made the colonized seem inferior. See Karl Hack, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008) 255–257. In this project the term is used in the latter sense signifying doing away with the influences of colonialism and colonial constructs in religion, society, culture and political life.

role of the church in India. In fact, he was part of the well-known *Rethinking Christianity* group in Madras (Chennai) during his lifetime. One of his statements suggests that his criticism of the church did not lead to a compromise with his faith or devotion to Christ. And he was unwilling to put Christ and the religion of Christianity with all its ‘trappings’ or traditions on the same pedestal. He writes:

Let it be clearly understood that we accept nothing as obligatory save Christ. Church, doctrine, dogma, whether from the West or from the past, whether from Apostles or from modern critics, are to be tested before they are accepted.⁵⁷⁰

This Christocentric statement is also very controversial regarding Christianity as a religion. Again, some of Chenchiah’s other statements reveal that he is willing to accept the kingdom of God as the goal for Christianity rather than the church. He writes:

Christianity took the wrong gradient when it left the Kingdom of God for the church. [...] Christianity is a failure because we made a new religion of it instead of a new creation⁵⁷¹ [...] The Church arrested the kingdom when Peter added 3000 unto them—a fatal day for the kingdom and a glorious day for the Church.⁵⁷²

Again, Chenchiah viewed the institutional church not as a spiritual reality, but as merely a human institution. He writes:

When the Holy Spirit became a distant reality and then a dogma, when Jesus went to heaven and did not return, we thought of a Church and built one.⁵⁷³

Chenchiah had also a thoroughly negative view of the rituals and sacraments of the church.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁰ *TC* 2.

⁵⁷¹ *ICT* 159.

⁵⁷² Chenchiah, “My Search for the Kingdom” *Guardian* 8-2-1951 in *ICT*, 160.

⁵⁷³ *ICT* 160.

He writes:

There will be no baptisms, no confessions of faith, no creedal profession [...The Hindu] will slowly and in different degrees come under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, without change of labels or nomenclature [...] The change will be in the realm of the Spirit-not in the region of *nama* [name] and *rupa* [form].⁵⁷⁵

Chenchiah's criticisms of Christianity and the church, though extremely controversial, make available a broad parameter for the decolonisation project. In this broad parameter nothing seems to be beyond scrutiny except the raw fact of Christ or specifically the Christ-event. The church with its traditions, confessions, creeds, sacraments and rituals are all to be rethought or re-evaluated in the context of India and in terms of Christ. Rethinking Christianity becomes a crucial project for Chenchiah particularly because he himself was a convert from Hinduism and because he had strong nationalistic inclinations. His nationalistic fervour for the freedom movement guided his reactions to Christianity and the church. Following from his critique of Western Christianity and the church are his proposals for religion-less Christianity and an effort towards de-institutionalisation of the church.

1.3.2. *De-institutionalisation of the Church and Religionless Christianity*

Chenchiah's evolutionary ideas coupled with his pneumatological emphasis, his efforts to situate Christianity in the Indian milieu and Hindu world-view in the context of colonialism and nationalistic feelings, led him to conceive of the Christian community differently. His efforts were therefore towards a decolonised and de-

⁵⁷⁴ICT 161.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

institutionalised Church. In contrast to an exclusive community on the Western pattern propagated in India, the Christian community would be conceived as belonging to the wider society where the secular-sacred divide would be nullified and inter-religious communion would take place. This is an effort to make it inclusive of the socio-cultural reality of the people, because he realised that rigid institutionalisation is one of the problems of the Indian church.⁵⁷⁶ Here the antidote is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit permeating not only people's religious, but social life as well. Chenchiah affirms that we are called to bring the motivating power of the Spirit into all levels of life and not only in the spiritual realm. This is the power that enables us to live out our Christian life at the boundaries of the institutional church in our daily context.⁵⁷⁷ Consequently, Chenchiah is not in favour of segregation of the clergy and the laity and separation between people's religious and secular life. He argues that this segregation creates more institutionalisation. For instance, he points out that the laypeople's religion differs from that of the clerical in that the clerical seeks to uphold religion through preservation of truths through creeds and doctrines whereas the laypeople's religion finds fulfilment in action.⁵⁷⁸ Here in the 'non-clerical' religion, home becomes the temple and there is no division between the sacred and secular, and there is spontaneity of relations which might be missing in the church. Chenchiah's effort is to bring out the church into the daily life of the people and thus transcend the boundaries of the church. He contends that, 'We

⁵⁷⁶I have already noted the challenge of institutionalism in the churches in North India in the previous chapter.

⁵⁷⁷ *WR* 157.

⁵⁷⁸ *WR* 157.

need a place of God outside the Church where we work for Him and with Him, and this can only be the home and the *asrama*.⁵⁷⁹

Asramas were suggested as a model by Chenchiah as ‘nonauthoritarian, nontraditional, nonritualistic, non-sectarian, nonsacerdotal [...] and noninstitutional’⁵⁸⁰ communities. It is the place where the ideal of ‘realisation of religion’ can be sought.⁵⁸¹ It is meant for harmony with *Brahman* (God) and all things involving the need for experimentation and inner purity. Thus *asramas* would form a new ‘brotherhood’ with peoples, animals and nature.⁵⁸² This religion of the *asrama* is not renunciation. It is a religion of union, realisation, experimentation and social reconstruction. It is achieved not by tearing oneself from life but placing oneself between God and the world.⁵⁸³

Consequently, Chenchiah calls for real engagement of Christians both in the church and in the secular world. In order to show that the Christian life can also be lived outside the church, he points out that the laypeople pray and practice their spirituality in their workplaces and through daily living which actually lie outside the church or temple or mosque. He continues that ‘The priest takes us into the temple of God; the laymen take God from the temple into our houses and social institutions.’⁵⁸⁴ Chenchiah was in favour of preaching and spreading the gospel, but that did not necessarily mean church affiliation for him. He claims that, ‘A Christian movement within Hinduism without the umbilical cord being cut is a decided advantage to the

⁵⁷⁹Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰Ibid.

⁵⁸¹WR 156.

⁵⁸²Ibid.

⁵⁸³WR 157.

⁵⁸⁴TC 44.

Hindu and the Christian.’⁵⁸⁵ In other words, he meant that in order to be true Christians, affiliation to a particular institution is not absolutely necessary; it ought to be possible to follow Christ from within one’s particular religion. Chenchiah argues that Christianity should be ‘communicated as life and power and not as an institution.’⁵⁸⁶ So it is the inward dimension of realising our Lord in our hearts that ought to motivate our lives and actions which ought to be also the Indian church’s pursuit for the ‘realisation of Christ.’⁵⁸⁷ Chenchiah wanted Christianity to permeate the society like a leaven without a particular community or church. Though he was baptised himself and was part of a church community taking part in the Eucharist, sacraments had become meaningless rituals to him because he thought that they did not carry the right meaning for India. He argued that ‘the thought of having to undergo baptism has kept many a Hindu from open confession of his sincere faith in Christ.’⁵⁸⁸ Chenchiah thinks that the progress of Christianity should depend on its inherent appeal and not any external conditions, so he proposes a religion which has less of a formal structure, not ‘doctrine-bound, sacrament-affiliated, tradition-fixed’.⁵⁸⁹

Practically speaking, Chenchiah tried to put into practice the openness of the church or the Christian community, in the latter’s engagement with the wider community. This was needed in terms of solidarity in common national concerns which at that time was the independence movement. Therefore he was against the idea of the ghettoisation of the Christian community and the seeking of special

⁵⁸⁵Chenchiah, “Christianity and Hinduism,” *NCCR* 48 (1928), 119-38 in *TC* 218.

⁵⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸*ICT* 161.

⁵⁸⁹*TC* 234-245.

privileges for Christians from the government.⁵⁹⁰ This can be criticised from the perspective of *dalit* rights in their struggle for gaining the Scheduled Caste Status from the Government; however, Chenchiah has to be understood from within his own context. In times of pre-Independence fervour perhaps it seemed more important for him to have national solidarity and equality than to have sectarian aspirations.⁵⁹¹

1.3.3. *Ecumenical Relations*

Chenchiah's idea of the openness of the Christian community draws within its purview ecumenical relationship among the churches, which is different in nature from the ecumenical discourses in the West. The difference begins with the scope of ecumenical interrelationship which is not limited to Christian denominations alone, but finds it in interrelationships among other faith communities. He actually wanted to unite Christians and people of other religions towards the common goal for India's national struggle for freedom. Keeping that goal in mind, he wanted to see Christianity as a movement rather than a consolidation of a community and it was in that spirit that he would seek expression in unity of fellowship amidst diversity. Thus Chenchiah argued that Christian society ought not to be comprehended within the church alone. Here the wider society is the broader field in which Christians should identify themselves. Within this framework and interrelationships among the wider community, the Christian denominations should find their unity. He notes that Christians are bigger than the church and all unities, ideas and reforms should flow

⁵⁹⁰The concerns and issues concerning the *dalits* have been dealt with in chapter two.

⁵⁹¹*TC* viii.

from the wider society into the church.⁵⁹²This is a flow in a different direction. Ecumenical movements generally tend to work out relationships of unity among themselves and then seek to witness this oneness towards other communities. Instead, for Chenchiah, ‘the heart is in the society outside the Church’.⁵⁹³ From this concept of the wider society all Christians are one, a fluid society, not a historic church but a living soul. He affirms that ‘Life is wider than devotion, soul greater than prayer, Christian people greater than Church, the clergy, concepts and institutions.’⁵⁹⁴

Chenchiah thinks that there should be Christian action groups that are less bound by the Church and more led by the Spirit, and also prayer groups to address the needs of the nation.⁵⁹⁵ From here Chenchiah takes us into the practical aspects of ecumenical relations. He points out that due to the difference between the churches in doctrine and practice it is useful to start from our relations outside the church and gradually come to concerns that are common within the church. He suggests that we must start from the affirmation that we are all united in Christ and as Indians. He deplores the unfortunate fact that we are divided even though we are loyal to the same Christ we follow. He proposes:

Let us be united because we are Christians and Indians. And then let the Church be one because Christians are one. If loyalty to Christ has no power to unite us, and loyalty to Churches has power to divide us, there is something fundamentally wrong in the whole situation [...]⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹²Chenchiah, “Indian Christians: Problems and Privileges: Community or Movement?” *Guardian* (1942): 28-30 in *TC* 307-312.

⁵⁹³*Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵*TC* 314-317.

⁵⁹⁶Chenchiah, “Problems of Indian Christian Community,” *Guardian* (1942):40ff in *TC* 28.

Chenchiah spoke of church union not in terms of organisational structures or in terms of creeds and dogmas but in secular activities. He notes that it is the tragedy of the situation that it is ‘the church that separates Christians from Christians’.⁵⁹⁷ He points out that ‘[t]he Protestant and Catholic mix in politics, combine in trade, work in municipalities and legislatures. The only place where they cannot work together is the church.’⁵⁹⁸ His idea of church union is to flow from the secular realm into the religious. He further proposes that we first ‘bring laypeople together in secular activities, in trade, social work, in pleasure, before we attempt to join them in prayer’.⁵⁹⁹ Chenchiah affirms that there is an easy opportunity for us to unite in our secular lives where we meet everyday which can be exploited before seeking to unite as church members. He proposes:

Let us unite together as men [and women] and country-men before we unite as Christians. Let us unite in the secular field before we unite as Christians. [.. .] Let us form common associations for all Christians in secular activities first. Let union begin outside the church and flow into it afterwards. This seems to be the easier way.⁶⁰⁰

The openness and relational character of the church which is not bound within any institution but goes beyond into the wider community is poetically expressed by Chenchiah with the words:

Let us get out of the incense-laden churches to the free air of plains. Let us go out of sects into vast spaces of community, let us leave candle-lit alters and pass into the sun-lit world that we may see without distraction plain facts in true proportion [...].⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁷*TC* 151-152.

⁵⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹Chenchiah, “Problems of Indian Christian Community,” in *TC* 28.

1.3.4. *Interfaith Relations*

Chenchiah believed that the solution to the communal problem in India could be cooperation between faith communities. He reflected on interreligious and intercultural relationships being a privilege of the Christian to explore. For Chenchiah, the Christian stands in a unique position to both Hindus and Muslims as he or she can allow those traditions to help reinterpret Christianity and also in turn bring to these communities the redemptive principles of Christianity. He writes that the ‘responsibility of a Christian [is] to transmit such portions of western culture as are useful and helpful for national growth and freedom to his people and to transmit the living energies of his inherited culture to the west.’⁶⁰² Chenchiah argued that Christianity is the gospel of new creation and in these terms it is a different religion compared to others, although he acknowledged the working of the Spirit in other religions and because of this he thought building of bridges is possible. Moreover, spiritual insights from different religions can enrich the understanding of the person of Christ and Christian life and experience. He argues that ‘The negative plate of Jesus developed in a solution of Hinduism brings out hitherto unknown features of the portrait [of Jesus] and these may prove exactly the Gospel for our time. The same thing happens to Hinduism when developed in a Christian environment.’⁶⁰³

Chenchiah showed that the influence of Christianity or Christ led to renewal of Hinduism on its own terms through the establishment of the *Brahmo Samaj*, *Arya Samaj* and the *Ramakrishna Mission*, which were renewal movements within

⁶⁰²TC xiv.

⁶⁰³TC 36.

Hinduism.⁶⁰⁴ Chenchiah contends that it is possible that the truths of Christ can be brought to us by the adherent of another religion and it is also possible to follow Christ from outside the Christian faith. He tells of a person, Thiru V.K., who was led in devotion by a disciple of poet Ramalingaswami who himself had a vision of Christ. Chenchiah writes:

It was Ramalingaswami that opened my friend's eye to the magnificence of Christ and the magnitude of his message. As he read the two hundred stanzas in which Ramalingaswami weeps for his sins, he awoke to a sense of sin and the need for repentance. As he saw Ramalingaswami's portraiture of Siva, the face of Jesus flashed on him. [. . .] Christ came to him through Ramalingaswami. Both Ramalingaswami and Thiru V.K. remained Hindus, however, trying to imbue Hinduism with the spiritual values they had found in Christ.⁶⁰⁵

For Chenchiah, interfaith relationships are actually a quest of human beings for truth and in this quest people in India cross religious boundaries. He contends that this crossing of boundaries is based on the shared understanding of God's presence as Spirit in faith communities. The pneumatology of Chenchiah here continues to be a major constitutive element. Chenchiah identifies that in India there is a longing for understanding God as Spirit. He reminds us that the 'central desire of the Hindu to approach God [is] in the realm of spirit'⁶⁰⁶ and continues that the 'inner needs of Hinduism [. . .] emphasize the need for the approach to Christ as a Spirit.'⁶⁰⁷ On the basis of shared experience of the Spirit, people of different faiths in India are driven towards other religions either in search of new hope and light or by despair from

⁶⁰⁴TC 39

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁰⁶TC 214.

⁶⁰⁷Ibid.

their own particular religio-social situation.⁶⁰⁸ Thus Christianity is looked upon as being one of the many contributors to this search for reality for the Indians. As Chenchiah puts it, 'Jesus stands in relation to the residuary problems of other religions rather than satisfied longings of man. In other words, the relationship of Christ to non-Christian hearts and hopes lies in the unexplored regions of our Lord's life and not in the region already mapped out.'⁶⁰⁹

Practically speaking, Chenchiah also made efforts towards intercommunity fellowships by bringing people together in prayer. He is said to have started small prayer groups consisting of Christians and Hindus. Chenchiah urged that a Hindu should pray for a Christian and a Christian should pray for a Hindu. He realised that 'this sort of prayer group to relieve each other's distress really makes for sincere love and evidences mutual concern.'⁶¹⁰ He was in favour of the spread of the gospel as inner change rather than change of communities or social groups outside Hinduism.⁶¹¹ His ideology of conversion is that it would shift its emphasis from 'mass to quality, from change to character.'⁶¹² He was also in favour of inter-religious worship where both Christians and Hindus could join together and the best common worship would be monotheistic or non-idolatrous.⁶¹³

The above discussion of Chenchiah's theology and ecclesiology shows clearly that he sought to develop a Christian theology on Indian foundations drawing concepts from Indian philosophical and religious world-views and practices. He clearly reflected the efforts of the Indian Christians of his period who searched for an

⁶⁰⁸Chenchiah, "Who is Jesus? A study of Jesus in terms of the Creative Process," *Guardian* (1943):352, 353, in *TC* 100.

⁶⁰⁹ *WR* 153.

⁶¹⁰ *TC* xvi.

⁶¹¹ *TC* 38.

⁶¹² *TC* 39.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

Indian understanding of Christianity. The Indian or Hindu preference for a non-dogmatic religion and spirituality in the Spirit, and the nationalistic fervour for freedom have influenced his ecclesiological understandings as well. He was thus in favour of a decolonised and deinstitutionalised Indian church. It was evident that Chenchiah's decolonising approach does not merely include critiquing European religio-cultural elements manifested in architecture, traditions and customs, but goes to a deeper level. It questions the nature of Christianity itself couched in western categories and includes the doctrines, dogmas, liturgy, worship and sacraments which are central to the life of the church. Chenchiah's negative views about Christianity and the church urge us to rethink our theologies and ecclesiologies as many people still view the church in India today as foreign and imperialistic. This also provides a direction to critically rethink which elements of Christianity or ecclesiology need to be treated as core constituents and which of them could be treated as peripheral and needs to be re-evaluated in the light of Christ and the Indian context. It also discourages a sense of complacency of the church regarding its colonial nature and its efforts towards meaningful projection of its faith through its doctrines and liturgical practices to those outside. I have shown that it is wrong to think that Chenchiah proposed a total break from western principles or cultures. He suggested healthy transaction of Indian values with western tradition and cultures that promote mutual growth, but that also ensure the freedom and autonomy of the Indian people. In other words, it is Christianity without its colonial bondage, at the same time with the freedom of the Indian people to interpret it from their own backgrounds.

It is evident that Chenchiah found pneumatology to be a driving force that has the potential not only to urge the Indian church towards decolonisation and deinstitutionalisation, but also to accomplish a relational Christianity and relational church that would overcome the barriers of the secular and the sacred, Christianity with other religions, especially Hinduism, and the segregation of the clergy and the laity in the ministry of the church. I have shown how keen Chenchiah was to make Christianity the religion of the Spirit, to free it from the bounds of the institutional church so that both Hindus and Christians can participate in building up the kingdom of God. This also hints at new forms of Christian community in terms of dual or multiple religious belonging. The alienation that has been brought about among the Indian communities through a colonial Christianity is therefore hoped to be rectified through decolonisation, integration and union through the Spirit. It is essentially in this perspective that he argues that the present denominational disunity of the church in India can be overcome through wider efforts of integration of Christians and people of other religions in their common response to socio-political issues. Chenchiah's conception of a relational church would hope to encourage mutual inter-religious cooperation and common spirituality in prayer, worship and action.

SECTION TWO:

K.P. ALEAZ AS REPRESENTING A CONTEMPORARY INDIAN CHRISTIAN APPROACH.

In our discussions of Chenchiah's theology and ecclesiology a clear picture has emerged about the responses of Indian Christians towards colonial Christianity and the church in terms of a decolonisation approach. It also highlights the positive

contributions that were made to build Christian theology and ecclesiology on Indian foundations. It showed how a Christocentric yet a pneumatological perspective could be used to build a relational church in India. In the following section I will explore the theology and ecclesiology of Aleaz in the contemporary period to show, first, how Hindu philosophical categories continue to be used to build Indian Christian theologies in the present period; second, how a decolonised approach need not necessarily mean a total rejection of the church in its rituals and practices, as proposed by Chenchiah; and third, how a pneumatological category continue to be suitable for developing a relational church in the Indian context. As a representative of the contemporary approach I have considered the theology and ecclesiology of K.P. Aleaz. The following is a brief introduction before I bring out his theology and ecclesiology.

Aleaz, born in 1947,⁶¹⁴ in Kerala, South India, has his roots in the Syrian Orthodox tradition. His approach shows how a prominent Indian philosophical category is used to understand Christ and Christianity. He uses one of the most dominant strands of Indian philosophy, the *Advaita Vedanta*⁶¹⁵ to explore the God-human-creation relationship. He was influenced by Indian Christian theologians of the 19th century, particularly Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907)⁶¹⁶ and others.⁶¹⁷ Drawing from principles of *Advaita Vedanta*, he argues for the oneness of

⁶¹⁴His certificate Date of Birth however mentions 1946. See D. Isaac Devadoss, "Life and Evolution of K.P. Aleaz's Thought," in *Many Ways of Pluralism: Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz*, ed., V.J. John (Delhi/Kolkata: ISPCK / Bishop's College, 2010), 4.

⁶¹⁵*Advaita Vedanta* is a school in Indian philosophy, a principle of non-duality which underlies the identity of the *Brahman Atman* with the self and the world and one of its greatest exponents is Sankara.

⁶¹⁶Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya was a Hindu convert into Roman Catholicism, a Bengali theologian and nationalist, well-known for bringing Hindu and Christian concepts into dialogue. For example his formulation of Trinity as *Saccidananda* (Being, Consciousness and Bliss).

⁶¹⁷Other theologians include K. Subba Rao, J. G. Arapura, S.J. Samartha, Swami Abhishiktananda and Raimon Panikkar. See Devadoss, "Life and Evolution of K.P. Aleaz's Thought," 7-16.

the Creator with the creation. This serves as a background for Christianity or the church's relationship with other communities. Aleaz's concern has always been working towards the mutual harmony between religions, a rejection of superiority of any particular religion and a mutual enrichment of each religion through the resources of others. He stresses the building of a community around God with people from all religious backgrounds. Aleaz has a score of books to his credit⁶¹⁸ and numerous articles in which he expounds his particular *Advaitic* Indian Christian philosophy and theology.

2.1. Building Christian Theology on Indian Philosophy

Aleaz, a contemporary Indian theologian, continues to carry the legacy of those of the pioneering Indian Christian theologians of the 19th century who attempted to build a Christian theology drawing on Hindu religion and philosophy. It will be evident that drawing from the efforts of the pioneers like Brahmabandhav Upadhaya,⁶¹⁹ he seeks to reinterpret Christology and Soteriology on the principles of *Advaita* Vedanta as expounded by one of its greatest proponents Shankara.⁶²⁰ *Advaita* Vedanta is one of the most prominent schools of Vedanta (speculative tradition drawing on the Vedas) that teach the non-duality (*Advaita*) and oneness of the

⁶¹⁸Some of his books include *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996); *Convergence of Advaita Vedanta and Eastern Christian Thought* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000); *Relevance of Relation in Sankara's Advaita Vedanta* (Delhi: Kant Publications, 1996) and others.

⁶¹⁹Cf. footnote 13.

⁶²⁰Shankara or Samkara is one of the commentators of the sutras known as Vedanta Sutra that deals with the Vedanta which are religious or philosophical speculations of the Upanishads. The aim is to systematize the teachings of the Upanishads. He is generally assigned to the eighth century (788-820?) His main tenet is that of *Advaita* or non-dualism. This tenet proposes that Brahman is the ultimate reality and the world totally depends on it for its reality. See *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 506-507.

Brahman (God or Supreme Self / Spirit) and the individual self.⁶²¹ Aleaz explains that ‘Shankara’s *Advaita Vedanta* is neither monism nor pantheism. It is strictly the denial of dualism (*A-dvaita*). It rejects the plurality of ultimate parallel absoluteness [...] It affirms the unity of the Absolute (*Brahman-Atman*) which alone is Being (*Sat*)’.⁶²² He maintains that in this philosophy God becomes all in all for us and for the rest of creation; the ultimate Reality who gives meaning to human beings and the rest of creation.⁶²³ Aleaz notes that in Shankara’s system of thought, everything and everybody depends on God. This realisation of our absolute dependence on God leads to a new life in human beings.⁶²⁴ The affirmation here is that there is no gulf between God and humans as well as between God and the universe. The relationship between them is ‘non-reciprocal dependence relation,’⁶²⁵ meaning that the whole of creation including human beings depend on God, but the reverse is not true. So here ‘pantheism is eliminated and true theism is established.’⁶²⁶

Aleaz shows through Brahmabandhav Upadhaya (1861-1907), that there remains an integral connection between *Advaitic* thought and a rethinking of the Trinity from Indian perspectives. Aleaz notes that Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya as early as 1898 interpreted the Trinity as *Sat-chit-anandam*. The meaning of the term will become clear as we discuss further. Showing that the primary source of such interpretation is Shankara’s writings and Upanishads,⁶²⁷ he agrees with Upadhyaya that in Shankara’s writings *Brahman* (Supreme Being/God) is both *Sat-chit-anandam*

⁶²¹Satischandra Chatterjee and Dheerendramohan Dutta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, (Calcutta University Press, 1948), 397.

⁶²²Aleaz, “Advaita Relation: A Search in the Authentic Writings of Shankara,” in *Towards a Holistic Vision of the World*, edited by Prince Mookkanottil (Cochin: Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, 2000), 30.

⁶²³*Ibid.*, 30, 32.

⁶²⁴*Ibid.*, 32,33.

⁶²⁵*Ibid.*

⁶²⁶*Ibid.*

⁶²⁷*CAET* 225-228.

and *Nirgunam*.⁶²⁸ In line with Shankara, the former means, ‘He (Brahman / God) is *Sat*-existing by himself, He is *Chit*-self-knowledge, knowing himself without any external intervention; He is *Anandam*-supremely happy in His self-coloquy’.⁶²⁹ *Nirgunam*, on the other hand, does not mean (as commonly held) that Vedanta holds an impersonal, abstract, unconscious conception of Being or God. Instead, it means that ‘He / She (Brahman) possesses no external attributes, no necessary correlation with any being other than His / Her Infinite Self.’⁶³⁰ Aleaz shows that for Upadhyaya, personality means ‘self-knowledge’.⁶³¹ From the Upanishads, Upadhyaya draws, as Aleaz notes, the conception that through the Self-knowledge of Brahman (*Cit*), ‘He (Brahman) reproduces His Self as *Sabdabrahman* (Logos) by *Ikshanam* (beholding).’⁶³² Again, through Upanishads, Upadhyaya notes that *Brahman* is Bliss, meaning, ‘He (Brahman) is in Himself, by Himself. [.. .] He affects all things but is not affected in return. He is self-satisfied. He is *ananda*.’⁶³³ Aleaz shows that through these Upadhyaya comes to a definition of *Sat-Chit-anandam*. I quote Aleaz’ reference of the same:

It means that Brahman knows himself and from that self-knowledge proceeds His eternal beatitude. Brahman is in Himself, by Himself. He is related of necessity only to the Infinite Image of His own Being, mirrored in the ocean of His knowledge. The relation of Being (*Sat*) to Itself in self-knowledge (*Chit*) is one of perfect harmony, self-satisfaction, beatitude, bliss (*Ānandam*). *Sat-Chit-ānandam* shows us how

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 226, Brahman as the Absolute Nirguna Brahman is the qualityless Brahman. He is the basis of the phenomenal world, presided over by Isvara or the Saguna Brahman. See *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 507.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Upadhyaya, “*Cit*,” *Sophia*, Vol. VI, No.3 (March 1899): 238 in *CAET* 228.

⁶³³ Upadhyaya, “A Vedantic Parable,” *Sophia* Vol. V, No.8 (Aug.1898):119 in *CAET* 228.

Brahman is ineffably blessed in Himself; blessed in His very nature.⁶³⁴

Interpreting the above in terms of the Christian idea of Trinity, Upadhyaya writes,

God comprehends Himself by one act of eternal knowledge. Knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by His knowledge is the Son; and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of reciprocal love proceeding from the Father and the Son.⁶³⁵

Summing up the above thoughts it can be said that God the Father exists in his eternal being through perfect self-knowledge of his own Self. He is blissful, happy and satisfied by the self-knowledge that he has; his existence does not depend on anything external to himself. In other words, his eternal being is not contingent on anything finite. He is not an impersonal being unable to have relations other than his own. Only that it is not a necessity for him. On the other hand, he is related to his Son / Logos / Word as he begets him through his eternal being of self-knowledge. The relationship of the Father to the Son is that of perfect harmony and beatitude, through the love of them both. This reciprocal love is the Holy Spirit who constitutes the eternal bliss of the Trinity. Aleaz extends the implications of the understanding of Trinity as *Sat-Chit-Anandam*, in his linking of God's own self-knowledge or consciousness with that of divine experience of human beings in their own selves. He contends that a human person realises or knows God through this *Advaitic* experience. He writes that 'the concept of Saccidananda can signify the inseparable aspects of the mystery of God in Himself / Herself as well as the mystery of the

⁶³⁴B. Upadhyaya, "A Vedantic Parable," *Sophia* Vol V, No.8 (Aug. 1898):119; "Being," *Sophia*, Vol I, No.7, (July 28, 1900):7 in *CAET* 228-229.

⁶³⁵Upadhyaya, "Hinduism and Christianity as compared by Mrs. Besant," *Sophia*, Vol. IV, No.2, (February, 1897) 8; cf. also "Questions and Answers," *Sophia* Vol.1, No.11, (August 25, 1900), 7 in *CAET* 229.

divine presence in the innermost sanctuary of a person's being. It is the human *advaitic* experience which is expressed as Saccidananda.⁶³⁶ In other words, a 'human person can realize God in himself / herself and also infinitely beyond himself / herself and can become one with God in the fullness of peace and joy.'⁶³⁷

This so called *Advaitic* experience or *Sat-Chit-Anandam*, the realisation of oneness with God that is experienced by human beings is paralleled in Eastern Christian thought. Aleaz claims that the Hindu experience of *Sat-Chit-Anandam* can be compared to the proclamation of 'Being is Communion' and is not monistic.⁶³⁸ Here the union of God and human beings is only in the level of energies and not in essence as in the Eastern tradition.⁶³⁹ Aleaz agrees with Brahmabandhav that :

The union to which humans are called is neither hypostatic as in the case of the human nature of Christ, nor substantial as in that of the three divine persons. It is in the Father's self-awareness and presence to Himself/Herself in the Son, that everything that is has come to be. Son, as he is representative son of man, is the representation of the created being in Cit; the created beings awake to being through the Son. Ananda, the Holy Spirit is the expression of love in God, love between God and humans and love between humans.⁶⁴⁰

The above discussion of the Trinity from the *Advaitic* perspective suggests that human beings can come to the realisation of oneness with the Father through the Spirit and be deified into the image of the Son. This *Advaitic* experience enables human beings to be caught up in the Spirit in their awareness of the essential unity of God and the rest of the Creation while yet maintaining the distinction between Creator and Creation, in terms of non-reciprocal dependence relation.

⁶³⁶CAET 285.

⁶³⁷Ibid.

⁶³⁸Ibid.

⁶³⁹Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰CTAV 98.

2.2. Christology or Jesology⁶⁴¹ from an Advaitic Perspective

In Aleaz' Christology, Jesus is held up as the representative human being who reveals this *Advaitic* experience in his relation to the Father. Aleaz interprets Jesus's relationship to God the Father in *Advaitic* terms. He interprets the person and function (work) of Jesus in terms of *Advaitic* philosophy. Aleaz explains Jesus' person as 'the extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*), the name and form (*nāmārūpa*) and the effect (*kārya*) of Brahman and as the delimitation (*ghaṭākāśaḥ*) as well as the reflection (*ābhāsa*) of Brahman.'⁶⁴² Aleaz explains that the human Jesus was constituted of the same elements⁶⁴³ as human beings and that is why he was a true representative human being. The *Jivatman* (Spirit) of Jesus is the reflection of the Supreme Self in his 'body, senses, vital force, mind, intellect and ego.'⁶⁴⁴ Jesus is the extrinsic denominator of Brahman (God) meaning that Jesus represented God and did not point to himself but the Father. Aleaz shows that the Upanishads both maintain similarity and difference between Jesus and Brahman.⁶⁴⁵ Aleaz suggests that the relation between Jesus and *Brahman* (God) have to be explained in terms of the relation, for example, between the Sun and light. In other words, this concept maintains that Jesus and God are essentially one though the difference between them

⁶⁴¹ Aleaz uses this spelling. In other instances authors are known to use Jesuology. See Sunil Caleb, "K.P.Aleaz's Perspective on an Indian Jesuology: An Evaluation" in *Many Ways of Pluralism: Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz*, edited by V.J.John, (Kolkata/Delhi: ISPCCK/Bishop's College, 2010),85.

⁶⁴²TR 174.

⁶⁴³Aleaz mentions the five constitutive elements of human beings which were the same in the human Jesus, namely, space, air, fire, water and earth which corresponded to the qualities of sound, touch, colour, taste and smell. See *CTAV* 93.

⁶⁴⁴*CTAV* 93.

⁶⁴⁵*CTAV* 93

is only perceived in ignorance.⁶⁴⁶ Brahman, the Supreme Self is actually delimited by the embodied Self of Jesus. Such delimitation is spoken of by the ignorant as Jesus. Otherwise Brahman and Jesus are non-different.⁶⁴⁷ Jesus is the reflection of the Supreme Self (Brahman) like the semblance of the Sun in water. This means that Jesus has ‘no separate reality for himself’ and his reality is only found in Brahman.⁶⁴⁸ Aleaz explains that Jesus is the name and form; the expression of God. He is the bodily manifestation of the name and form latent in Brahman.⁶⁴⁹ Further, Jesus is the effect of Brahman which means that Brahman is always the cause though Jesus as the effect existed in Brahman even before he took birth in this world.⁶⁵⁰ Aleaz notes that understanding the person of Jesus in the *Advaitic* framework yields the central notion of Jesus’ total dependence on God and that his reality derives from God. He writes:

It is this total dependence on the part of Jesus upon Brahman that is expressed in the self-sacrifice of Jesus. The relevance of Jesus lies in his not claiming any significance for himself, in his total sacrifice for himself for others and it is this fact which we have tried to bring out by presenting Jesus as the human representative, as the representative Jiva.

In terms of the function or work of Jesus, Aleaz suggests interpreting the ‘function of Jesus as the all-pervasive (*sarvagatatvam*), illuminative (*jyotiḥ*) and unifying (*ekikṛtya*) power of the supreme Atman.’⁶⁵¹ This is to manifest that the ‘supreme Brahman as Pure Consciousness (*prajnana-ghanam*) is the Witness (*Sākṣi*) and the Self of all (*sārvatma*) and manifests the eternally present

⁶⁴⁶Ibid., 94.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁴⁸Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 96, 97.

⁶⁵¹TR 175

(*nityasiddhasvabhāvam*) human liberation.’⁶⁵² Aleaz claims that Jesus reveals to us that Brahman is pure and eternal Consciousness. Jesus helps us to realise that all ‘human perception and knowledge ultimately is through the Supreme Self.’⁶⁵³ This consciousness, which is the ‘principle running through everything and abiding,’ is the Witness of the Self or Brahman to human beings. This is revealed through Jesus to human beings by way of ‘remembrance and recognition.’⁶⁵⁴ Jesus, through his life, exhorts us to think that the ‘Supreme Lord is to be realised in one’s own Self’.⁶⁵⁵ Jesus also manifests the ‘all pervasive power,’ the light, and the unifying and liberating power of God.⁶⁵⁶ Aleaz claims that Jesus is the affirmation that the ‘light of Consciousness exists in all alike.’⁶⁵⁷ He points out that Jesus proclaims the gospel that the ‘Self is the only common referent of the universe [...] its origin and its end; all things are unified in Brahman’.⁶⁵⁸ Aleaz argues that the Jesus proclaims liberation by the removal of ignorance which fails to realise that one’s own real nature is the Self. This liberation is not a goal to be attained as the Self already is present in everything. It is only by the removal of the ego and illumination of knowledge, that liberation is possible.⁶⁵⁹

Drawing implications from the work of Christ thus understood, Aleaz reinterprets the idea of atonement and sacrifice of Jesus. He is of the opinion that instead of the idea of propitiation and scapegoats that were relevant for the Jews, *Advaita* provides an ideological basis for the self-sacrifice of Jesus for Indians. In

⁶⁵²TR 175. See a detailed discussion of the understanding of the person and function of Jesus in *CTAV* 92-105.

⁶⁵³CATV 100.

⁶⁵⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 99-104.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁵⁹ CATV 105.

this light, Jesus' sacrifice was a model and we have to sacrifice ourselves to discover our reality or existence in the Supreme Being. What he essentially means is that Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross was a denial of his own Self and recognising his Self in God the Father. So atonement carries with it the model of denial of ourselves and depending completely on God. Aleaz maintains that Christianity and the Church has distorted the universal gospel of Jesus into a dogmatic juridical religion. He writes:

Our Jesulogy basically agrees with the contention of the Neo-Vedantins that unfortunately the universal message of Jesus which comprises the ideas of the indwelling divinity, of divine grace, universal ethics, and spiritual realisation was distorted by the Christian Church through fettering it in cast-iron dogmas of innate vileness of human nature, the 'scape-goat' and the 'atonement', physical resurrection and the second advent, earthly kingdom and imminence of the Day of judgement which are purely sectarian in scope. Human sacrifice was a Jewish idea and to fit the gentle and loving Jesus into Jewish beliefs, the idea of human sacrifice in the form of atonement or as a human scape goat, by Christianity, was really unfortunate.⁶⁶⁰

The above discussion show Aleaz' efforts at building Indian Christian theology on *Advaitic* philosophy. A critical discussion on how far the conclusions of such an engagement are acceptable is beyond the scope of the present project. What is important for our purposes is that it shows there is a possibility of building a Christian theology from India's own resources, and that the legacy of the pioneering attempts of Indian Christian theologians still continues at present. Aleaz's attempt shows that there is always the possibility open for newer interpretations of the gospel of God in Jesus on the basis of new resources from other contexts and philosophies than that prominent in the Greco-Roman ones. Aleaz's efforts also suggest a decolonisation of Christian theology in terms of deconstructing European or Jewish

⁶⁶⁰ CTAV 99.

religio-cultural thought to reconstructing it from Indian thought processes and religious world-views. Interestingly, Aleaz thinks that this decolonisation and reconstruction is aided by the Holy Spirit whose work is to illumine us to new understandings of Jesus in the Indian context. He argues that our explorations about Jesus should lead to the concept of an universal Jesus from a particular one;⁶⁶¹ befitting the diverse religio-cultural context of India. The understanding of God in Jesus is a continuous divine human interaction. So nothing can be pre-defined or pre-formulated. There are no timeless interpretations that could be transferred from elsewhere and made automatically viable in our context. Aleaz is emphatic that the way we understand Jesus and the way we interpret him depends on our context and therefore there is the possibility of new meanings emerging. The Indian context of religio-cultural plurality demands that we try to identify God's revelations in other religions, rather than evaluating other religions in terms of our pre-formulated criteria. In the process we also need to be open to being evaluated by other faiths. Aleaz believes that it is the Holy Spirit who opens up the ways in which we can understand God and Jesus Christ through this mutual interaction.⁶⁶²

2.3. Aleaz's Indian Ecclesiology in the Spirit

I have shown earlier that in the case of Chenchiah, the church and sacraments were severely criticised and considered to be a barrier towards greater integration of various communities in India. For Aleaz, however, the church with its sacraments

⁶⁶¹TR 216.

⁶⁶²Aleaz, "A Religio-Cultural Proposal for Building Communities in Asia," *CTC Bulletin* XX/1(April, 2004): 67, 68.

and liturgies occupies a central place in Christian spirituality. Aleaz does not discuss the church per se directly but does deal with it through his engagement with Eastern Orthodox theology which he tries to enrich with his *Advaitic* concepts. Nevertheless, Aleaz's concepts regarding the church show some aspects of the Eastern tradition with which he agrees. It will be clear that the eschatological openness and inclusivity in the Spirit is manifested in his ecclesiology. On the other hand, the church's stance regarding the marginalised communities and most importantly interfaith relations form part of his ecclesiological mission. Furthermore, Aleaz's overall decolonisation approach and *Advaitic* foundations are recognisable in his ecclesiology. I will highlight his thoughts on the ecclesiological character and mission through the following themes.

2.2.1. *Worship, Liturgy and Sacraments*

For Aleaz, the church occupies a central place in Christian spirituality with its sacrament and liturgy. Aleaz argues that human restoration is fully effected through our involvement in the church and sacraments as the Holy Spirit brings us in union with the divine nature and mystical body of the Son.⁶⁶³ Drawing from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Aleaz notes that the church is an eschatological reality. He notes along with others from the Eastern tradition that in and through worship and liturgy, the community or congregation is put in an eschatological reality as they look back and forward to the glorious memory and anticipation of the future in the Lord.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶³CAET 10, 98.

⁶⁶⁴Nikos A. Nissiotis, "The importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity For Church Life and Theology" in *The Orthodox Ethos, Essays in Honour of the Centenary of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of*

Arguing for an inclusive character of worship, Aleaz, along with Poulos Mar Gregorios argues that Christian worship has to draw in all the substantial elements in human life and culture.⁶⁶⁵ The inclusiveness is in terms of involvement of both body and senses, verbal and non-verbal communication. It can also include music, colour, smell, gestures and so on.⁶⁶⁶ Worship is an act of the whole body of Christ, so it would include both who are physically present and those who are elsewhere. Aleaz quotes Paulos Mar Gregorios about worship being inclusive:

[Worship] spreads its arms to include all the faithful, and all mankind, while it bows down to worship the Creator. It goes back into the past and forward to the 'last day' to include 'all those who have pleased God' from Adam to the parousia. This total community in space and time to which I belong has to become a reality in worship. History and eschatology and all generations, as well as all races and peoples, have to be borne in consciousness in authentic worship.⁶⁶⁷

Pointing out the significance of worship in the Eastern tradition, Aleaz quotes Paulos thus:

[W] orship is an end in itself; it is not a means to achieve 'blessings and provisions for our earthly pilgrimage': nor is it ancillary to mission or part of mission [...] It is not even to be fed by body and blood of Christ that we participate in the Eucharist, though this is absolutely essential for life. The Eucharist is an act of freedom, love and joy. It seeks for nothing beyond the Holy Trinity to whom the offering is made, though much may accrue to it in the course of the act.⁶⁶⁸

North and South America, edited by A.J. Phillippou (Oxford: Holy Well Press, 1964), 41, cited in *CAET* 97.

⁶⁶⁵Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Joy of Freedom: Eastern Worship and Modern Man* (Madras: CLS, 1986) 3-9, cited in *CAET* 98.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 10,11, cited in *CAET* 99.

The liturgy of the Church is highlighted with a pneumatological role and eschatological orientation that proclaims the Kingdom of God in Christ. Drawing from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Aleaz notes that, 'It is in the liturgy of the Church, in its structure and rhythm, in its ineffable and celestial beauty, reflected the joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, the experience of the kingdom and the true epiphany of the new creation redeemed by Christ.'⁶⁶⁹ Aleaz points out that 'Eastern liturgy is the passage from this world into the world to come, it is a procession and ascension to the kingdom.'⁶⁷⁰ He notes that Eucharist worship for the Orthodox occurs when 'the Spirit transports us into the presence of the heavenly throne. [...] This sense of being in the presence of the Holy Trinity with the angelic hosts dominates the Eucharist service.'⁶⁷¹ Thus, one of the important aspects of the Eucharistic thought in the Eastern liturgy is its unifying factor and going beyond into the kingdom.

Regarding the sacraments, Aleaz follows the Eastern tradition that 'the sacraments are understood as the aspects of a unique mystery of the Church, in which God shares divine life with humanity, redeeming humans from sin and death and bestowing upon them the glory of immortality.'⁶⁷² Aleaz contends that Eucharist can be construed both Christologically and pneumatologically. Aleaz affirms along with Eastern theologians that the role of the Holy Spirit is to unite us with the deified humanity of Christ through the Eucharist. It is the Holy Spirit who recreates, purifies and unites us into the body of Christ. Through the Eucharist and in the Holy Spirit we become participants in the Trinity while we are being deified. The Christian life,

⁶⁶⁹Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodox in the West* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 139 in *CAET* 97.

⁶⁷⁰*CAET* 110.

⁶⁷¹Paulos, *The Joy of Freedom: Eastern Worship and Modern Man*, 12, 13 cited in *CAET* 98.

⁶⁷²*CAET* 101.

points out Aleaz, is a foretaste of that deification. In order to realise this life of deification we must be in a continuous state of adoration, prayer, thanksgiving and worship of the Triune God.⁶⁷³

Regarding the aspect of baptism, the inclusive and community character in the Spirit is brought about. With Christopher Duraisingh, Aleaz brings in the dimension of corporate baptism of all people in and through the death of Christ. What it essentially means is that baptism ought to give the baptised an avenue into the formation of peaceful and harmonious communities with people of other faiths. Baptism does not mean separation from the wider community of people in the world, rather when we are baptised we are given the opportunity to reach out in communion and fellowship with the wider society. Separation can only be from sin and not from the community to which somebody belongs.⁶⁷⁴ Along with T.V. Philip, Aleaz argues that in the early church, baptism was not exclusively about entering into an organised church or a particular community, but a commitment to fight against evil.⁶⁷⁵ Referring to a seminar on the *Relationship of the Church to Non-Baptized Believers in Christ*, Gurukul, Madras, 1977, Aleaz points out that it affirmed that (water) baptism was not absolutely necessary for salvation and the church should be culturally one with the people of a particular culture or people.⁶⁷⁶ Along with Samartha, Aleaz notes that there have been different responses towards the church and baptism from the Hindu community. There have been prominent intellectuals

⁶⁷³See Georges Tsetsis, *Orthodox Thought: Report of Orthodox Consultations organized by the World Council of Churches 1975-1982*(Geneva: WCC, 1983), 83 cited in CAET 14.

⁶⁷⁴TR 345. See Christopher Duraisingh, "Some Dominant Motifs in the New Testament Doctrine of Baptism", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XIX, No.1, (March 1972), 13-17.

⁶⁷⁵TR 346. T.V. Philip, "The Meaning of Baptism: A Historical Survey," *Religion and Society*, Vol.XIX, No.1,(March, 1972), 25.

⁶⁷⁶TR 346-347. See Herbert Hofer, ed., *Debate on Mission* (Madras: Gurukul, 1979), 398, 400-403.

and reformers who responded to Christ without converting to Christianity.⁶⁷⁷ Others had a commitment to Christ without getting baptised, but were indifferent to or have totally rejected the church.⁶⁷⁸ Then others have gone through baptism and conversion but were very critical of the church.⁶⁷⁹ So in India, as Aleaz points out, there is always a possibility of dual or multiple religio-cultural belonging, like being Hindu-Christians, Muslim-Christians etc.⁶⁸⁰ For Aleaz, in the Indian context, spiritual conversion can mean experiencing God as our innermost Reality through the help of Jesus and reorienting one's life in terms of that experience.⁶⁸¹ He points out along with others that there are many in India who belong to the fellowship of Christ without undergoing water-baptism because it meant breaking away from their religio-cultural community. The Hindus are happy to receive Jesus in their pantheon, but may not want to be part of the organised church.⁶⁸²

2.2.2. *The Church's Response to Marginalised Communities especially the Dalits*

Aleaz brings his *Advaitic* understanding and pneumatological perspective to respond to the *dalit* reality in the Indian church. Taking the situation of *dalit* segregation and oppression in India into consideration he claims that the cause for the *dalits* can be strengthened if *dalit* theologians realise that *Advaita Vedanta* promotes equality of all people through the presence of Brahman (*Atman* or Spirit) in all. He contends that *dalits* need not revolt against *Advaita* as a Hindu philosophy of the upper caste. They

⁶⁷⁷ Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen and others.

⁶⁷⁸ Manilal C. Parekh, Subba Rao and the like.

⁶⁷⁹ Brahmabandhav, Chenchiah and others.

⁶⁸⁰ TR 349, Cf. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Madras/Bangalore: CLS / CISRS, 1974), 117.

⁶⁸¹ TR 341.

⁶⁸² TR 345.

rather need to revolt against the upper castes who are ignorant of the teachings of *Advaita*.⁶⁸³ He explains that ‘Advaita can provide deeper foundations for *Dalit* theology and *Dalit* theology can make *Advaitic* theology a people’s theology.’⁶⁸⁴ With Arvind P. Nirmal, the pioneer of *Dalit* theology, Aleaz reminds us that *dalit* theology is not grounded on a series of propositions believed to be revealed truths but on people’s experiences. It is actually a shift from philosophy to sociology. Here the basic unity between thought and practice is affirmed.⁶⁸⁵ Jesus becomes a *dalit* through his identification with the outcast and marginalised, and manifestation of the suffering on the cross.⁶⁸⁶

Aleaz finds a link between the experiences of the *dalits* and the role of the Spirit. He contends that the role of the Spirit is bringing the church in solidarity with *dalit* experiences. He argues that the Holy Spirit revives the ‘dry bones’ of the *dalits* and gives them life, unifying and empowering them for their liberation struggle. The Spirit is the comforter of their groaning and suffering. Moreover, the Holy Spirit heals all those who are oppressed. The Spirit thus acts on the side of the *dalits*. The Spirit acts to revive the *dalits* into a collective resurrection. It is in the power of the Spirit that the *dalits* are encouraged to stand against the oppressive structures of the upper castes. Through these struggles and siding with the oppressed, the Spirit builds up a new humanity.⁶⁸⁷ As on the day of Pentecost, the *dalits* through the Holy Spirit

⁶⁸³ Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak 1993), 242.

⁶⁸⁴ Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religions, Study, Experience and Interaction* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 1995), 251.

⁶⁸⁵ Aleaz, “Some Highlights on a Dalit Christian Theology,” in *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, Vol 7, Pt.6: Indian Christianity/ edited by A.V. Afonso and D.P.Chattopadhyay, (New Delhi: Culture for Studies in Civilization, 2009), 206. See A.P. Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective” in a *Reader in Dalit Theology*, edited by Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul, 1990), 139-141.

⁶⁸⁶ Aleaz, “Some Highlights on a Dalit Christian Theology,” 207.

⁶⁸⁷ Aleaz, “Some Highlights on a Dalit Christian Theology,” 208.

are able to break their culture of silence and speak up for their rights, dignity and honour. Presently the Spirit-inspired voices of the *Dalits* are represented by many volumes of *dalit* literature and *dalit* theology.⁶⁸⁸ Here Aleaz's attempt has been to synchronise the oneness found in *Advaita Vedanta* among human beings due to the presence of the *Brahman Atman* (God the Spirit) in all and openness in the Spirit recognising *dalit* experience of marginalisation and suffering.

2.2.3. *Theology of Religions and Interfaith Relations*

Aleaz's theology of religions and interfaith relations includes a decolonising aspect that is somewhat different from others who have been engaged in the business of emphasising the rootedness of the gospel in India. While inculturation, indigenisation or contextualisation have been attempted by both Roman Catholics and Protestants; for example, in terms of taking up Indian (Hindu) dress and lifestyle as attempted by the Roman Catholic missionary Roberto De Nobili,⁶⁸⁹ or the Protestant Chakkarai's⁶⁹⁰ use of Sanskrit terminology to reinterpret Christian doctrines, there is always a sense here that Christianity or more specifically Christ is a westerner or a foreigner and all one needs to do to root the gospel in India is to make the foreign Christ or Christianity Indian by 'repackaging' him or the religion in Indian lifestyle and thought patterns. Aleaz, to the contrary strongly emphasises that both Christ and Christianity are Asian in origin. He emphasises that religion and culture are

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 207.

⁶⁸⁹ Roberto De Nobili was a Jesuit missionary who came to India in 1605. He concluded that he could never come close to the Indians with his European lifestyle so he decided to act the role of a Christian *Sanyasi* (or monk) and to adopt Hindu garb and style of living. See *ICT* 11-14.

⁶⁹⁰ Vengal Chakkarai Chetty was born in 1880 in Tamilnadu and was later converted to Christianity in 1903. He introduced large numbers of Sanskrit terms into his writings to reinterpret Christian ones. See *ICT* 185.

inseparable and integrally connected in India so Christianity and Indian culture should be intrinsic to each other. Along with Aloysius Pierris and Raimon Pannikar, reflecting on the broader Asian context, Aleaz stands for ‘*enreligionization*’⁶⁹¹ and ‘*interculturization*’⁶⁹² instead; rejecting inculturation, indigenisation or contextualisation as defective. Aleaz notes that the latter three categories are defective for the following reasons: they treat the gospel as alien to Asians/Indians; that it supposes that there is a dichotomy between the message and context; they treat God the Creator as foreigner to his own continent / country (Asia or India) and presumes that a mere ‘revising of the language of the unchanging gospel is what is needed’ at all.⁶⁹³ The concept of *enreligionisation* on the other hand considers that in the Asian context, one ‘cannot separate a philosophy or culture from its soteriological religious content’.⁶⁹⁴ Citing Pieris, Aleaz contends that in the Asian context, ‘culture and religion are overlapping facets of the indivisible soteriology which is at once both a philosophy that is basically a religious vision and a religion that is a philosophy of life’.⁶⁹⁵ Interculturization, as suggested by Aleaz means ‘to accept the *mythos* of the other and it challenges the partners to a new self-understanding involving a continuous process of reinterpretation.’⁶⁹⁶

Aleaz maintains that all these above concepts point to the importance of the Indian hermeneutical context in understanding interfaith engagement. The Indian hermeneutical context refers to the self-identity of the Indian Christian as well as the

⁶⁹¹ This is a term suggested by Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 52 cited in Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1994) 166. (Henceforth, *GIC*)

⁶⁹² *GIC* 167.

⁶⁹³ *GIC* 99-176.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁹⁵ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 83-85 cited in *GIC* 166.

⁶⁹⁶ *GIC* 168.

‘socio-politico-religio-cultural realities of India.’⁶⁹⁷ It points to the fact that the understanding of ‘Jesus is a continuous integrated process involving humans and their Innermost Atman (Spirit) of God simultaneously.’⁶⁹⁸ Thus inculturation, indigenisation and contextualisation are not to be sought for. What is needed is ‘experiencing the emerging gospel from within a hermeneutical context.’⁶⁹⁹ Aleaz brings the above conceptions together with his basis on *Advaita* to formulate a theology of religions which he calls *Pluralistic Inclusivism*. Pluralistic inclusivism is an interfaith project that seeks to avoid the pitfalls of indigenisation or contextualisation while at the same time promoting a deeper engagement of religious faiths with each other. Explaining pluralistic inclusivism Aleaz writes:

In Pluralistic Inclusivism both Inclusivism and Pluralism undergo change in their previous meanings. It makes Pluralism inclusive and Inclusivism pluralistic. Pluralistic Inclusivism is an attempt to make Christian faith pluralistically inclusive, i.e. the content of the revelation of God in Jesus is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to it as per the requirement of different places and times and it is through such pluralistic understanding of the gospel that its true inclusivism is to shine forth.⁷⁰⁰

In other words, the meaning of the gospel of Christ can be decided on the basis of the particular religio-cultural context which can contribute to new meanings that can emerge in that context. In this project he suggests the possibility of ‘relational convergence of religions,’ particularly for India. The first aspect of relational convergence of religions is that of mutual conversion. That means that in order for Christianity or Christian theology to become Indian Christian theology, it has to

⁶⁹⁷ *GIC* 177.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁰ *TR* 172.

undergo a conversion to the ‘Indian religio-cultural context’.⁷⁰¹ Aleaz contends that Indian religio-cultural context will decide the content of the gospel of God in Jesus for India’.⁷⁰² He writes:

In the very conversion to Jesus in India, there is a conversion to the religio-cultural context of India, effecting thus a double conversion and this hints to the possible relational convergence of religious experiences.⁷⁰³

The suggestion here seems to be that religions including Christianity have to be ready to be reconceptualised in a particular religio-cultural context. The role of the religio-cultural context, apart from assigning new meanings, is to point out that even the unique truth claims of each religion can find complementarities only when each religion is prepared to admit that there can be a number of ways to articulate them; ‘none wholly adequate and all limited by available conceptual frameworks.’⁷⁰⁴ This manner of religious convergence and complementarity does not seek to arrive at a ‘universally accepted tradition’⁷⁰⁵ but recognises that we are all moving towards a ‘common quest’ for truth and perfection.⁷⁰⁶ In relational convergence of religions the uniqueness of each religious claim is affirmed on its own criteria while simultaneously being open to be ‘converted’ or transformed by the other.⁷⁰⁷

The second aspect of relational convergence is the affirmation that religious resources are the common property of all humanity and that ‘richness of one’s own religious experience grows by mutual giving and receiving.’⁷⁰⁸ In Aleaz’ stress on

⁷⁰¹TR 180.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴TR 184.

⁷⁰⁵Ibid., 183.

⁷⁰⁶Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷Ibid., 183,184.

⁷⁰⁸TR 185.

commonness and oneness, he argues that there is ‘no point in upholding the fundamental differences’ between religions for it does not serve wider ecumenism.⁷⁰⁹ The basis for this whole project of pluralistic inclusivism for Aleaz is that of *Advaita Vedanta* philosophy. *Advaita Vedanta*’s basic affirmation that God, humanity and the world are *one* reality helps his interfaith project to transcend such religious boundaries and affirm the other. He is convinced that *Advaita Vedanta* ‘transcends all religious boundaries.’⁷¹⁰ He writes:

Through Advaita Vedantic understanding that each idea of God is but a stage in the religious journey, tolerance and acceptance of all different religions become natural and spontaneous for a Hindu.⁷¹¹

Aleaz’ pluralistic inclusivism does not treat the church as insignificant. Instead, following from his Eastern Orthodox background he emphasises that since the Holy Spirit is the final authority in the church, according to that tradition truth is experienced in the church, but the Spirit frees its members to express truth in Indian terms. Therefore, Aleaz proposes that the one truth can be appropriated and understood according to the particular context. An Indian understanding of the Truth will require Indian framework of understanding and in this sense pramanas or sources of knowledge in Indian philosophy can be helpful.

He claims,

[It] is the Holy Spirit speaking and acting through the whole body of believers who is the final authority in the church. Truth for Eastern Christianity is God experienced in the church and its is not limited to the Bible or magisterium or conciliar definitions. [...] In Orthodox tradition any

⁷⁰⁹TR 181. He proposes this in relation to Christian-Muslim relations while Jesus is held as a prophet in both Islam and Christianity. Here he argues that there is no point in highlighting the difference between Christian and Islamic understandings of Jesus simultaneously as well as hold the above view.

⁷¹⁰CTAV 1.

⁷¹¹Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, 240.

theologian has the freedom to express his/her encounter with Truth and what India now suggests is, let the freedom be exercised in terms of six *pramanas*⁷¹² of Advaita Vedanta.⁷¹³

SECTION THREE:

A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF CHENCHIAH AND ALEAZ AND THE INSIGHTS PARTICULAR TO INDIA.

The above discussion of Chenchiah and Aleaz bring out some indications of how theology and the church are construed in the Indian context. In other words, it brings out insights that are particular only to Indian Christian theology in comparison to that of the West as discussed in Chapter Two. In Aleaz it was evident that Indian Christian theology can be developed drawing from Indian religio-philosophical categories. Through Aleaz I have shown that efforts at building Christian theology and ecclesiology on Indian foundations continues even in the present times. However, the significant differences between the Indian Christian theology of the 19th and 20th centuries and present are particularly in terms of the context and the approach. During Chenchiah's time, especially during the pre-Independence period, the effort at rooting the gospel of Christ and the Church in India was understandably tied to nationalistic inclinations. Post-Independence and in contemporary times, the motivation has moved towards religious harmony and building dialogical interfaith communities. It is evident that unlike Chenchiah, the church in Aleaz continues to be the locus of new theological endeavours situating it in the religio-cultural-

⁷¹²Pramanas are sources of knowledge in Indian philosophy and are six in number namely Perception-*pratyaksa*, inference-*anumana*, scripture or verbal testimony-*sabda*, comparison-*upamana*, postulation-*arthapatti*, and non cognition-*anupalabdhi*. Aleaz uses these pramanas as sources of knowledge in Indian Christian theology. See Aleaz, *The Role of Pramanas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak) 1991.

⁷¹³CAET 223, 224.

philosophical context of India. It is also important to note that unlike Chenchiah, Aleaz along with much of Eastern Orthodox theology, thinks that the church and its liturgical tradition and sacraments, pneumatologically and eschatologically understood, do not form a barrier, but are efficacious towards God-human relationship.

Chenchiah and Aleaz's theologies have shown that there is a potential of a pneumatological perspective in Indian theologies which needs to be explored further. While Chenchiah was Christocentric and Aleaz considered Jesulogy to expound the implications of *Advaitic* thinking, both showed that pneumatology has the capacity to renew our understandings and interpretations of Christian theology and determine our relationships with God and the world. For Chenchiah, this is expressed in a sort of spiritual-biological evolution in Christ through the Spirit, while Aleaz emphasises the oneness that exists in God-humans-creation through the presence of the Supreme *Atman* (Spirit) in all. Pneumatology is seen to play a prominent role for both. For Chenchiah, it is the Spirit who is responsible for transforming us into 'Christs' in a spiritual or biological evolutionary process; whereas Aleaz's Christ pervades the whole creation in the Spirit. Consequently, Christ in the Spirit is interpreted as cosmic Christ or universal Christ by Chenchiah and universal Jesus as in Aleaz. Thus the pneumatological emphasis in each, adds universality to the particular Christ or Jesus. Of course, a criticism can be put forward as to the limitations of the concept of universal Jesus or Christ.⁷¹⁴

Nevertheless, the efforts of our theologians are an important step towards making Christ relevant for India through the Spirit. In terms of the work of Christ,

⁷¹⁴ See Sunil Caleb, "K.P.Aleaz's Perspective on an Indian Jesulogy: An Evaluation" in *Many Ways of Pluralism: Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz*, 85-97.

the pneumatological emphasis yields interesting but challenging results in each of our theologians. They are challenging in the sense that some of them go beyond traditional theological affirmations in their bid to be relevant for India. For example, Chenchiah affirms that Christ saves by his continuous presence and not by a particular act of his without emphasising Christ's death on the cross and having a theology devoid of the concept of sin. Surprisingly, Christ's resurrection becomes more important to him than Christ's death. I discern two reasons for this: on the one hand, Chenchiah wanted to be relevant to Indian spirituality's preference for the universal in the Spirit as opposed to historical particularity; on the other, the Spirit's role in resurrection links well with new creation and new birth rather than the death of Christ. Obviously, one would be inclined to question how Chenchiah could have a sound theology of resurrection if he does not have a counterpart in a theology of the death of Christ. Yet we can see Chenchiah and Aleaz are closer in terms of rejecting the affirmation that the juridical understanding of the atonement is the only way of understanding Christ's work on the cross. So instead of judgement and propitiation; love, service and communion becomes important for Chenchiah, while in Aleaz, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross becomes a model for our own self-sacrifice for others and realising our total dependence on God. The pneumatological perspective can be said to provide relationality in their theologies in terms of making the particular universal and in providing a sort of openness and inclusivity. Here it is clearly evident that the Christological dimension is qualified by a pneumatological perspective, Indian thought-processes and the context, and can be put into our category of a *relationally distinct* relationship as formulated earlier.

Particularly in terms of ecclesiology, while the colonial captivity of the churches in India continues to be highlighted and a decolonisation approach continues to be encouraged, the character of the decolonisation effort has changed. The vehement attack on the organised church and its complete rejection in terms of its rituals and practices are replaced by a critical attitude towards its reform (structural and theological) and seeking a renewed understanding in terms of inclusivity and openness. While Chenchiah's decolonisation approach rendered the organised church established on the pattern of the West with its rituals and practices redundant for the Indian context, Aleaz's decolonisation approach stands for new models of Christianity and a church that takes the religious and cultural context of India seriously.

Consequently, both Chenchiah and Aleaz deal with the problem of institutionalism of the church; however, they tackle the problem in different ways. Chenchiah's efforts were towards bridging the religious-social, sacred-secular divide in the power of the Spirit and practicing spirituality even beyond the church in and through daily lives. This brings him to the concept of a non-institutional religion and even a churchless Christianity, where there is no need for liturgy and sacraments. Christianity is supposed to spread like a leaven without a particular church structure. On the other hand, for Aleaz the grace of the Spirit works through the liturgical tradition of a church, in and through worship, rituals and sacraments, while the same liturgy can be open and cosmic by embracing all humanity and creation through the presence of the Spirit. Both Chenchiah and Aleaz's relational theologies make for a relational church in terms of the effort of bringing together the secular and the

sacred, the religious and the social and in the possibility of following our religion beyond sacred spaces.

An eschatological orientation along with the pneumatological perspective also renders their ecclesiology relational; however, this relationality is not qualified with the particularity and distinctiveness of the Christian community. While decolonisation is important, the distinct identity of an Indian church as a community is not clearly dealt with. While relationality is emphasised throughout the question of distinctiveness of a particular community and its particular contributions are not emphasised. Thus the relational distinctiveness dialectics are not fulfilled in this case.

There are interesting suggestions about ecumenism from Chenchiah. He suggests that church-unity should be sought outside the church in action first and then united work, prayer, worship and communion would inevitably follow. He prefers a non-dogmatic and non-organic form of ecumenism, yet he fails to elaborate on such ecumenism and how it would work. On the other hand, Aleaz bases the unity of the churches drawn from the *Advaitic* unity that is realised between God, humans and entire creation, but fails to emphasise the unity that is in Christ.

Both Chenchiah and Aleaz leave options open for dual or multiple religious belonging. Chenchiah thinks that it is not necessary for the followers of Christ to be particularly affiliated to a church and therefore it is possible to follow Christ from within one's own religion whatever it might be. Aleaz also shares the reality of many people living with transcending religious boundaries in India and therefore points to the grounds for dual or multiple religious belonging. I have shown in the first chapter of this thesis that Christians and others continue to live in two or more worlds in

terms of religion and culture, although Chenchiah and Aleaz do not elaborate on the intricacies of dual or multiple religious belonging.

On the issue of theology of religions and interfaith relations, while Chenchiah seeks to ground people's religious practices drawing from Hindu religious philosophical resources, Aleaz seeks to situate interfaith relations in Indian philosophy and the religio-cultural context of the people. While Chenchiah sought to build up interfaith communities of worship and prayer and reformulated Hindu religious practices like *Yoga* as a Christian spiritual discipline, Aleaz's interfaith efforts are dialogical towards mutual enrichment of religions. Though this shows the *dialogical mutuality*, it fails to be *critically particular* as required by our *distinctively relational* criterion. Aleaz prefers to disregard the distinctions between religions in favour of similarities for facilitating dialogue. As much as this stance is understood in the context of discrimination and alienation between communities in the Indian context, questions may arise as to the lack of distinctive contribution of Christianity or any other religion regarding dialogue in this aspect. Again, his *Advaitic*, non-dual project of religio-cultural oneness can be easily co-opted and misused by Hindu fundamentalism's harmful hegemonic, mono-cultural project,⁷¹⁵ which emphasises that all minorities in India should belong to one culture, i.e. Hindu. Moreover, Aleaz's project has been criticised as elitist, having little relation to concrete realities and has no relation to questions of power.⁷¹⁶

On the question of a liberationist perspective both Chenchiah and Aleaz are deficient. While Aleaz emphasises the religio-cultural context of India in his

⁷¹⁵ See S. Robertson, "Theological Contributions of K.P. Aleaz," in *Many Ways of Pluralism: Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz*, 32.

⁷¹⁶ Philip Vinod Peacock, "A Question of Millions and a Million Questions: Reflecting on Pluralistic Inclusivism from a Dalit Perspective," in *Many Ways of Pluralism: Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz*, 122.

theology of religions and seeks to address the *dalit* issue, he fails to question the socio-economic structures that perpetuate marginalisation in such a context. Aleaz uses Vedic religio-philosophical categories (Brahmanic categories), which have been accused by liberation theologies, like *dalit* theology, for excluding the concerns of the poor and the outcaste for centuries.⁷¹⁷ This is an important aspect that the church in India cannot bypass: the question of marginalisation and liberation of the marginalised. In both Chenchiah and Aleaz this liberationist approach is seriously lacking.

The above discussions of the theologies and ecclesiologies of Chenchiah and Aleaz show the similarities and differences between approaches of yesteryears and the present. It shows that their contributions are significant in terms of highlighting aspects that are particular to India theologically and contextually: the significance of a pneumatological perspective, the need for decolonisation in theology and the church, an integrated way of understanding ecumenism, the potential of using Indian religio-philosophical resources, the reality of dual or multiple religious belonging, an interfaith approach that is non-elitist and the need for a liberationist perspective.

Thus in the following section I will look forward to an ecclesiology that both combines the insights so far gained and avoids some of the drawbacks highlighted, yet includes the relational-distinctive dialectics of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology for the North Indian context. I offer the Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan, as an alternative to the above ecclesiologies as suitable for the project.

⁷¹⁷Philip V. Peacock talks about how Advaita seeks to co-opt *dalit* theology and makes a distinction between knower and doer, a division that is accused of an elitist bias. See Peacock, "A Question of Millions and a Million Questions: Reflecting on Pluralistic Inclusivism from a Dalit Perspective," 123.

SECTION FOUR: THE PERMEABLE SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY OF SAMUEL RAYAN.

This section will be an attempt to offer a suitable Spirit ecclesiology that fulfils, on the one hand, the criteria of relational-distinctiveness, and on the other, the particular demands of the North Indian context. I will offer the Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan, as a suitable alternative. It will become clear that what is lacking in Amos Yong's ecclesiological project needs to be supplemented with Rayan's project. Rayan's project will also show in what areas he is more suitable than his counterparts Chenchiah and Aleaz for the development of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. Here is a brief introduction to Samuel Rayan.

Samuel Rayan SJ, born in 1920, is an Indian theologian broadly characterised as a liberation theologian. However he is a liberation theologian with a difference as his pneumatological perspectives guide his theology of liberation.⁷¹⁸ He entered the *Society of Jesus* in 1939 and then studied philosophy at Shembabanur, Tamilnadu from 1942-1945. Following his philosophy degree, he studied theology at De Nobili College, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. Rayan was ordained as a priest in 1955 and thereafter he pursued his doctoral studies in theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, from 1958-1960. In the year 1961 he became the chaplain of AICUF (Catholic Students Movement) in Kerala.⁷¹⁹ This led him in his engagement with

⁷¹⁸MIS 139.

⁷¹⁹Kurien Kunnumpuram, ed., *Jesus: The Relevance of his Person and Message for our Times*, Vol.1 Selected Writings of Samuel Rayan, SJ. (Bombay: St.Paul's, 2011), 7.

Marxism regarding concern for humanisation and development.⁷²⁰ Kirsteen Kim points out that Rayan's liberation theology was also influenced by the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris SJ.⁷²¹ From 1968-1982, he was one of the first invited Catholic members of the WCC Faith and Order Commission. This ecumenical engagement equipped him to serve as the principal of the Indian School of Ecumenical Theology in Bangalore from 1988-1990. He also served as a professor and Dean of Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi.⁷²² In a context where socio-economic and religio-cultural oppression and marginalisation continues, Rayan's theology provides the church with tools to engage broadly in the Spirit with liberation of the oppressed. For Rayan, theology is 'faith seeking justice'.⁷²³ Moreover, his pneumatological perspective has led him to take the concrete, cultural and religious realities into account in his theology.⁷²⁴ Theology ought to address the struggles, problems and potentials of a community. It is the theology of everyday life not as practiced by professionals, but out of the lived experiences of the common people.⁷²⁵ Rayan's thoughts can be explored through one of his published books⁷²⁶ and various articles in different journals.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁰MIS 140.

⁷²¹Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation, Faith Meets Faith Series* (Maryknoll, NY:Orbis Books, 1988) 45-50 cited in MIS 157.

⁷²²MIS 138.

⁷²³Samuel Rayan, "Doing Theology in India" in DS 22.

⁷²⁴MIS 139.

⁷²⁵Samuel Rayan, "Doing Theology in India," 23.

⁷²⁶Samuel Rayan, *Breath of Fire-The Holy Spirit: Heart of the Christian Gospel*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979). First published as *The Holy Spirit: Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978). Later published as *Come Holy Spirit*, (Delhi: Media House, 1998).

⁷²⁷Journals namely *Jeevadhara, Religion and Society(RS), Indian Journal of Theology(IJT), Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection(VJTR)*

4.1. Samuel Rayan's Theology and Ecclesiology

Samuel Rayan's theology and ecclesiology can be described as the dynamic combination of twin images, *bread* and *breath*. In fact, the title of a *Festschrift* for Rayan's seventieth birthday contained the phrase 'bread and breath.'⁷²⁸ In the introduction to this book, bread and breath are referred to as the 'two poles' around which Rayan's theological reflections turn.⁷²⁹ The phrase 'Bread and breath' in Rayan's theology expresses the dynamics of our human life in many facets and maintains the dialectics of the joint action of Christ and the Spirit. 'Bread and breath' in Rayan's theology brings together various meanings. Bread for him signifies food for all, along with the need for justice when considered in the context of marginalisation and poverty perpetuated by the powerful. Breath signifies the role of the Spirit that inspires us through faith to provide for the hungry.⁷³⁰ The breath of God helps us to live by the Spirit while the Spirit also inspires us through Christ to share the materials we possess. Our human life is the dynamic interplay of the spiritual and the material.⁷³¹ The dialectics of bread and breath is more nuanced in Rayan as Kirsteen Kim points out that 'bread and breath are even more integrated [...] not only breath but also bread is a symbol of the Holy Spirit'.⁷³² Again, bread is the person of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who breathes the Spirit of God. Kim observes the dialectics further. She writes:

⁷²⁸T.K. John, ed., *Bread and Breath: Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan SJ*, Jesuit Theological Forum Reflections 5 (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash) Rayan himself derives this phrase from a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins entitled *Giver of breath and bread*.

⁷²⁹Ibid., xii.

⁷³⁰John, ed., *Bread and Breath: Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan SJ*, xii.

⁷³¹MIS 192.

⁷³²Ibid.

Bread and the breath is a richly poetic way of combining two natures of Christ, the secular and the sacred, the immanence and transcendence of God [...] to motivate mystics to seek human well-being and encounter the Spirit in their neighbours. [...] Conversely, bread and breath expresses to activists the role of the contemplative and to historians the validity of the mystical.⁷³³

The above ‘breath and bread’ dialectics represented in one of the connotations of the joint working of Spirit and Christ can be seen in Rayan’s description of Spirit Christology. Although his Christology can be primarily classed as Spirit Christology, he admits that this cannot be done without a corresponding Logos Christology.

4.1.1. *Spirit Christology*

Rayan’s Christology is distinctively pneumatological and liberationist. Jesus is the ‘symbol of the Holy Spirit’,⁷³⁴ but this Spirit ‘is the non-conformist manner in which Jesus moved with bad characters, and ate with social outcasts [...] and] in the concern for bread for the hungry’.⁷³⁵ This is its liberationist aspect. The Spirit-Christ dialectics is further evident as he contends that ‘at the beginning of Christianity stand two events: the Christ event and the Spirit event. [...] Without the experience of the Spirit, Jesus could not have moved men and women of his time as he did.’⁷³⁶ Rayan clearly explains the relationship between pneumatological Christology and Christological pneumatology. He writes: ‘Jesus is Christ and Lord only through the Holy Spirit. This is Pneumatological Christology. But the Holy Spirit is only given,

⁷³³Ibid., 193.

⁷³⁴Rayan, “Symbols of the Spirit,” in *GHBV* 120.

⁷³⁵Ibid.

⁷³⁶Rayan, “New Efforts in Pneumatology,” in *GHBV* 99.

and in this sense, ‘there is a Spirit at all only if Jesus is Christ and Lord.’⁷³⁷ Here we have Christological Pneumatology. He argues that it is not possible to develop Pneumatology separately from the Word.⁷³⁸ On the other hand, Rayan does highlight the importance of Spirit Christology, which he claims has been neglected in favour of Logos Christology in the West.

He writes:

Spirit Christology presents an interpretation of Jesus in a way analogous to Logos Christology which has been dominant since the second century. The main difference is that Spirit Christology functions in an inclusive way, open to other New Testament Christologies, ready to consider, interpret and appropriate them, while Logos Christology has tended to be exclusive, throwing other Christologies in a shadow.⁷³⁹

Rayan argues for the importance of Spirit Christology as its capacity to highlight Jesus’ humanity in his ‘subjectivity, personhood, freedom and obedience’⁷⁴⁰ which reveals him as a person of history. This aspect of Jesus has been neglected by Logos Christology.⁷⁴¹ Spirit Christology also determines the aspect of salvation for Rayan and makes it universal. He writes:

God as Spirit has been effecting salvation from the beginning of world history. Salvation did not begin with Jesus. Jesus reveals it, realises it historically, and becomes its perfect exemplar. [.. .] Since no less than God acts in Jesus for the salvation of the world, this salvation is universally relevant for humankind.⁷⁴²

Rayan’s Spirit Christology is expressed in terms of annunciation, baptism, resurrection and Pentecost. In the annunciation the Virgin Mary was hovered over by

⁷³⁷Ibid., 98.

⁷³⁸Ibid.

⁷³⁹Rayan, “New Efforts in Pneumatology,” in *GHBV* 98.

⁷⁴⁰Ibid., 100.

⁷⁴¹Ibid.

⁷⁴²Ibid.

the Holy Spirit resulting in the New Man Jesus Christ. When we offer ourselves similarly to the Spirit, 'God's Word will become flesh in us.'⁷⁴³ Rayan affirms that from the moment of baptism, the Spirit took charge of Jesus' ministry and similarly the work of the Spirit begins in our hearts with the coming of the Spirit.⁷⁴⁴ For Rayan, the death and resurrection of Christ are bound up together. While death symbolises the commitment of Christ towards the oppressed and exploited and is a resistance towards evil, the resurrection symbolises the beginning of new birth and new creation.⁷⁴⁵ Rayan agrees with Madathilparampil M. Thomas (M.M. Thomas) that resurrection is an eschatological event, which signals the entry into new creation. It is through the Spirit that Jesus is made contemporary and ever present with us. It brings out the possibility of a new order in our present times and makes history present. He links this to our daily life and concern for justice through the effect of Christ's resurrection for all humanity. He concludes that Christ is present because of resurrection, 'not only in the Church, not only in the sacraments, but in the care people give for one another, in the struggle for justice, solidarity and friendship and the toil for daily rice. Jesus is there with them participating in their liturgy of life.'⁷⁴⁶ Rayan argues that through Christ's resurrection the Spirit is breathed in us and we are encouraged to communicate that Spirit among others. This makes the 'Spirit of God, a Spirit of befriendedness and reconciliation.'⁷⁴⁷ He claims that we can all share in the resurrection of Christ through the communication of the Spirit, building a

⁷⁴³ Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 14.

⁷⁴⁴ Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 15.

⁷⁴⁵ Rayan, "Jesus and the Poor in the Fourth Gospel," in *Jesus: Relevance of His Person and the Message for our Times*, edited by Kurien Kunnumpuram, Vol. 1, (Mumbai: St.Paul's, 2011), 145.

⁷⁴⁶ Rayan, "Decolonization of Theology," in *DT* 43.

⁷⁴⁷ Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 76, 77.

community of justice and love.⁷⁴⁸In Pentecost, referring to the pouring out of the Spirit in tongues of fire, Rayan affirms that: ‘The Spirit is the Communicator of the Word. The creative Spirit and the creative Word work together’.⁷⁴⁹

What is evident in Rayan’s Spirit Christology is the dialectics of the working of the Spirit and the Word / Christ together with an added liberationist perspective. It is seen that the Spirit, on the one hand, ensures the relevance of salvation of Christ universally among humanity, and on the other, ensures the particularity of that salvation through the Logos made flesh historically. Salvation in Rayan always has liberation of the oppressed in focus. Again, the resurrection of Christ, on the one hand, signifies new creation through the Spirit, while the eschatological Spirit makes the resurrected Christ ever present with us. Furthermore, the Spirit helps the liberation of Christ to be witnessed in our everyday lives and in the building of communities of justice and peace. Thus there is also the dialectics of the Spirit and Christ, the spiritual and the concrete working here along with the liberationist perspective.

4.1.2. *Decolonisation of Theology and Theology of Life*

Along with the above dialectics working in Rayan’s theology, it must be highlighted that it has a strong decolonisation approach, which leads him to a theology of life from the liberationist perspective. In his article, *Decolonizing of Theology*, Rayan admits that such an effort of decolonisation is neither new nor confined to India but emphasises that it is absolutely necessary in India. In this article he outlines the

⁷⁴⁸Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹Ibid., 19.

problems with colonial theology: Rayan contends that since colonial theology failed to acknowledge that God has been working through the Spirit even before the colonial era in India, it failed to acknowledge the richness of India's culture and religion, its thought-world and symbols. Subsequently, it opted for importing the traditions and cultures of the west, which ended up making God a stranger in the land and the churches mere 'replicas of western churches'.⁷⁵⁰ Colonial theologies manufactured in the western academies and monasteries stressed hierarchy, power, submission and otherworldly salvation and failed to be prophetic in proclaiming a gospel of liberation for the poor.⁷⁵¹ Following Balasundaram,⁷⁵² Rayan further notes that classical traditional theology is a 'handmaid of western expansionism' and therefore has been primarily church-centred and usually equated the kingdom of God with the church making it the sole vehicle of salvation.⁷⁵³ It has been non-revolutionary and ignorant of the conditions of workers and the poor, being bereft of social analysis, 'individualistic in orientation'⁷⁵⁴ and presents Christ, in the words of Aloysius Pieris, as 'the western colonizer's tribal god seeking ascendancy in the Asian pantheon.'⁷⁵⁵

In response to this colonised theology, Rayan offers a theology of life, of praxis; rather 'ortho-theo-praxis,'⁷⁵⁶ that rescues faith from being merely an 'intellectual assent' of the Patristic and Scholastic system to a theology that

⁷⁵⁰Samuel Rayan, "Decolonization of Theology" in *DT* 29-34.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵²See F.J.B. Balasundaram, *Contemporary Asian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995) 32-34; T.Balasuriya, *Jesus Christ and Human Liberation*, Colombo, 1984, 328-330 cited in Rayan , "Decolonization of Theology," *DT* 32.

⁷⁵³Rayan, 'Decolonization of Theology,' in *DT* 34.

⁷⁵⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 59 cited in Rayan, "Decolonization of Theology," in *DT* 34.

⁷⁵⁶Rayan, "Decolonization of Theology," in *DT* 39.

concretely connects with hope of the kingdom.⁷⁵⁷ He writes that theology ought to ‘connect hope and freedom in history; connect eschatology and struggle for justice now; connect Reign of God and social change.’⁷⁵⁸ As a concrete theology of praxis and life, Rayan’s theology seeks to speak from the perspective of the oppressed, springing from the suffering and struggles of the victims of oppression; in other words, from the ‘underside of history.’⁷⁵⁹ Such a theology from the perspective of the oppressed people becomes a ‘people’s theology’⁷⁶⁰ that critiques the structures of society that oppress the poor and the marginalised. Further, this kind of theology affirms a theology of religions not only from the perspective of Christians, but from the perspective of neighbours of other faiths. Rayan argues that since in India or Asia, the majority of the poor are non-Christians, ‘theology has to speak to and speak through non-Christian peoplehood.’⁷⁶¹ Citing Pieris, Rayan notes the importance of ‘theology of religions that will expand the existing boundaries of orthodoxy as we enter into the liberative streams of other religions and cultures.’⁷⁶² In other words, this liberationist theology would affirm unity in diversity, theological pluralism and not dead uniformity, and this unity would be ‘woven out of diverse ethnic groups, cultures, languages, religions, myths and sacred texts and symbols.’⁷⁶³ Finally, such a theology itself would be open to be challenged, judged, and evaluated from different perspectives and especially from the victims.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁵⁷Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 41

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Rayan, “Decolonization of Theology,” in *DT* 41.

⁷⁶²Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 87 in Rayan, “Decolonization of Theology,” in *DT* 41.

⁷⁶³Rayan, “Decolonization of Theology,” in *DT* 35-43.

⁷⁶⁴Ibid.

The above are the features of a theology of life that Rayan seeks to offer, but how does he actually attempt to do it? His primary strategy to get rid of much of colonial theology's abstract and metaphysical emphasis and theoretical articulations is to give bodily language to theology. This would be a language of 'Art, of poetry, drama, painting, sculpture and dance, of the novel and the short story, or even of architecture,' a language close to the earth and one that has the capacity to carry our struggles and celebrations.⁷⁶⁵ In these terms, symbols, myths, imagination and memory become vital vehicles of faith. Rayan makes a plea to use symbols 'for the creation of a living and vigorous theology.'⁷⁶⁶ He claims that myths expressed through rituals and stories, lead us into participation with a particular religion or culture and hold together the sacred and the profane. So he calls for the re-mythologisation of religion and theology that would open up avenues to explore and appreciate the mythical richness of religious traditions of India. Imagination and collective memory of the community again are the bedrock of myths and symbols, which continue to connect us to God and the entire creation.⁷⁶⁷ Again, to counteract the theologies of the dominant, he does *people's theology* as mentioned above. The source for people's theology is the life of the people and the stories that narrate people's movements, struggles and generosity of ordinary people. It is a theology of the ordinary people and not simply about learned propositions to be discussed in academia. It is a people centred theology using the narratives of ordinary people.⁷⁶⁸ This includes doing theology as a disciple. In other words, the call to discipleship is a call to theologise as well. The call for commitment to Christ is a call to critically

⁷⁶⁵Rayan, "Theology as Art" in *DT* 8.

⁷⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁷Rayan, "Theology as Art," in *DT* 3-13.

⁷⁶⁸Rayan, "People's Theology," in *DT* 79-103.

analyse the forces at work in the world, to be open for God's kingdom and to discern movements of liberation in the world.⁷⁶⁹ This theology rooted in praxis looks forward to history being humanised and transformed. Rayan maintains that our faith in God and the coming reign should be correlated with a praxis that critically evaluates history and also transforms it.⁷⁷⁰ One of the aspects in which Rayan expresses his theology of life is through his theology of Creation and the Earth.

4.1.3. *Theology of Creation and the Earth*

Rayan's theology of creation and the earth holds in tension the dialectics of the unity in diversity, spiritual and the concrete, and the role of the Spirit and Christ with his own characteristic liberationist perspective. Rayan claims that 'The Holy Spirit is the author of all dynamism in nature, all the chemisms and tactisms [...] movements, colours, sounds, freedoms and spontaneities. It is the Spirit that holds this diversity together, weaving them into cosmic harmony.'⁷⁷¹ In this web of interrelatedness, 'God is here not as the proprietor of nature and of men and women but as Source and Goal and Friend and Home.'⁷⁷² Rayan thinks of this interrelatedness as otherness. He writes:

[. . .] the otherness is a reality within interrelatedness. All otherness is intrinsically for-one-anotherness. [...] There is a unity of the human, the cosmic, the technical and the divine. Without nature the human being is nothing; without the human being nature is nothing [.]⁷⁷³

⁷⁶⁹Rayan, "Theologian as Disciple-Disciple as Theologian," in *DT* 46-52.

⁷⁷⁰Rayan, "Indian Theology and the Problem of History," in *DT* 192-221.

⁷⁷¹Rayan, "New Efforts in Pneumatology," in *GHVB* 107.

⁷⁷²Rayan, 'Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis' in *NWC* 89.

⁷⁷³*Ibid.*

The above shows the unity in diversity that is brought about by the Spirit in and through Creation. Rayan uses this aspect of interrelatedness and gives it his own liberationist perspective. He explains that through this interrelatedness brought about by the Spirit we are encouraged to resist dehumanisation and oppression and are urged to fight for justice and freedom.⁷⁷⁴

Rayan links this interrelatedness to new creation with a liberationist perspective. He affirms that the Spirit brings new creation in terms of providing power and energy to the weak and the oppressed.⁷⁷⁵ The new creation not only energises the weak and the oppressed but renews the whole earth, as Rayan believes that the whole creation and our whole lives are ‘bathed in the Holy Spirit.’⁷⁷⁶ The Spirit renews the world. Rayan contends that the Spirit’s work has to be affirmed both in our hearts and in the wider outreaches of the cosmos of God’s creation. The involvement of the Spirit in creation takes up the issues of renewal of the earth, regeneration of society and rebuilding our value systems.⁷⁷⁷ Rayan claims that: ‘All the beginnings, all fresh stirrings of life in particular, all creativity and development, all lushness and blossoming is associated with and attributed to the action of the Holy Spirit!’⁷⁷⁸ The Spirit pleads with us to be befriended by God and nature, to restore God’s beautiful creation.⁷⁷⁹ While the Spirit inspires and creates, the earth becomes the concrete locus of such renewal as it is considered an embodiment of Christ’s body. Rayan thinks of the earth as the ‘primordial sacrament’⁷⁸⁰ of God because the earth is the ground of our existence; ‘the giver of breath and bread and

⁷⁷⁴Rayan, “Symbols of the Spirit,” in *GHBV* 135.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 10.

⁷⁷⁷ Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 10

⁷⁷⁸Rayan, “Ecology and Theology: A Theology of Nature, a Theology of Life,” in *NWC* 64.

⁷⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 59.

like God, immensely resourceful'.⁷⁸¹ He finds in nature and earth the extension of 'Christ's bodiliness.'⁷⁸² In the incarnation, the universe's evolutionary pilgrimage attains its fulfilment. In Christ all matter and all its forms and processes seem to draw in the divine and endow everything with new sanctity and dignity. The 'whole of nature is the Mother of the Son of God.'⁷⁸³

Having discussed the basic framework of Rayan's theology I will now proceed to discuss his Spirit ecclesiology. I will show that his Spirit ecclesiology is a permeable Spirit ecclesiology that shows the relational-distinctive dialectics. I will show how Rayan's ecclesiology is both similar to and different from Yong, Chenchiah and Aleaz and thereby argue that Rayan's theology and ecclesiology is appropriate for a permeable Spirit ecclesiology in the North Indian context. I will discuss Rayan's ecclesiology in terms of the nature, ministry and mission of the Church.

4.2. The Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan

4.2.1. The Nature of a Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology

4.2.1.1. *A Pneumatic and Liberationist Community with a Critical Edge*

Ecclesiology for Rayan is essentially constituted by the Spirit, but he thinks that the Spirit-experiences of the people help build the church community. Distinctively, Rayan's focus is on the Spirit-experiences of those people who are poor and

⁷⁸¹Ibid.

⁷⁸²Ibid., 62.

⁷⁸³Rayan, "'Ecology and Theology: A Theology of Nature, a Theology of Life,'" in *NWC* 62.

marginalised, expressing the liberationist dimension. This liberationist dimension also carries with it a distinctive critical character which is both self-critical and a critique of the oppressive forces in and beyond the church that perpetuate such marginalisation. Rayan affirms that the ‘Church is radically pneumatic’⁷⁸⁴ in the sense that it is constituted out of the people’s Spirit-experience, mediated through the Spirit’s presence and gifts to them.⁷⁸⁵ One might ask, what is the content of this Spirit-experience? Rayan writes: ‘The Spirit works primarily by generating awareness and communion [...] by giving us vision and urging us to build community.’⁷⁸⁶ Rayan contends that this kind of Spirit experience ensures participation by the ordinary people, especially the marginalised, and helps them to work for their freedom, to speak for their rights and to form communities.⁷⁸⁷ The Spirit enables the church to take the side of the weak and the oppressed, which is a critique of the notion of the catholicity of the church that compromises with the colonial church.⁷⁸⁸ The Spirit, who is the genuine authority of the church, redistributes power to all and offers a critique of a narrow view of apostolicity, authority and charism that is often limited to the offices of the church. On the whole, it makes the church active towards affirming life itself.⁷⁸⁹ Rayan’s pneumatic church, therefore, maintains its spiritual character by affirming that it is constituted by the Spirit and also in its concrete character by including the Spirit-experiences of the people. It is on the one hand egalitarian and inclusive in its notion of catholicity and

⁷⁸⁴Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 90.

⁷⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 93,94.

⁷⁸⁸Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 102.

⁷⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 93, 94.

apostolicity, while it also qualifies such criteria by critiquing the colonial and hierarchical character of the church.

4.2.1.2. *The Church of the Kingdom of God*

In the church's relationship to the kingdom of God, Rayan shows similar dialectics. Rayan's church of the Kingdom is universal and inclusive through the Spirit as the church operates in the horizon of the kingdom of God. Rayan contends that the church is actually the consequence of the Kingdom of God, a provisional sign, whereas the kingdom is the definitive eschatological reality. The church is always a small-group movement, but the kingdom is involved with the whole of human history and its ultimate meaning and completion.⁷⁹⁰ On the other hand, the church of the Kingdom is particular in that it operates on the principles of Jesus's conception of the Kingdom. The Reign of God, for Rayan, involves Jesus' invitation of fellowship with outcasts and marginalised people. The 'compassion of Jesus breaks down walls of class and caste barriers, elitist pretensions and rebuilds the honour and pride of the marginalised and despised.'⁷⁹¹ This creates an inclusive, egalitarian, and casteless community, which is so important for the caste-ridden church of India. It creates opportunities for all in the church without discrimination on the basis of caste or tribe. Both Spirit and the Word / Christ operates in such a church of the Kingdom together to build a relational community of sharing. Rayan claims that the new

⁷⁹⁰Rayan, "Theology of the Church," *NWC* 299.

⁷⁹¹Rayan, "Jesus: a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion," in *Jesus: The Relevance of His Person and Message for our Times*, 82-83.

humanity within the kingdom of God will not be a 'relationship based on human biology but on the new biology of the shared blood of Jesus and his shared Spirit'.⁷⁹²

Furthermore, Rayan concretises the church of the Kingdom with the liberationist viewpoints of the need for sharing of bread and love with all. Thus the Kingdom of God is linked with a community of people living in openness, love and care, and in the bread that we eat. These are the bases of life and the foundational sacrament of God.⁷⁹³ Rayan further concretises aspects of the Kingdom of God with his notion of history. Rayan's notion of history is both eschatological in the Spirit and grounded on building up of new humanity in Jesus. Rayan's eschatological history, on the one hand, unites the sacred and the profane, in other words the religious and the secular; and on the other, grounds it in the responsibility of human beings to build human communities based on love.⁷⁹⁴ The church is therefore part of the realised eschatology founded on the love for its neighbour. The eschatological universality of the Spirit can build communities beyond the church since it unites the sacred and the profane; yet Rayan thinks that this history is the 'history of the Spirit' made particular in the risen Christ.⁷⁹⁵ The church of the Kingdom, which is related to the history of the Spirit, leads to Rayan's understanding of the church as a dynamic movement.

⁷⁹²Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 54.

⁷⁹³Rayan, "The Praxis of Subversive Prayer," in *Jesus: The Relevance of His Person and Message for our Times*, 74.

⁷⁹⁴Rayan, "Mission After Vatican II: Problems and Positions," *International Review of Missions* 59 (Oct): 419, cited in *MIS*, 155.

⁷⁹⁵ Rayan, "Mission after Vatican II," 421-22 cited in *MIS* 156.

4.2.1.3. *The Church: A Dynamic Movement*

Rayan seeks to address the problem of the institutionalisation of the church through a pneumatological perspective. He argues that over-organisation or over-institutionalisation fails to maintain the spiritual nature of the church. This leads to what he calls ‘despiritualisation and impoverishment’⁷⁹⁶ where ‘centralised bureaucratic control contradicts the characteristic of spiritual existence’.⁷⁹⁷ He further contends that this institutional nature of the church prevents it from being open and creative. Some of the reasons for such a state, Rayan argues, are the church’s tradition, longing to keep the status quo, excessive legalism, its foreign character and its incapacity to keep up with change. Rayan agrees with John V. Taylor to state that the church has tried to tame the Holy Spirit through this kind of institutionalisation. Instead of the Spirit being the creative Lord and initiator of communal responses in the church, she became a thing to be manipulated by the office of the church and dispensed with sacramentally.⁷⁹⁸ The basic issue says Rayan, is that we have not ‘yet succeeded in incarnating the church redemptively in the concrete life of the people.’⁷⁹⁹ According to Rayan, the institutionalisation of the church has led to:

[T]he separation of the Spirit’s mystery and institutional aspects, laity from clergy, marginalisation of women, distinction of spirit from matter, death of prophetism in the church, rejection of democracy and religious liberty,

⁷⁹⁶Rayan, “Theology of the Church,” in *NWC* .313.

⁷⁹⁷ Rayan, “Theology of the Church,” in *NWC* 313.

⁷⁹⁸J.V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit & Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press), 208-209 cited in Rayan, “New Efforts in Pneumatology,” 83.

⁷⁹⁹Samuel Rayan, “Theology of the Church,” in *NWC* 286-287.

mentality that is suspicious of mysticism and inclines to positivism and rational order.⁸⁰⁰

Instead, Rayan prefers the church to be a movement, which he thinks is more suitable for India. In a movement there is no fixed membership, people can 'belong' or participate in many different ways. For example, this can be done through 'participating in gatherings and meetings, reading literature, contributing to thinking, assuming responsibility in some form'.⁸⁰¹ Drawing on Karl Rahner, Rayan's notion of de-institutionalising the church also includes decentralisation of control and openness in the Spirit to adapt to new situations, but at the same time emphasising the loyalty of the individual Christian to the church. He writes that the church should be 'practicing decontrol in favour of larger freedom and guidance of the Spirit [...] and the loyalty of the individual Christian; and by adapting itself continually to situations that evolve from day to day'.⁸⁰² For the same reason Rayan urges the church along with other faith communities to be involved in the socio-political struggles of the people. He thinks that religions must not be disconnected from the socio-political situations and problems because religion has both served to justify oppression in some occasions and also has liberationist potential.⁸⁰³

Thus Rayan's project of de-institutionalisation of the church opens the way for the church to move out of its colonial assumptions and reform itself in terms of upcoming challenges, and also allows the church to be concretely situated within its context. It not only holds to the core elements of Christianity and concrete participation, but it also allows different ways of understanding itself in the Spirit

⁸⁰⁰Rayan, "New Efforts in Pneumatology," 83-86.

⁸⁰¹Rayan, "Theology of the Church," 313.

⁸⁰²Rayan, "Responsibility of the Church in India Today," in *NWC* 322.

⁸⁰³Rayan, "Commonalities, Divergences and Cross-fertilization among Third World Theologies," in *DT* 322.

and allows different ways of participating in the church. This also opens the way for people who do not officially belong to the church but seek to participate in different ways.

4.2.1.4. *The Ecumenical Church: Unity in Diversity*

In terms of ecumenical relations, Rayan finds that unity in diversity of the Spirit is a helpful criterion. He claims that the Spirit helps the church to transcend borders of our narrow ecclesiastical boundaries. Rayan argues that the Spirit ‘breaks walls of divisiveness and transcends barriers between churches since the Spirit cannot be the monopoly of any church, religion, culture, race or epoch.’⁸⁰⁴ The Spirit is universal in presence and as such cannot be bound by sacraments and structures.⁸⁰⁵ This shows that Rayan is in favour of unity of the churches that can transcend the barriers of liturgy, sacraments and structures. Rayan takes up the model of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit to point out that the Spirit brings new approaches, new living and new being to the conception of the church.⁸⁰⁶ He argues that if ‘we accept the different [or the other] which the Spirit of God continually creates, we will be able to collaborate, and thus build unity from variety.’⁸⁰⁷ We are invited ‘to think out new styles of Christian living, new forms of religious life, new kinds of church structure that will be expressive of the community the Spirit gathers and serve the brotherhood he builds.’⁸⁰⁸ According to Rayan, in today’s plural world, ecumenical sensitivity

⁸⁰⁴Rayan, “Symbols of the Spirit,”123.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁸⁰⁶ Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 16, 19.

⁸⁰⁷ Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 94.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., 23.

would demand that Christian churches should lead in reflections on formulations, symbols and practices of catholicity and unity of all life.⁸⁰⁹ This shows that Rayan is in favour of moving beyond the barriers of unity in diversity built upon conformity of sacraments and liturgies to unity based on the acceptance of diversity.

4.2.2. Ministries of a Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology

4.2.2.1. *The Incarnated Ministries of the Church*

Rayan's views on the ministries of the Church reflect his notion of an 'incarnated Christian spirituality.' In this sense, local cultures become 'instruments of incarnated Christian spirituality.'⁸¹⁰ Rayan's spirituality does not discard the potential of the different strands of Indian tradition, like the *Advaita*, *Bhakti* and *Shakti*, yet he thinks that Indian or Asian spirituality should take into account the concerns of the marginalised and consider the *dalit*, feminist and tribal criticism of Brahmanical traditions like *Advaita*. He prefers the *Shakti* tradition which represents the freedom and power of the Spirit in India. However, he also realises the potential of the *Bhakti* tradition for reflecting Indian experiences.⁸¹¹ Highlighting Rayan's spirituality, Kim finds that Rayan favours on the one hand the contemplative life and on the other a spirituality of the struggle for liberation.⁸¹² This spirituality is liberationist in terms of releasing the church from symbols of colonisation and searching for new symbols

⁸⁰⁹Rayan, "How will the Hindu Hear?" in *GHBV* 233.

⁸¹⁰Rayan, "Local Cultures: Instruments of Incarnated Spirituality" in *GHBV* 295.

⁸¹¹ Rayan, Review of S. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, *IRM* 66/262 (April 1977) 189; "Spirituality for Interfaith Social Action," in Xavier Irudayaraj ed., *Liberation and Dialogue* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications), 69 cited in *MIS* 163.

⁸¹²Rayan, "Nairobi Experience," *VJTR* 40 (Mar 1976): 116-120 cited in *MIS* 150.

from the culture of the people and relating to concrete struggles of the oppressed.⁸¹³ This accounts for Rayan's understanding of ministries of the church as both spiritual and concrete. Accordingly, Rayan holds that the church should be given the freedom to experiment with different kinds of liturgy, all rooted in the particular ethno-linguistic-religious culture of the people. The local church should be able to use particular gestures, elements, symbols, lyrics that are compatible with the culture of the people. Rayan suggests that 'In India [...] there will be Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Bengali Rites and liturgies' if the logic of an *incarnated spirituality* is to be followed.⁸¹⁴ Moreover, he suggests that to make worship more concrete, the use of less verbal forms and more non-verbal expressions, like gestures, postures, movements, dance and use of pictures could be more effective.⁸¹⁵ Rayan proposes a more egalitarian church order, which is hoped to bring unity among the members and offices of the church.

In terms of offices of ministry both the clergy and the laity belong to the church and hierarchy only means that the church has a sacred beginning. The church's unity and freedom is expressed through prophetic witness of love, which prevents 'absolutising of offices, organisations, rituals, customs and laws while marginalising life'.⁸¹⁶ Rayan shows that through the practices of the early church as a 'Jesus Movement it was more sociological than religious, through four shared realities,' namely, 'shared faith, shared prayer, shared or broken bread' and 'shared material resources.'⁸¹⁷

⁸¹³Rayan, "Local Cultures: Instruments of Incarnated Spirituality," 295-308.

⁸¹⁴Rayan, 'Sociological Factors and the Local Church as an Eucharistic Community' in *NWC* 78.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸¹⁶Rayan, "Hierarchy-Religious Relationship" in *NWC* 374-380.

⁸¹⁷Rayan, "Sociological Factors and the Local Church as an Eucharistic Community" in *NWC* 182.

Rayan's understanding of the sacraments includes inclusivity, but is grounded in the social reality of the Indian context. It is liberationist and also a critique of the social and economic structures that perpetuate poverty and dehumanisation. Rayan seeks to build the church's relations on the inclusive and liberationist structure of the Eucharist. He explains that the current structure of the church in India shows a feudalistic nature: the divisions of class and caste, the division of labour, the exclusion of certain groups and so on.⁸¹⁸ For Rayan, the Eucharist has definite socio-political implications.⁸¹⁹ He writes:

The bread of the Eucharist is a social reality made by the labour of hundreds of people, men and women. It is an economic reality, bought and sold in the market, around which treatise can be signed between nations. It is a political reality around which battles have been fought and still are fought.⁸²⁰

Rayan believes that the Eucharist can 'become the starting point of an ever widening activity of sharing bread and wealth in all areas of life, making for a fraternal, Eucharistic, socialist community of peoples'.⁸²¹ He interprets this in relation to the earth where the earth becomes the Lord's Table. It is God who lays down the table for all; 'it is a round loaf of bread and a big bowl of rice to be shared by all men and women. All are invited to this feast of the Lord'.⁸²² The openness in the Spirit is matched by the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Rayan contends that the Eucharist points to the paschal mystery and its relationship with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which urges us to struggle against dehumanisation of particular communities.⁸²³

Rayan believes that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the body of Christ and this body

⁸¹⁸Rayan, "Ecclesiology at work in the Indian Church Today," in *NWC* 166.

⁸¹⁹Rayan, "Sociological Factors and the Local Church as an Eucharistic Community" 173.

⁸²⁰Rayan, "The Church-The Jesus Movement," in *NWC* 183.

⁸²¹Rayan, "Indian Theology and the Problem of History," in *DT* 217.

⁸²²Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," in *NWC* 7.

⁸²³Rayan, *Come Holy Spirit*, 63, 75.

especially constitutes the poor and the downtrodden. It is a call to commit to justice and equality for all and a celebration of unity and oneness in the one Lord and one table. So he believes that to bring in discriminations and divisions in the table of the Lord would slow the growth of the church.⁸²⁴ Rayan contends that:

[. . .] in the Eucharist as the sacrament of that Body which we are, and as the meal of the new fellowship which cuts across all lines of race and colour, all purity laws and separatist traditions, and all self-righteous pretences; in the Spirit as abiding in all and enveloping all and especially empowering the weak; in Jesus' option to be Flesh, and poor and socially lowly and powerless; in Jesus' mission as liberation of the downtrodden.⁸²⁵

Rayan also understands Baptism in terms of an event which is spiritual, but which is grounded in history and the concrete life of the people. It is liberationist as it helps to build new communities and demands commitment to freedom of the oppressed. He relates it to 'concrete processes of history,' which should 'awaken us to the urgency of the call for dignity and freedom.'⁸²⁶ In other words, our baptism should make us realise the harsh realities of life and respond to them. He contends that the Lima text⁸²⁷ regarding sacraments has been primarily Christological in focus while neglecting the Trinitarian understanding with an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and a lack of historical and socio-political implication.⁸²⁸ Although Rayan does not discard the traditional meanings of baptism like remission of sins, belonging to the Lord, entry into the new people of God, dying and rising with Christ, rebirth to become a new creation,⁸²⁹ his position is especially that of liberation. Rayan believes that his perspective on baptism links us through the power of the Spirit to the realities

⁸²⁴Rayan, "The Challenge of the Dalit Issue: Some Theological Perspectives," in *GHBV* 196.

⁸²⁵ Rayan, "The Challenge of the Dalit Issue: Some Theological Perspectives," in *GHBV* 197.

⁸²⁶Rayan, "Baptism and Conversion: The Lima Text in the Indian Context," in *GHBV* 215.

⁸²⁷*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No.111 (Geneva, WCC), 1982.

⁸²⁸Rayan, "Baptism and Conversion: The Lima Text in the Indian Context," 216.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, .215, 216.

of the poor and the marginalised. He believes that through baptism, Jesus showed solidarity with the oppressed and the exploited of the earth. It shows a commitment to working for freedom of the oppressed.⁸³⁰ He claims that the core meaning of baptism should be immersion into the Christ-event and ‘commitment unto death to the cause of liberation in given historical situations.’⁸³¹ Rayan reinterprets baptism along with conversion. He writes that baptism means:

[. . .]conversion from individualism in religion and society to corporate existence; from spiritual and economic selfishness to the truth of the community and of the world which God loves; from rigid doctrines of private property to the original purposes for which God gave his earth to his human family; from privatization of life to Trinitarian communion; from ritual preoccupations to pursuit of justice from law to grace and from sacrifices to mercy.⁸³²

Thus baptism for him is an event that involves the working of Spirit and Christ to build communities of justice and peace. This is not simply a spiritual event, but one that is concretised in the struggle of the people.

4.2.3. The Mission of a Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology

Kirsteen Kim observes that Rayan’s understanding of the mission of the Church is pneumatological. Rayan identifies the Holy Spirit’s presence and work in the world as God’s redemptive call for universal salvation through the particularity of the gospel of Christ.⁸³³ Here one can find that the mission of the Spirit is integrally

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 217.

⁸³¹ Rayan, “Baptism and Conversion: The Lima Text in the Indian Context,” 216.

⁸³² Ibid., .220.

⁸³³ *MIS*, 188.

linked with the mission of Jesus. Jesus' mission is the model for the church's mission.⁸³⁴

4.2.3.1. *Mission to People of Other Faiths*

Rayan finds that other religions are 'sacraments of salvation' through the presence of the Spirit.⁸³⁵ In relation to other religions the church becomes symbolic of the salvation brought about by Christ. It makes the church 'the sacrament of universal salvation' rather than 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'⁸³⁶ Kim observes that Rayan has an inclusivist theology of religions with Christ at the centre, but it is modified by his pneumatological perspective. She points out Rayan's belief that 'the genius of India seeks the Universal Spirit'⁸³⁷ and 'the historical particularity of Jesus has been a difficulty in the way of accepting him as the Universal Spirit and the Saviour of all'.⁸³⁸ Thus Rayan suggests a theology of religions focussing on the history of the Spirit.⁸³⁹ Rayan's pneumatological theology of religions is life-centred and community centred. In his article *How will the Hindu Hear?* he argues that Hindus or the people of other religions can only connect to Christianity if it proclaims the message of life; life out of struggles and sufferings. He notes that theoretical proclamations cannot be as effective as the life that is lived out by the believers for all to see. It is the witness of the lives lived in Christ by the power of

⁸³⁴Ibid., 189.

⁸³⁵Rayan, "Mission after Vatican II," 422-25.

⁸³⁶Ibid.

⁸³⁷Rayan, "Interpreting Christ to India: Contributions of Roman Catholic Seminaries," *Indian Journal of Theology* 23/4 (1974) 223-231.

⁸³⁸Ibid.

⁸³⁹Rayan, 'How will the Hindu Hear?' in *GHVB* 235-236.

the Spirit that lends credibility to the message for others.⁸⁴⁰ In his article, *Dialogue with Hinduism*, Rayan notes that Hinduism has ‘little or no juridical structures, organizations, or persons in authority’ and therefore finds it hard to accept an institutional church expressed through power, wealth and centralised control.⁸⁴¹ Rayan’s plea is for the church to proclaim its gospel in terms of ‘free and unorganized witnessing [...] prophetic and charismatic [...] responsible lay initiative.’⁸⁴² He thinks the best way of communicating the gospel is to use the language of love, a language that is down-to-earth, of freedom and renouncement.⁸⁴³ Rayan’s theology of religions therefore centres on a spirituality that crosses religious boundaries, yet is grounded concretely in the cultures and struggles of the people, especially the marginalised.

4.2.3.2. *Mission towards the Dalits*

Rayan’s theology and ecclesiology is prominently liberationist and so far this has been clearly proven; however, his response to the question of the *dalit* issue should be highlighted here as the church in India continues to be caste-ridden. Rayan strongly denounces caste in the church. He writes: ‘For the church to make room for, approve of, tolerate, or perpetuate dalitness and discriminations based on caste or class or gender would amount to apostasy from the Christian faith.’⁸⁴⁴ In responding to the *dalit* predicament in his article *The Challenge of the Dalit Issue*, Rayan urges us to follow the praxis of Jesus. This praxis was exemplified in Jesus’ baptism with

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ Rayan, ‘Dialogue with Hinduism’, in *GHVB* 370-371.

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Ibid., 371.

⁸⁴⁴ Rayan, ‘The Challenge of the Dalit Issue,’ in *GHVB* 194.

his identification with the masses and his table fellowship with the outcastes of his day. Through the parable of the last judgement (Mt. 25:31-46) and the parable of the good Samaritan, Rayan identifies Jesus with the oppressed *dalits* where his crucifixion is the culmination of his 'dalitness',⁸⁴⁵ so Jesus was a *dalit* from 'cradle to the cross.'⁸⁴⁶ This fact of *dalit* segregation and oppression is a human creation and is considered by Rayan as 'a radical evil like sin and death'.⁸⁴⁷ Rayan challenges the church to 'go outside the camp' like Jesus to identify ourselves with the *dalits* and recommit ourselves through baptism and the Eucharist, in liberating service of justice and love, to the oppressed and the outcaste.⁸⁴⁸

4.2.3.3. *Mission in terms of Creation-Care*

Rayan's response to the earth's ecological crisis is his effort towards an ecological theology of creation. In attempting an ecological theology, Rayan forwards the notion of belongingness of the earth and combines the spiritual-sacramental approach with concrete images of the earth. It combines the work of the Spirit since creation and the earth understood as Christ's body. Further, his liberationist perspective adds the socio-economic oppression of the earth and commends care for creation. In his article, *The Earth is the Lord's*, he affirms that the earth belongs to God because it was created by the power of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. Thus the earth is the 'Lord's self-manifestation' and a sacrament that reveals God, his

⁸⁴⁵Ibid., 184-188.

⁸⁴⁶Ibid., 189.

⁸⁴⁷Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸Ibid., 187.

generosity and tenderness and it is the Lord's Table that provides for the hungry.⁸⁴⁹ However, he also affirms that the earth belongs to us and that we have an integral relation to it in terms of 'work, food, knowledge, contemplation and gift-giving'.⁸⁵⁰ Rayan raises concerns about the ecological crisis, which includes a liberationist socio-economic critique. He puts it in terms of the 'commercialization of the Earth',⁸⁵¹ the 'global imbalance in land/population proportion'⁸⁵² and 'the ecological crisis'.⁸⁵³ In response to these, Rayan believes that nature or the earth is integral to our faith and pleads for a 'mystical view of nature and a reverential approach to it, for a sacramental vision of the world, and for a culture of gentleness and poetry which can also act as a corrective to and a source of resistance against that kind of scientism and technology'⁸⁵⁴ responsible for this crisis. This response is a matter of God's justice related to the establishment of the kingdom of an egalitarian society, a counter-cultural praxis that subverts the ideology of resources in the hands of the few.⁸⁵⁵ Rayan contends that the ecological crisis can only be responded to not simply through a mystical theology of creation, but through Christological and pneumatological perspectives. Christologically, creation is seen as rooted in the Christ-event, in being included within the family of God through Christ, in being the bodiliness of Christ. Pneumatologically, creation is birthed by the Spirit, carries the 'grief of the Spirit' in its plight and looks forward to new creation and transformation

⁸⁴⁹ Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," in *NWC* 2-9.

⁸⁵⁰ Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," in *NWC* 2-9.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁴ Rayan, 'Ecology and Faith: The Mystery of the Earth', in *NWC* 25, 36.

⁸⁵⁵ Rayan, "Seek First God's Kingdom and His Justice," in *NWC* 37-44.

in the Spirit.⁸⁵⁶ Thus the mission of the Church in Rayan is all inclusive in Spirit and Christ.

SECTION FIVE: CONCLUSION

RAYAN'S SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY IS COMPARATIVELY APPROPRIATE IN TERMS OF PERMEABILITY AND THE NORTH INDIAN CONTEXT.

In the previous chapter I discussed the criterion of relational-distinctiveness as appropriate for permeability. I searched for models of the church from Western theology and found Yong's model based on Irenaeus metaphor to be appropriate. I have also shown how Yong's ecclesiology is a permeable Spirit ecclesiology in terms of the relational-distinctiveness dialectics of universality-particularity, spiritual-concrete, static-dynamic, unity-diversity and the joint working of the Spirit and the Word / Logos / Christ. Yet I moved forward into this chapter to explore whether Indian theology and the North Indian context demand more focussed dimensions in a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. After discussing the theologies and ecclesiologies of Chenchiah and Aleaz I found that an Indian ecclesiology demands particular approaches to respond to the distinct challenges of the Indian context that were not considered by the Western counterparts in question. The main approaches and issues that were lacking in Western discussions of the church are: an approach of decolonisation, an integrated religio-social way of understanding ecumenism, Indian religio-philosophical-cultural resources for Indian theology and ecclesiology; an

⁸⁵⁶ Rayan, "Ecology and Theology: A Theology of Nature, a theology of Life," in *NWC* 46-76.

interfaith approach that is non-elitist; the acknowledgement of the reality of dual or multiple religious belonging and a liberationist approach. Therefore, I offered the permeable Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan whose theology and ecclesiology combines the above dimensions including fulfilling the criterion for permeability.

I have shown that Samuel Rayan's permeable Spirit ecclesiology is theologically based on the bread and breath metaphor, broadly representing the joint working of the Spirit and Christ. This is parallel to Yong's basis of the Irenaeus' metaphor of the two hands of the Father. Rayan's bread and breath metaphor, like Yong's, has given the former much leverage in articulating the relational-distinctiveness dialectics in terms of universality-particularity, spiritual-concrete, static-dynamic, and unity-diversity. This has fulfilled the criteria of the relational-distinctive dialectics. Yong's Spirit ecclesiology, though permeable, is inadequate for the North Indian context as I have shown that it understandably fails to include the particular concerns of India. In particular, Yong's ecclesiology does not grapple with the concerns of colonisation and related approaches of decolonisation and de-institutionalisation, which are important aspects in Indian ecclesiology. Yong's ecclesiology also does not draw on Indian religio-cultural resources to be particularly grounded in the Indian context. His ecclesiology does not concern the dilemma of Indian Christian identity, and the reality of multiple religious belonging as faced by the marginalised. Yong's theology of religions can also be put into the category of being metaphysical and intellectual. Yong also lacks a prominent liberationist aspect and a critique of the socio-economic and structural forces that perpetuate marginalisation. Rayan's ecclesiology fulfils many of the above mentioned criteria for a North Indian permeable Spirit ecclesiology.

Rayan's theology and Spirit ecclesiology reveals many similarities to Chenchiah and Aleaz, but it also differs considerably. Chenchiah, Aleaz and Rayan all have the pneumatological perspectives and emphases needed for a Spirit ecclesiology, but Rayan's is distinctive because he highlights the potential of concreteness and diversity in contrast to mere universality accorded to the Spirit in the other two. Rayan's theology and ecclesiology includes the decolonisation aspect which both Chenchiah and Aleaz have, but Rayan includes a positive aspect of a theology of life in his project, which Chenchiah and Aleaz fail to develop. In other words, the decolonisation project that the Indian church needs is turned from a negative exercise into a positive one, towards building a human community on the theology of life. Further, Rayan's project helps to ground the largely elitist interfaith relations into the concrete life of the people so that it becomes a community exercise rather than an intellectual enterprise. His pneumatological theology of religions includes the Spirit-experiences of ordinary people, especially the marginalised. Finally, Rayan has an edge over both Chenchiah and Aleaz due to his liberationist perspective, which caters to the Indian situation of the *dalits*, tribals and other oppressed groups. Rayan's theology and ecclesiology also has a self-critical aspect and critical approach towards the socio-economic-political dimension of India which both Chenchiah and Aleaz lack.

Having shown Rayan's permeable Spirit ecclesiology to be comparatively appropriate, in the forthcoming final chapter I will apply such a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model to some select issues in the North Indian context. I will explore three issues in depth; namely, Ecumenism, Multiple Religious Belonging and Interfaith Relations.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS OF PERMEABLE SPIRIT ECCLESIOLOGY ON SELECT ISSUES IN NORTH INDIA.

In the previous chapter I arrived at a appropriate shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology for the North Indian context with the Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan. This chapter will focus on select issues to show the implications of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. Among the issues and challenges to the churches discussed in Chapter One, I have chosen to limit myself to three particular issues, namely: Ecumenical Relations, Multiple Religious Belonging and Interfaith Relations. In the following, I will discuss each in three subsequent sections and end with a conclusion in the fourth section.

SECTION ONE: ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Working towards ecumenical unity or ecumenical relations is not particularly fashionable at the present time.⁸⁵⁷ The diversity and proliferation of churches do not seem to hold promise for the kind of union envisaged a century earlier. Theologically, there are two extreme camps: one in the evangelical and pietistic traditions that see unity as a gift of grace that we receive in Christ and cannot be actively worked out; secondly, ecumenism understood in spiritual terms and

⁸⁵⁷Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole?* (London: T& T Clark, 2010), 187.

expressed merely in joint prayers, study and reflection.⁸⁵⁸ Yet in India and particularly in North India, I believe, ecumenical relations continue to be relevant at a different level, particularly in the face of concerns for witness in a plural and multi-religious society, but more so in the face of challenges from Hindu fundamentalist groups' oppression and persecution of minorities including Christians. Although the ecumenical fervour pre-Independence (before 1947) and after has somewhat receded,⁸⁵⁹ ecumenical thinking has been cast in new ways⁸⁶⁰ and has been extended in terms of wider ecumenism.⁸⁶¹

My particular concern here is to show that a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model based on the joint action of the Spirit and the Word/Christ with its potential to hold unity and diversity in tension and upholding new ways of thinking about ecumenism is a suitable basis for the Church of North India (CNI). I will show that the original basis of the CNI union is inappropriate for the demands of the North Indian context; and is inadequate in the face of other upcoming challenges. In the following, therefore, I will focus on the efforts of ecumenical unity in North India, with particular reference to the motivations and theological basis behind the formation of the Church of North India (CNI)⁸⁶² in 1970. I will show that the

⁸⁵⁸ Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole?*, 187.

⁸⁵⁹There are no recent efforts of the type of organic unity that was first envisaged during the pre-Independence times.

⁸⁶⁰After the formation of the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947 and the Church of North India (CNI) in 1970, joint efforts have been made to bring together three denominations, the CSI, the CNI and the Marthoma Church (MTC), to come together to form *The Communion of Churches in India* (this name was accepted in the year 2000), which was inaugurated in 1978. This was not a fully organic union, but an attempt to manifest oneness through a common structure while retaining autonomy of the three churches. See Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 89.

⁸⁶¹Newer concerns of the question of discrimination of the *dalits* and tribals within the church and the question of interfaith relations and ecological concerns have forced the churches to reconsider the limits of organic unity and go beyond that including the above concerns. See Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 92.

⁸⁶²Here CNI is taken as a working model because my project concerns North India and CNI is the foremost body of united churches in North India. The Church of South India (CSI) formed in 1947 is a

Biblical-theological basis of organic unity of the CNI, which focuses on Christ's intercessory prayer (John 17),⁸⁶³ is inadequate and problematic for the particular aspect of unity desired in India, i.e. unity-in-diversity. It will be seen that unity in diversity and universality and particularity are important dialectics for North Indian unity. Although the CNI has managed to express unity-in-diversity in its original plan of union, in its constitution and to some extent in its ministry,⁸⁶⁴ the Biblical-theological basis referred to above does not give much room for the dialectics of unity-in-diversity, universality and particularity to be worked out and has little potential to consider ecumenism in wider ways. Jesus' prayer can simply be taken as an inspiration for united witness for mission, but is theologically problematic in understanding the kind of unity envisaged therein.

During the formation of the CNI the main motivations were concerns of witness in mission coupled with a nationalistic fervour. However, the question of unity and diversity, universality and particularity were uppermost in the mind of Indian Christians. The aspect of witness through our unity inherent in Christ's prayer (John 17) is what motivated Indian Christians. As Bishop Dharendra Kumar Sahu notes

The central point of argument was that the unity of believers is to lead the unbelieving world to faith in Jesus as the one sent by God. The idea of mission was based on the prayer of Jesus that all believers may be brought to the unity of the divine, that the world may see the love of the Lord embodied in them and may behold the glory.⁸⁶⁵

more concentrated union of churches with more members, but is beyond the scope of the present project.

⁸⁶³ Other theological arguments for unity were simply assumed, but not elaborated upon, namely the Trinitarian aspect expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creed and the Pauline imagery of the Church as the Body of Christ with many members referred mostly with regard to organic unity.

⁸⁶⁴ For example, the CNI Constitution recognises both infant and adult baptism in its union. See *The Constitution of CNI*, (Delhi: ISPCCK 1987), 16.

⁸⁶⁵ Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 64-65.

The concern for unity first arose among Christians in North India, particularly Bengal, in the 19th century, whose educated converts and clergy sought to determine what an united church which is Indian would look like.⁸⁶⁶ They sought a church that is self-governed, self-supporting and self-propagating, free from colonial control and united in its identity as an Indian church. I pointed out in the first chapter that denominational divisions were introduced into India by the West, and as such the historical reasons that led to such denominationalism or schisms in the West were distinctly unattractive to Indians. Indian Christians were rather interested in ecumenical unity, which would lead to an Indian Church. Bishop Waller wrote about Indian Christians:

They are convinced that the church should be one: they are duly resentful at the cleavages introduced by the foreigners. They want a national expression of Christianity- an Indian Church.⁸⁶⁷

Thus, the concern for ecumenical unity was always linked to the question of identity of the Indian church. This called for an ecumenical unity for the churches in India that was universal in its relation with the worldwide church, but also particular in terms of maintaining its distinct Indian identity. As Sahu notes:

The concern in the union is to manifest the universality as well as particularity of the church, expressing its identity as the people of God. This concern has occupied an important place in the history of Christianity in India.⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁶ 'The General Christian Conference at Calcutta in 1855 was attended by six missionary societies and it was the first of a series of similar gatherings held at different places in East India, of which seventeen are recorded between 1855-1906.' See Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 12.

⁸⁶⁷ E.H.M Waller, *Church Union in South India* (London: SPCK, 1929), 30-31 cited in Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 62.

⁸⁶⁸ Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, xii.

The Indian Christian community has always been a diverse one. It was composed of people from different religious backgrounds; Hindus, Muslims, Parsees and Sikhs. The diversity was compounded as these people from different religious backgrounds brought their own spiritual outlook, which then combined with equally diverse denominational attitudes from the European and American continents. Superimposed on that was the question of caste segregation, which troubled the church.⁸⁶⁹ Thus it is evident that the issue of ecumenical unity in India has to consider the dialectics of unity and diversity, universality and particularity.

The Indian Christians continued their search for a Biblical-theological basis for unity. In Bengal, the Bengali Christians started to dream of an *United Church of Bengal* on the basis of the Apostles' Creed.⁸⁷⁰ In Western India an alliance was formed in 1871 by the name of *The Western Indian Native Christian Alliance*, which had for its basis the theological foundation of *one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and in all*. They also attached great importance to Jesus's prayer in John 17.⁸⁷¹ Gradually these Biblical-theological bases became the background of the basis for CNI.⁸⁷²

The CNI, from the beginning of its formation, showed the importance of universality and particularity among its members. The *Plan of Church Union* that was drawn up in successive stages, which finally took shape in 1965, showed this intention:

We are agreed in seeking a united Church which will be an integral part of the Universal Church, and yet develop the special and distinctive gifts which God has given to the

⁸⁶⁹ Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 23.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25,26.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁸⁷² It took forty years of negotiations between the churches beginning in 1929 to form the CNI in 1970.

people of India/Pakistan in the expression of their worship, their faith and their common life.⁸⁷³

The aspect of respecting diversity amidst the union it sought was also clearly expressed in the same Plan of Union:

[...] we do not desire that any one Church shall absorb other Churches, nor that one tradition shall be imposed upon all; but rather that each Church shall bring the true riches of its inheritance into the united Church to which we look forward. We intend that it shall be a Church which, while holding to the fundamental Faith and Order of the Universal Church, shall assure to its members freedom of opinion in all other matters, and also freedom of action in such varieties of practice as are consistent with the life of the Church as one organic body.⁸⁷⁴

This shows that the CNI was well aware of the need for universality and particularity, and unity and diversity from the beginning of its formation. Unfortunately, the primary basis of ecumenical unity, as I will subsequently show, did not reflect the above dialectics. The primary basis of the union was enumerated in the *Plan of Church Union*:

We are seeking union because we believe that the restoration of the visible unity of the Church on earth is the will of God, and we believe that the Holy Spirit is leading us to resolve the differences which at present separate us. Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed: '[...] that they all may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.'⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷³*The Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*, Fourth Revised Edition (Madras: CLS, 1965), ix. The Church of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ceylon (CIPBC) was the Anglican counterpart in the Union. In India, the bishopric of Calcutta was established in 1813, with separate dioceses for Madras and Bombay in 1835 and 1837 respectively. The bishopric of Calcutta became autonomous in 1930 and known as the General Council of the Church of India, Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) named CIBC. After Independence in 1947, the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment came to an end and CIBC came to be known as the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon (CIPBC).

⁸⁷⁴*The Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*, x.

⁸⁷⁵*Ibid.*, ix.

This shows that Jesus's prayer for union (John 17: 20-23) was the primary basis of the union, which was categorically accepted in the *Plan of Union*, starting from the seventh Round Table Conference in 1948.⁸⁷⁶ Apart from this primary basis other theological arguments were noticeable, in the fourth edition of the *Plan of Union* subsequently drawn up in 1965. For example, Sahu draws attention to the theological assessment of the said plan by W.J. Marshall, which revealed that 'one of the dominant insight [*sic*], which informs the Plan as a whole, is the church's dependence on God.'⁸⁷⁷ Marshall argues that this simple and obvious truth about our dependence on God for unity is often largely obscured.⁸⁷⁸ On the other hand, the Trinitarian dynamics at play in the union is highlighted in the Plan of Union in the following words:

Believing that God created *one* Church, a spiritual union and fellowship of those who are in Christ through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we pray and seek for a visible expression of this *oneness* in the worship, life and witness of the Church here and now.⁸⁷⁹

The CNI also affirmed its organic unity on the fundamental principle that the 'Church is the Body of Christ and its members are members of His Body.'⁸⁸⁰ The Church as Christ's Body appreciates God's relationship with each of us and respects differences of opinion. The fundamental principle further upholds that:

The Church therefore acknowledges that every member has an immediate and direct relationship to God, shown equally by the life of faith and of individual conscience in response to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Respect for the

⁸⁷⁶Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 65.

⁸⁷⁷J.W. Marshall, "The Church of North India/Pakistan: A Theological Assessment of the Plan of Union," (*PhD Thesis*, Dublin University, 1975). This was later published as a book entitled *Faith and Order in the North India/Pakistan Unity Plan*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1987), 19 cited in Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 60.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁷⁹*The Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*, viii.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

conscientious convictions of individual members shall be accorded by the Church, as long as they are in harmony with the mind of Christ and are not disruptive of the fellowship of His Body.⁸⁸¹

The above shows that the primary basis of the organic union of the CNI was Christ's prayer for unity, while the CNI simply assumed the Trinitarian dynamics involved and the imagery of the Church as Christ's body to focus on diversity in unity.⁸⁸² The problem lies in the fact that the primary basis of unity was incompatible with the model of organic unity that is envisaged in the affirming of the Church as the Body of Christ. In the following I will show that the union based on Christ's prayer for unity is in itself a weak basis for unity in diversity and universality and particularity required for unity in the CNI. Subsequently, I will show that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology is a suitable alternative model for North Indian church unity and has the openness to include newer ways of thinking about ecumenism.

1.1. Inappropriateness of Christ's Prayer as a Basis for unity in diversity

Concerning Christ's prayer recorded in John 17, and particularly the verses 20-23, it can be said that the meaning of the periscope itself is debatable. Commentators disagree as to how to understand the particular notion of unity that is expressed in the passage. Raymond E. Brown notes that though this passage is frequently used for

⁸⁸¹The Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan, 2

⁸⁸²The image of the church as a Body of Christ is from the Pauline image described in Rom 12:4; 1Cor 12. This model has been widely accepted for organic union. According to Ernest Käsemann and Raymond E. Brown, diversity is the essential character of organic unity. See Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communality*, (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., Eerdmans, 2008), 54.

church unity, there are several opinions or interpretations regarding it. Brown summarises the issues and I cite him at length:

Is the unity a question of united purpose expressing itself in a common Christian mission and message (Strachan)? Is it a question of Christians harmoniously working together without dissidence (Schlatter)? Is the union of Christians with each other and with Christ patterned on the union that exists between persons, especially between husband and wife (Strathman)? Is unity achieved through the unique character of God's image in the consciousness of every believer (Holtzmann)? Is it a mystical union (B.Weiss, Bernard)? Is it a unity founded upon the unity of each Christian with the Father and the Son (Behler)? Is this unity to be related to the Eucharistic mystery (A.Hamman)? Is it a unity that manifests itself in the power to work miracles (W.Bauer; cf.xiv 11-12)? Is it a unity under the "word" that founded the community-a unity that has nothing to do with personal feeling or common purpose and is not simply brotherly harmony, nor organization, nor dogma, even though these can bear witness to unity (Bultmann)? Sooner or later most authors say that it is a union of love. It is that; but Käsemann, p.59, has a point when he says: "We usually bypass the question at this point with edifying language by reducing unity to what we call love."⁸⁸³

Brown, of course, settles for both a mystical and visible unity, which he describes as vertical (believers with the Father and the Son) and horizontal (believers among themselves).⁸⁸⁴ However, different ways of understanding this unity, as evident in the above summarisation, has drawn theologians in different directions. Lesslie Newbigin, who was a senior statesman for the ecumenical movement in India and played a major role in the formation of the Church of South India (CSI), was clearly in favour of both a spiritual and visible unity in terms of organic union. He disapproved of the dichotomy of the spiritual and material, and thought that unity

⁸⁸³Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi): Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 775-776.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 776.

should be expressed in both ways.⁸⁸⁵ There are others who disagree that the passage inevitably points to an organic or visible unity for the churches of the present generation.⁸⁸⁶

Even if we assume that the unity expected among believers is modelled on the relationship of the Father and the Son, this is difficult to explain. What kind of unity is Jesus calling us to when he says that we can be one as Jesus and the Father are one? Is it possible to be one as Jesus and Father are one? Furthermore, do we know exactly what kind of relationship Jesus and the Father have in order to understand our union on that basis? What does Jesus mean by the terms ‘one’ and by the phrase ‘in you’ and ‘in us’? Often, existing interpretations have tried to explain the unity envisaged in the prayer in terms of ‘a union of wills, a union of belief in a set of articles of faith, a moral harmony, or an anachronistic plea par excellence of Jesus that Christianity be healed of its institutional divisions.’⁸⁸⁷ The question is whether the text warrants that kind of interpretation. There are others who interpret the text as a Farewell Discourse of Jesus to his disciples, linking it to the mission of Jesus that they are to follow.⁸⁸⁸ Primary difficulties arise in conceptualising the Father-Son relationship that we are called to participate in or imitate. The relationship of the Father and the Son cannot simply be considered as of unity, but also as distinctive. While the Father and the Son are one, the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the

⁸⁸⁵Lesslie J.E. Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London: SCM, 1953), 49 cited in Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 63.

⁸⁸⁶Evan T. Pollard, “That All May Be One (John 17:21) and the Unity of the Church, Expository Times,” Vol. LXX, No.5, February 1959, 149-50, cited in Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 65.

⁸⁸⁷Laura A. Weber, “That They May All Be One -John 17:21-23: A Plotinian Application to Unity”, (*PhD Diss*, Wisconsin: Marquette University, 1995), 18. Accessed September 24, 2016. <http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations/AAI9634107>.

⁸⁸⁸Weber, “That They May All Be One -John 17:21-23: A Plotinian Application to Unity,” 23; Beasley-Murray, George R. John. *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol.36, (Texas, 1987), 291-307.

Father.⁸⁸⁹ Furthermore, the passage suggests a mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son. The question is whether our relationship with other believers can be imaged on the unity and distinctiveness of the Father and the Son, and moreover in their mutual indwelling. Is the perichoretic union between the Father and the Son expected of our relationship with other believers actually possible?⁸⁹⁰ Here it will be useful to reiterate some of the counter-arguments of Kathryn Tanner regarding this element of perichoretic union which assumes Social Trinity. Tanner shows that the unity among human beings cannot be modelled on the unity among the Trinity. If we hold the perichoretic union of the Trinity as valid, which suggests an intermingling among persons of Godhead, this cannot be true of human beings. Here it is evident that *koinonia* among human beings cannot be same as perichoresis in the Trinity. Furthermore, the relationship of the Father and the Son cannot be the same as the relationship between Jesus and human beings. The difference due to the otherness of God and the sinfulness of humanity makes a considerable difference between those relationships.⁸⁹¹ Thus the whole question of basing our unity on this passage is essentially problematic.

1.2. The Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology as an Alternate Model for Ecumenical Unity

The preceding highlights some of the complex problems with regard to this passage of scripture when used as the basis for Christian unity or unity for the churches. My

⁸⁸⁹T.E. Pollard has used John 17:21 to argue against church union. Since the unity is based on the oneness of the Father and the Son, this unity should allow for diversity. See Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi): Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 775.

⁸⁹⁰Weber, "That They May All Be One -John 17:21-23: A Plotinian Application to Unity, 18-22.

⁸⁹¹ See Tanner's arguments explicated in this thesis on pages 120-125.

present concerns; however, are particularly with the dialectics of unity and diversity, and the expansion of the idea of unity. I have shown that the negotiators of the CNI were aware from the beginning of a need for unity that included diversity. However, the basis of unity in question fails to conceive of the kind of unity that North India desires. The emphasis here is on the concept of our oneness with the Father and the Son, and on the oneness of the believers whatever the nature of oneness might be. Therefore, in this model there is a conspicuous lack of the notion of diversity. Even if the distinctiveness of the Trinitarian Persons is emphasised over that of unity in this model, it does not follow that the same distinction in unity would apply for the believers individually or the churches. On the other hand, if it is assumed that Jesus brings us unity among ourselves and with the Father through the Spirit, it does not necessarily indicate the reason why this unity should essentially be conceived in diversity? This model does not clarify why the universality and oneness of the church should be conceived without a homogenising of its particularities? Furthermore, it does not clearly indicate what the Son's role is or what is the Spirit's role is in this process of our union with others and our union with the Father. If both the Son and the Spirit's roles are simply to unite, who is responsible for preserving our particular identities or diversities within this process of unity? The above problems essentially drive a wedge between the basis of union and the model of unity that is envisaged in the organic unity that is the Church imaged as a Body of Christ. It is clear that the above basis of unity modelled on Christ's prayer is incompatible with the unity in diversity image that the Church as a Body of Christ envisages and therefore creates conceptual problems for thinking about unity. This prayer can be taken as a pious

affirmation of unity for common witness, but is unsuitable as a basis for organic unity.

Considering the above problems in the light of the particular kind of ecumenism North India requires, I argue that the model of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology based on the Irenaeus' two hands of the Father, the Word / Christ and the Spirit working together in the world (also understood as breath and bread- Spirit and Logos Christology in Rayan), is more appropriate for addressing the concerns of the CNI expressed in the dialectics of universality-particularity, unity-diversity. I will show that this basis and model also has the capacity to go beyond the organic union model. In a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model there is room for a relational-distinctive dialectics in terms of unity and diversity, universality and particularity, which I have shown so far in this project. These relational-distinctive dialectics corresponds to the role of both the Spirit and Christ /Son / Word as they bring us towards unity.

In Chapter Two, I articulated how both the Spirit and Christ are each responsible for maintaining unity and diversity, universality and particularity or distinctiveness. I have shown through reference to Yong, Aleaz and Rayan how the Spirit's presence brings unity right from Creation turning chaos into cosmos. The Spirit brings consciousness of our unity with God and with the rest of Creation. The Spirit makes us aware and conscious of the presence of God in all and how inter-related we are to others who are alike or unlike us. I have also shown how the Spirit brings unity among the diverse community gathered at Pentecost. The eschatological Spirit thus poured out (Acts 2; Joel 2:28-29) brings together the young and the old, sons and daughters, slaves and free, while maintaining the identity of each by the gift

of empowered speech manifested individually. In these ways the Spirit is the Spirit of both unity and diversity, and universality and particularity. Similar unity and diversity or distinctiveness and particularity can be expressed about the Word or Christ working in the world. God's Creation is through the Word or Logos. Nothing is created without the Word (John 1:1-4). In this sense, the Logos is active in Creation from the beginning. The manifestation of the Logos is through the particularity of God's diverse creation. This Logos or the Word was made flesh again in the historic particularity of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). On the other hand, the presence and action of the Spirit in Jesus Christ is evidenced from his conception, baptism, ministry, his whole life, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. I have shown through engaging with Western and Indian theologians that eschatologically and pneumatologically the particular Christ develops an universal and cosmic character drawing all Creation unto him towards consummation.

When the above paradigm of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology is applied to the churches in North India, they acquire a character of unity and diversity, universality and particularity both in Christ and the Spirit. This model in fact outlines both the unity of the working of Christ and the Spirit, and also highlights their distinctive roles in the process of unity. The churches can be united on the basis of affirming unity in the one Lord Jesus Christ. Similarly, the churches are drawn into unity by the Spirit who unites us in Christ. The Spirit also baptises us into the one body of Christ with diverse members. The Spirit, who is the Spirit of diversity, also motivates the churches to preserve the distinctive identity or tradition of each church while affirming unity among them. On the other hand, the manifestation of the Word can be diverse in different churches through their particular forms of proclamation, worship,

liturgy and ministries. The Spirit urges us to respect the diversity of each denomination in terms of their cultural and local contexts. The universality of Christ through the Spirit also acknowledges the particularity of the Word manifested in each church, in each context, and therefore opens the way to include more churches in the communion. The particularity and distinctiveness envisaged in both Spirit and Christ also enables the church to focus on developing a distinct Indian character for the church. In the Spirit, it will be open to the diversities of the Indian religio-cultural context, while bringing harmony to form an Indian identity for the church. This model avoids the problem of conceiving our unity on the basis of the Father-Son relationship, which we are unsure of and that is difficult to conceive. The permeable Spirit ecclesiological model, which allows unity in diversity and universality and particularity, is therefore appropriate as a complementary model for North India. The efficacy of this model lies in the compatibility it brings with the basis of union and the corresponding theological foundation that is envisaged in the image of the church as a body of Christ in terms of unity in diversity.

Furthermore, the significance of this model lies in that it offers a paradigm to move beyond organic unity towards other forms of unity. I will discuss how this is so shortly. I have already noted earlier that post-CNI the efforts made towards unity were more in terms of the nature of the communion of churches rather than an organic unity. In this sense the CNI, CSI and the MTC are united in basic structure, but operate as autonomous churches. Lorelei Fuchs outlines different forms of unity besides organic unity that has been tried by various churches throughout the world at different stages amidst different concerns; namely, *Federal Union*, *Conciliar Fellowship*, *Unity in Reconciled Diversity*, *Communion of Communion*s and

Koinonia.⁸⁹² It is beyond my scope here to discuss the above models; however, it shows that though organic unity is not simply dismissed, other models are required for ecumenical unity. Mention may be made here of a recent model of ecumenism known as ‘receptive ecumenism’ which is gathering momentum in the West. Receptive ecumenism, in the words of its founder, Paul Murray, from Durham University is:

‘What, in any given situation, can one's own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?’ and, moreover, to ask this question without insisting, although certainly hoping, that these other traditions are also asking themselves the same question. With this, the conviction is that if all were asking and pursuing this question, then all would be moving, albeit somewhat unpredictably, but moving nevertheless, to places where more may, in turn, become possible than appears to be the case at present. It is, as that suggests and as befits the character of Christian life, the way of hope filled conversion.⁸⁹³

Receptive ecumenism is a valuable paradigm in so far as it nurtures a humble recognition that the other tradition has something to contribute to our learning. It is in this essential attitude of openness and humility towards other traditions that it harbours the potential of a significant movement for unity. This has the potential to maintain the dialectics of unity in diversity as diversity is made an opportunity to learn rather than becoming an obstacle. In this sense, this model of ecumenism makes sense where in India unity in diversity is one of the main requirements.

However, the context of India, and particularly that of North India, poses different problems and challenges with regard to ecumenical unity. They are not

⁸⁹² Lorelei F. Fuchs, S.A. *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 53-69.

⁸⁹³ Paul. D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning-Establishing the Agenda 1,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, edited by Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

limited to the concerns for unity in diversity, or a common witness for Christ or identity as an Indian Christian. Although they still remain vital concerns, the experience of more than forty years of unity of the churches in CNI has revealed further hurdles and challenges. Sahu notes that the 'joining together of different denominations meant that the church became the repository of considerable and varied groups'⁸⁹⁴ with various goals and aspirations. On the other hand, there is a constant threat of 'pressure from a caste-structured society' that prioritises the privileged over the marginalised and downtrodden, which results in continuing segregation and discrimination within the church.⁸⁹⁵ The question of church unity in India is entangled by the concerns of disunity not merely due to inherited Western historic denominational divisions over doctrine and ministry but due to issues of caste segregation, tribal divisions, and Christians being a miniscule minority amidst a multi-religious society. The question of unity of the church cannot be addressed without taking into consideration the above issues because they are integral to the life and the identity of the church in India. In other words, unity of the church cannot be conceived without justice and liberation of the marginalised. Sahu contends that the present church in North India must include in its concerns of unity and ministry, the struggles and aspirations of the *dalit* and *tribal* Christians and the wider society with its multi-cultural and multi-religious character in which the Indian church has its being.⁸⁹⁶ Therefore the question is- do the different models of unity mentioned so far and receptive ecumenism in particular have the capacity to include the issues of justice and liberation, along with unity?

⁸⁹⁴Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 82.

⁸⁹⁵ Sahu, *United & Uniting: A Story of the Church of North India*, 82, 83.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Y.T. Vinayaraj, in his article on Ecumenism, *Re-defining Oikumene: A Subaltern Perspective*, argues why this kind of ecumenism is needed in India is also consistent with the epistemic shift in the wider ecumenical movement. He shows that the change of perspectives of ecumenism was due to the changing concerns of the global and the local. Vinayaraj shows three phases in this change: He discusses that in the first phase ecumenism was basically a Christianisation programme, which affirmed the universality of Christ and the Christian gospel, cast in the essential unity of the Christian church and its universal growth. Vinayaraj argues that it was basically ecclesiocentric and anthropocentric in focus.⁸⁹⁷ In the second phase, there was a shift in focus in the post-War situation and with the formation of decolonised nation states. The ecumenical movement began to show its concern for poverty, racism and critiqued the hegemonic tendencies of mission strategies. Vinayaraj notes that in this phase, 'the ecumenical movement re-defined its faith and theology in solidarity with the struggles of the marginalised and enlarged its geography and ethnography to the Asian-African-Pacific-Latin-American cultures and people'.⁸⁹⁸ The third phase in the 60s and 70s was characterised by the emergence of Black, Feminist, *Dalit*, Tribal, *Minjung*, Ecological and other contextual liberation theologies. It made ecumenism shift its focus from anthropocentric to a life-centred vision. It essentially was a move in the direction of a 'counter-imagination of unity in the context of fragmentation, marginalization and globalisation'.⁸⁹⁹ This decisive shift is in 'rejecting the unitary notions of modernity, like scientism, liberal humanism and Marxism; this new

⁸⁹⁷ Y.T. Vinayaraj, Ecumenism, *Re-defining Oikumene: A Subaltern Perspective*, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://revytvinayaraj.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/ecumenism.html>. This paper was presented at the Seminar on *Edinburgh 1910 and Beyond* at Whitefield Bangalore on 28th November, 2009 and published in "Theology of Our Times" in October, 2010. Vinayaraj refers to the focus of Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram (1938) Conferences.

⁸⁹⁸ Vinayaraj, Ecumenism, *Re-defining Oikumene: A Subaltern Perspective*, Vinayaraj refers to New Delhi (1961) and Uppsala (1968) conferences.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vinayaraj refers to Canberra Conference in 1991.

epistemological shift gives special attention to the so-called ‘other’/‘marginal’ /‘local’/‘little’ /‘mission field’ histories or narratives of life worlds.⁹⁰⁰ Vinayraj argues that it is imperative that ecumenism, therefore, focuses on revisiting the other in terms of marginalised communities, affirming the dignity and importance of difference in our notions of unity, understanding the importance of local movements and building up of a pluriform and dialogical community.⁹⁰¹

The above arguments show that ecumenism has shifted in its understanding through different phases. Ecumenism that includes the concerns of the marginalised, the other, including their particular struggles and challenges, ought to be one of the primary approaches in India. I argue that a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model has the capacity through the presence and liberationist work of the Spirit in the world to include the concerns and the struggles of the marginalised, and values the particularity of the other through the presence of the Logos in creation. Through the presence and work of the Spirit and Christ, a permeable church can be envisaged that goes beyond its ecclesiological borders, not in terms of an universalising hegemonic tendency of Christendom, but in honouring the particular struggles of each local community. It extends its borders through the Spirit beyond the church to people of other communities in solidarity, especially with the marginalised and with concerns of justice and peace. Here unity of the church is essentially envisaged in solidarity and liberation. I have shown through the Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan how questions of unity and diversity, universality and particularity are also linked with the questions of liberation. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology, therefore, holds in tension

⁹⁰⁰Ibid.

⁹⁰¹Ibid.

diversity in unity, particularity in universality, along with a liberationist approach that is appropriate for India and particularly for the North Indian context.

SECTION TWO: MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

In this section I will show that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology, with its relational-distinctiveness dialectics, creates space for people engaged in multiple religious belonging.

In consideration of the context of North India in Chapter One and the theological discussions concerning Indian theologians in Chapter Three, frequent references to the reality of dual or multiple religious belonging have been made. The North Indian context highlighted the struggle of Indian Christians living in ‘two worlds,’ seeking to negotiate boundaries between Christianity and their former religion. This has been particularly noted among the religious practices of marginalised groups of *dalits* and tribals, who constitute the majority of the Church in North India. While considering Indian theologies, it has been highlighted that the question of transcending religious boundaries has been common in India, both in terms of actual practice and in terms of intellectual accommodation of various faiths in one’s conceptual make-up and religious experience. It has been pointed out that from the early 19th century efforts have been made by Christians in India who have sought to live by reconciling more than one tradition within their religiosity. For example, Brahmabandhav Upadhaya (1861-1907), a prominent Bengali convert to Catholicism, sought to identify himself as a Hindu-Catholic or Hindu-Christian.

Brahmabandhav affirms:

We are Hindus so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholic. We are Hindu Catholics [...]. The test of being a Hindu cannot therefore lie in religious opinions.⁹⁰²

There were others like Manilal C. Parekh (1885-1967), who from the time of his baptism understood himself to be a Hindu-Christian although he considered Hinduism as a national and cultural entity rather than a religious one.⁹⁰³ One of the best-known figures, who probably profoundly experienced, though not without difficulty, what it means to belong to two different traditions at the same time is Swami Abhishiktananda. He was a French Benedictine monk (his original name was Dom Henri Le Saux) who came to India to show the Hindu mystics, whom he admired, that there is a similar tradition of mysticism in Christianity. Together with another French priest, he established an Indian Christian monastery or *ashram* in 1950, which he named *Shantivanam*, near Tiruchirappalli, in South India. Near the end of his life his friends in France thought that he had become a Hindu while others, some of them from India, thought that he remained a Catholic. This explains the kind of dual religious identity in which Abhishiktananda lived.⁹⁰⁴

Multiple religious belonging is a complex phenomenon of the interplay of identity and religious belonging in different cultures. Peniel J.R. Rajkumar and Joseph P. Dayam admit that, ‘needless to say, an amoebic and amorphous phenomenon like multiple religious belonging, which is replete with its variegated diversity and attendant complexity, holds in it more questions that we have even yet

⁹⁰² B. Animananda, *The Blade: Life and Work of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya* (Calcutta: Roy & Son, 1947) cited in *ICT* 68.

⁹⁰³ *ICT* 266.

⁹⁰⁴ Michael Amaladoss, “Being a Hindu-Christian: A Play of Interpretations-the Experience of Swami Abhishiktananda” in *Many Yet One: Multiple Religious Belonging*, edited by Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and Joseph Prabhakar Dayam (Geneva: WCC, 2016), 90.(Henceforth, *MYO*)

learned to ask.’⁹⁰⁵ The conceptual difficulty in understanding multiple religious belonging is somewhat minimised by the efforts of some who have tried to understand it by applying different terminologies or highlighting the differences between Western/European/American and Eastern/Asian understanding. There are others who have tried to categorise different strands of the phenomenon.

In the following I will briefly discuss them. In terms of terminologies, various usages besides multiple religious belonging are used viz., *Multiple Religious Participation (MRP)*, *Hybridity* and *Liminality*.⁹⁰⁶ John J. Thatamanil suggests that in some instances the term MRP is more appropriate than multiple religious belonging and highlights the difference between the two. He claims that the term MRP is the ‘best generic term for modes of religious life in which persons take up ideas and practices drawn from the repertoires of discrete traditions.’⁹⁰⁷ Thatamanil revises the definition of MRP following John Berthong, a Confucian-Christian thus:

[...] multiple religious participation is the conscious (and sometimes even unconscious) use of religious ideas, practices, symbols, meditations, prayers, chants, and sensibilities drawn from the repertoires of more than one religious tradition.⁹⁰⁸

He further notes that ‘multiple religious participation may lead to multiple religious belonging but it need not’.⁹⁰⁹ Thatamanil argues that the terms *belonging* and *identity* are more problematic than the term *participation*. The term *belonging* suggests actually having membership in more than one community, which is both acknowledged by the individual and the concerned communities, but he says such

⁹⁰⁵Peniel J.R. Rajkumar and Joseph P. Dayam, “Introduction” in *MYO* 1.

⁹⁰⁶ The terms *(In) Betweenness*, *Dual Belonging* and *Hyphenated Identities* are also used sometimes. See Rajkumar and Dayam, “Introduction” in *MYO* 1 and Allan Samuel Palanna, “(In) Betweenness and Being Analogical: Making Sense of Hospitable Faith,” in *MYO* 149.

⁹⁰⁷John J. Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation,” in *MYO* 10.

⁹⁰⁸Ibid., 11.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

acknowledgement from both sides is rare. Often the individual who acknowledges his or her status as such is not validated or acknowledged by the other community. In this circumstance Thatamanil asks a pertinent question: ‘Must claims of double belonging receive communal authorization before they can be recognized as valid?’⁹¹⁰

Thatamanil argues that even the term *identity* is complex because we can speak of multiple religious *identities* or multiple religious *identity* depending on how we understand the formation of identity of a person.⁹¹¹ The term hybridity is also used to describe the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging. The concept of hybridity in a positive sense was actually brought into postcolonial and cultural studies by Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie among others. This term denotes intermingling and fusing of cultures, but also emergence of a new identity.⁹¹² Another term closely associated with hybridity is *liminality*, which is used by various authors to express one of the authentic categories of ‘Indianness,’ i.e. the fact of transcending of religious boundaries.⁹¹³ Felix Wilfred writes:

In the Indian tradition, the concept of *sandhya*-conjunction is very important. It is the *twilight zone* where night and day meet. The borders and twilight zones, or to use an anthropological terminology, the position of *liminality* [italics mine] is unique and creative.⁹¹⁴

The various terms mentioned above helps to highlight different aspects of the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.

⁹¹⁰Ibid., 10.

⁹¹¹ Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation,” 10

⁹¹²See Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001) 349. The term was earlier used in a derogatory sense to refer to persons of mixed origins. See John Scott, “Hybridity” in John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2004). The above references are cited in Sunder John Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” in *MYO* 138.

⁹¹³ See Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 346 cited in *MYO* 136.

⁹¹⁴Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 171.

The western status and understanding of multiple religious belonging differ from their counterparts in the East. Catherine Cornille notes that the West is slowly coming to terms with this phenomenon, while it is almost commonplace in the East, for example, in China, Japan and India to name a few.⁹¹⁵ Wilfred writes about the Asian situation of transcending of borders:

One widespread experience in different parts of Asia is that people, by and large, do not hold on to rigidly demarcated borders. The borders are fluid and porous. This is even more true when it is a matter of religion and religious experience [... ,] the Asian cultural ethos of fluid borders is very alive and active.⁹¹⁶

In the West, belonging to one religion may be the norm and multiple religious belonging the exception. In the East and in the wider history of religion, multiple religious belonging is the rule rather than the exception at least at a popular level.⁹¹⁷ There is a further important distinction between the West and the East in this matter: In the West, it is more a matter of choice or selection for the individual which religion one wants to draw closer to. In the East, it may not be wholly a question of choice, but a question of one's birth in a particular community, circumstances, upbringing, socio-cultural or other factor.⁹¹⁸ In this context it is important to note that the concept of religions as a monolithic entity is debatable. In North America and Europe religious multiplicity is recognised, but it is often delegitimised as syncretistic.⁹¹⁹ Thatamanil draws attention to the fact that scholars like Wilfred

⁹¹⁵ Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, Faith Meets Faith Series, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1970) 1-2 (Henceforth, *MM*).

⁹¹⁶ Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies*, 175.

⁹¹⁷ *MM* 1-2.

⁹¹⁸ See Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction" in *MYO*, 2. Also see Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," 8.

⁹¹⁹ Thatamanil explains syncretism through an example. He contends that a person who cultivates yoga practice in addition to Eucharist engages in MRP, but if the yoga practice is installed within Eucharist it becomes syncretism. He argues that the term syncretism 'must first serve descriptively before they

Cantwell Smith long ago understood religious traditions as fluid and impure, which flow into each other and are not essentially ‘discrete, reified and homogenous entities’.⁹²⁰

To further understand the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, Catherine Cornille’s categorisations are helpful. She broadly categorises the issue in two aspects: involuntary and voluntary. In the involuntary category, she gives the example of the situation in East Asia where being a Chinese person also means belonging to Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism. This is not a matter of choice, but that of cultural identity. Another aspect in the involuntary category is of a person being born in a family where his or her parents belong to more than one religion. This person then has to negotiate different religions during his or her upbringing. This refers to the external circumstance rather than an individual choice.⁹²¹ In the voluntary category, there could be occasions of crisis, need or necessity in terms of disease or difficulty when a person chooses to turn to another religion or practice it occasionally for help. Another aspect of the voluntary category is that some people might choose to identify permanently with more than one religion because they find in that religion some resources or vitality that brings them fulfilment. Cornille mentions Raimon Pannikar who went through a similar experience saying: ‘I started as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu, and returned as a Buddhist without ceasing to be a Christian.’⁹²² Furthermore, there are people who have not completely identified with two religions on an equal level, in which case one of the religions

are subjected to normative evaluation.’ See Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation,” 11.

⁹²⁰ See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) cited in Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation,” 7.

⁹²¹ Catherine Cornille, “Multiple Religious Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue” *Current Dialogue* 57, (December 2015): 4-5.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, 5.

continue to be more dominant than the other. There are other kinds of belonging in which a person fully initiates himself into the religion of the other. Cornille gives the example of Paul Knitter, a priest, who took vows in Buddhism. Other ‘borderline’ cases include situations where a person identifies with the symbolic and scriptural framework of one religion and with the hermeneutical framework of the other. Cornille cites cases where Christianity is sought to be understood in terms of *Advaita* or other categories.⁹²³

Multiple religious belonging is understandably not without its numerous adherent problems. It also poses a significant challenge for the churches. Thatamanil in his discussion of MRP, points out three pertinent problems: *misappropriation*, *contraindication* and profound *existential uncertainty*. In his discussion of the first issue of misappropriation, Thatamanil claims that all forms of religio-cultural-ritual borrowing might not be legitimate. While exclusive ownership of a particular religious symbol or ritual by a particular religion is a debatable issue, there can be borrowing in an asymmetrical relationship of power. Thatamanil notes that ‘prudent questions must be raised about who borrows from whom and under what circumstances.’⁹²⁴ He gives the example of the religio-cultural relationship between Native Americans and non-native Americans as a result of colonisation and missions. There were cases where religious identities of the native-Americans become hybrid due to coercion, and where the non-Native Americans misappropriated the cultural and ritual motifs and artefacts of the subjugated natives without giving them due honour.⁹²⁵ In other cases borrowing might be a consumerist enterprise where spiritual disciplines and ritual practices are simply taken over, sold in the market and severed

⁹²³ Cornille, “Multiple Religious Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue”, 5.

⁹²⁴ Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation.”17.

⁹²⁵ Ibid; also see John B. Cobb Jr, “Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation,” in *MM* 22.

from their community of origin.⁹²⁶ Therefore, Thatamanil suggests that there must be criteria to discern which form of borrowing is legitimate and not dehumanising. In this sense, he suggests an ethical criterion where ‘persons engaging in such activities remain in conversation with communities from whom they are borrowing. *Borrowing from* is done best when *learning with*.’⁹²⁷ The second problem Thatamanil highlights is that of contraindication. He asks whether the ritual or practice of a particular religion is always compatible with the different tradition into which it is borrowed. He argues that it is not always the case. He contends that care should be taken about the appropriateness of the practices and their therapeutic value before borrowing. As an example he cites that certain kind of meditations may not be practiced in a different religious tradition without a guru.⁹²⁸ The third problem has to do with anxiety and uncertainty that people might face while engaging in MRP. This is true both for mystics and scholastics as well as ordinary people. Thereby Thatamanil raises the question of spiritual care for persons who engage in such practice and highlights the lack of expertise in that field.⁹²⁹

Rajkumar and Dayam have pointed out that multiple religious belonging also has the danger of persons engaging in it in the sense of a ‘bricolage spirituality’ or a non-serious mix of different religious and cultural elements especially as a trend of postmodernity.⁹³⁰ They agree with Cornille and Peter C. Phan that there are people who take it as a ‘light-hearted flirting with different religions’⁹³¹ or ‘self-indulgent,

⁹²⁶Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation,” 17.

⁹²⁷Thatamanil, “Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation,” 17.

⁹²⁸Ibid., 17-18.

⁹²⁹Ibid., 18, 19.

⁹³⁰Rajkumar and Dayam, “Introduction,” in *MYO* 3.

⁹³¹ Catherine Cornille, “Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions,” *Buddhist Christian Studies* 23 (2003): 48, cited in Rajkumar and Dayam, “Introduction,” in *MYO* 3.

free-floating, cafeteria-style potpourri of mutually incompatible religiosities.’⁹³² Peter C. Phan admits that it is sometimes a case of the New Age Movement that ‘represents a symbolism of unbridled consumerism, excessive individualism, and the loss of collective memory that are characteristics of modernity and its twin, globalisation.’⁹³³

Multiple religious belonging is a significant problem for Christianity and the Church. It particularly poses a problem for Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam that demand exclusive commitment on the part of their adherents.⁹³⁴ Cornille axiomatically states that: ‘The more encompassing a religion’s claim to efficacy and truth, the more problematic the possibility of multiple religious belonging.’⁹³⁵ Phan shows through a survey of well-known personalities⁹³⁶ several complications and hurdles involved in the process of multiple religious belonging. He argues that for authentic multiple religious belonging to occur, hard and patient intellectual work is needed otherwise it might run the risk of shallowness. He shows that this may lead to a continuous tension in the life of the individual who engages in this phenomenon and that the learner needs stepping into the shoes of the religious experiences of others and the guidance of some teachers.⁹³⁷

While problems and hurdles abound, the reality of multiple religious belonging in relation to Christianity and the church cannot be avoided. Thus scholars and theologians continue to grapple with the problem, so that they can understand what it means theologically and ecclesiastically. Some examples would give us an idea of

⁹³² Peter C. Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003):495 cited in Rajkumar and Dayam, “Introduction,” in *MYO* 3.

⁹³³ Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” 498.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁵ *MM* 2.

⁹³⁶ One of them Phan holds up as an example is Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka.

⁹³⁷ Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” 510-513.

how they continue to think of multiple religious belonging. John R. Cobb thinks that multiple religious belonging is rather a means to an end and looks forward to transformation of religions in the process.⁹³⁸ Joseph O' Leary for example, argues for the significance of reinterpreting Christianity in terms of Mahayana Buddhism, so that the church can answer its critiques that are against a metaphysical understanding of Christianity.⁹³⁹ Cornille summarises Raymon Pannikar's position as someone who practiced a lifetime of multiple religious belonging. Pannikar thinks that the question of religious identity and belonging is not only a subjective matter, but also a question of acceptance by the group. However, the group consists of individuals who continually have to negotiate boundaries. Pannikar thinks this helps in the process of the self-understanding of our faith while going beyond boundaries of fixed identities and exclusive belonging.⁹⁴⁰ An interesting contribution in this field is made by Jacques Dupuis who comments on the relationship of complementarity and convergence of Christianity with other religions. He proposes that this relationship is able to hold the value of any particular religion while acknowledging the salvific value of other religions within the plan of God. He explains:

The question of a complementarity and convergence between Christianity and the other religions of the world arises in the context of a theology of religions that while holding clearly to the essential and constitutive elements of the Christian faith, attributes to the other religious traditions a positive value in the order of salvation for their members and a positive significance in the plan of God for the whole of humankind.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁸ See John B. Cobb Jr, "Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation," in *MM* 20-27.

⁹³⁹ Joseph S.O' Leary, "Toward a Buddhist Interpretation of Christian Truth," in *MM* 29-43.

⁹⁴⁰ Raimon Pannikar, "On Christian Identity: Who is a Christian?" in *MM* 121-141.

⁹⁴¹ Jacques Dupuis, S.J., "Christianity and Religions: Complimentarity and Convergence," in *MM* 61.

While the above positions describe different ways of positively understanding and responding to the issue of multiple religious belonging in a wider context, I want to stress that in India, in the particular context of North India, this phenomenon includes other dimensions which need different approaches. In the First Chapter, I described the struggle faced by the *dalits* and tribals as they attempt to live in two worlds, especially Christian *dalits* and tribals after conversion. I highlighted the complex processes of assimilation, transformation and/or rejection of different religio-cultural or ritual elements in *dalit* and tribal religiosity in interaction with their old religion and Christianity. I maintain that colonial Christianity has long since driven an unrealistic wedge between different communities and uprooted the masses from their indigenous communities for which these marginalised groups still continue to struggle. For most of them it is not an intellectual choice, but one that their context demands. It is essentially a struggle for survival spiritually and existentially. I also discussed the *dalit* predicament and tribal marginalisation that occurs due to the dominant cultural hegemony of the upper castes or the powerful. These two groups continue to suffer oppression, marginalisation and violence from which they seek liberation. Thus the question of legitimising or de-legitimising multiple religious belonging by Christianity or the Church especially in the context of *dalit* and tribal marginalisation takes on a different note. Phan draws attention to the necessity of engaging in multiple religious belonging with particular attention to solidarity with the poor and marginalised and working for their emancipation without which this type of engagement can easily slip into ‘spiritual escapism’ or ‘bourgeois leisure life’.⁹⁴² Sunder John Boopalan argues that for the right kind of hybridity (he uses this

⁹⁴² Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” 513.

word instead of multiple religious belonging) to occur, especially a hospitable kind of hybridity, it ‘needs to be perpetually disposed toward marginality and sites of oppression.’⁹⁴³ He argues that marginality is the ethical rudder as one steers through the ambiguity of hybridity.⁹⁴⁴ Stephen Moore notes that hybridity disrupts the normative, which corresponds to the pure, neatly arranged, straightforward space that excludes the marginalised.⁹⁴⁵ Hybridity also functions as a worldview that ‘allows disparate identities to relate to each other based on shared identity and to co-exist without needing to undermine each other.’⁹⁴⁶

Boopalan agrees with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a post-colonial theorist, that the Indian scene is mostly ruled by a ‘liberal pluralism of repressive tolerance,’⁹⁴⁷ a pluralism which pretends to be hospitable by claiming to be tolerant and harmonious. Actually this is a superficial kind of pluralism that is devoid of an analysis of power, class, caste, gender and the plight of the marginalised.⁹⁴⁸ Boopalan instead argues for a hybridity and plurality that is embodied, mostly expressed through various rituals and practices of different religions.⁹⁴⁹ He reminds us that rituals have an inherent power to implicate and create alternative cultures and communities. He writes:

[...] rituals create alternative cultures that are not easily co-opted by dominant cultures, enabling hospitable freshness and

⁹⁴³John Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” in Rajkumar and Dayam eds., *MYO*, 136.

⁹⁴⁴Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” 136.

⁹⁴⁵Stephen Moore, *Empire and the Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament, Bible in the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 109 cited in Raj Nadella, “Motif of Hybridity in the Story of the Canaanite Woman: Its Relevance for Multifaith Relation,” in Rajkumar and Dayam eds., *MYO* 111.

⁹⁴⁶Nadella, “Motif of Hybridity in the Story of the Canaanite Woman: Its Relevance for Multifaith Relation,” *MYO* 111

⁹⁴⁷Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 176, cited in Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” 138.

⁹⁴⁸Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder,” 138.

⁹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 139.

creating nonhegemonic multiple belongings. They “contest the exclusivity in religious orthodoxies by redefining boundaries and reformulating the relationship between Self and Other.”⁹⁵⁰ Thus rituals have the ability to foster hybrid identities that contest⁹⁵¹ and reorganize identities.⁹⁵²

Boopalan contends that rituals make use of space and time that rejects the unequal elevation of intellectual over the material. The meaning-making power of ritual embodiment elicits response from participants⁹⁵³ especially those from the marginalised. James Ponniah shows the importance of rituals in multiple religious belonging through the hybrid identities that are produced and promoted in the Christian and Muslim shrines in Tamilnadu.⁹⁵⁴ Ponniah agrees with Selva Raj that rituals are performed ‘often in opposition to and defiance of institutional norms and ecclesial prescriptions-that occur at the grassroots level in the arena of popular piety and rituals’.⁹⁵⁵ Hybridity is thereby grounded in rituals, which can be an alternative model of religious dialogue, ‘a dialogue that emanates from the epicentre of rituals, performances, and practices of the people, and differs substantially from that which emanates from the official deposit of faith of institutionalized religions.’⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵⁰ Alexander Henn, “Introduction: Beyond Norm, Text and Dialectics- Rituals as Social Praxis,” in Henn and Klaus Peter Kopping, eds., *Rituals in an Unstable World: Contingency-Hybridity-Embodiment* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008, 13 cited in Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” 141.

⁹⁵¹ Pnina Werbner, “Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity”, in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1997), 23-24, cited in Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” 141.

⁹⁵² Boopalan, “Hybridity’s Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder” 141.

⁹⁵³ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁴ James Ponniah, “Shrines, Ritual Hospitality, and Hybrid Identities in South Asia” in Rajkumar and Dayam, *MYO* 100.

⁹⁵⁵ Selva J.Raj, “Dialogue ‘One the Ground’: The Complicated Identities and the Complex Negotiations of Catholics and Hindus in South India,” *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 17(2004): 41 in “Shrines, Ritual Hospitality, and Hybrid Identities in South Asia” in Rajkumar and. Dayam, *MYO* 107.

⁹⁵⁶ Raj, “Dialogue ‘One the Ground’: The Complicated Identities and the Complex Negotiations of Catholics and Hindus in South India,” in “Shrines, Ritual Hospitality, and Hybrid Identities in South Asia” 41.

In this espousal of the critical and the embodied rituals and practices, ensues the discussion of how the church can understand or appropriate the issue of multiple religious belonging especially in relation to the *dalits* and tribals. Joshua Samuel highlights how the *dalits*, both Hindu and Christian, themselves use hybridity to counteract the influences of oppression and how the church can stand in solidarity with them in this struggle. Samuel writes:

[...] through hybridity the subjugated people at the bottom of the social pyramid creatively appropriate and use the religious and the cultural sources of the dominant (usually their oppressors) in order to sustain themselves through their oppressive situation.⁹⁵⁷

Samuel argues that this element of hybridity has helped the *dalits* survive under oppression. It is this element of plurality and not being able to be limited by a particular religion that has been the strength of the *dalits*.⁹⁵⁸ In relation to the church and the acceptance of *dalits* living in multiple religious belonging, Samuel asks, ‘rather than insisting on their “exclusive” membership in Christianity, would it be possible to accept them as members of the body of Christ, without laying down stipulations and conditions? Would that be too unchristian?’⁹⁵⁹

A relevant example is the *Kristbhakta*⁹⁶⁰ movement, explored in the First Chapter, in North India which consists of a group of non-baptised believers who are in the liminal position of being Hindus and also having love, faith and attachment to

⁹⁵⁷Joshua Samuel, “Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging for Liberation: A Reflection from a Dalit Perspective” in *Current Dialogue*, (December 2015): 80

⁹⁵⁸Samuel, “Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging for Liberation: A Reflection from a Dalit Perspective” 81.

⁹⁵⁹Ibid.

⁹⁶⁰Kristbhaktas are devotees of Christ, but not members of any mainline Church. They are seekers, who accept *Yesubhagavan* (God in Jesus Christ) as their *Satguru* (Teacher). *Yesubhagavan* is their *istadevta* (personal God) according to *Bhakti* tradition. Apart from Varanasi, similar movements are seen in Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. There are thousands of devout seekers who seek to follow Christ in this way. See Sylvester, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, 2.

Jesus. This phenomenon is witnessed in North India with Matridham Ashram in Varanasi as the focal point.⁹⁶¹ This group of people testify to their unique experience in Jesus, but express this in terms of signs, symbols, and rituals drawn from Hinduism. They are largely from the marginalised communities, but its significance lies in being a ‘prophetic interrogation to the static and archaic tenets of established religions.’⁹⁶² Jerome Sylvester who researched this community writes:

The Khristbhaktas are at the periphery of established religion [...]. Many Christians find Khristbhakta Movement as a new way of spreading the Gospel and new way of being Church. The type of discipleship emerging from the Khristbhakta Movement is different from the conventional membership of Christian Churches. Being a disciple of Christ without being member of the Church is a reality to be faced.⁹⁶³

The experience of believing without affiliation to any institution is therefore a reality in this case not only individually but also in terms of community. This points to the fact that in North India, communities as well as individuals can practice multiple religious belonging. They can belong to Christ-centred communities without being baptised. I will not explore the important related issues of baptism, conversion and the possibility of non-baptised believers in the Indian context because I have not taken up the issue of rituals, worship and sacraments in this chapter.⁹⁶⁴ All I want to suggest here is that the *Christbhakta* Movement helps us to begin to conceptualise the church in new ways. Does it not also signify the need for a kind of church that I am arguing for with a porous or permeable ecclesiology?

⁹⁶¹Felix Wilfred, “Forward” in Sylvester, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, xi-xii.

⁹⁶²Sylvester, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, 131.

⁹⁶³*Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁶⁴Particularly important in this field are the thoughts of M.M. Thomas. See M.M. Thomas, “Church’s Mission and Post-Modern Humanism: The Church-the Fellowship of the Baptised and Unbaptised,” accessed 27th September, 2016, <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1448&C=1274>. Also see Timothy C. Tennent, “The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 29, No.4, (October 2005): 170-177.

Turning to the tribal Christians, we also see this group maintaining both continuity and discontinuity with their previous religions especially in terms of rituals and practices. In Chapter One I extensively discussed how tribal Christians continue to negotiate their borders in terms of their relationship with their former *Sarna* religion and Christianity. This is especially true in East and Central India among the *Adivasi* (tribal) community. Lovely Awomi James argues that that tribal Christians maintain hybridity in terms of their use of several customs and traditions, rituals and practices. She shows that among tribal Christians in the Northeast India, their belief in the world of the spirits, practice of totemism, practice of taboos, shamanism and traditional feasts continue amidst their Christian faith.⁹⁶⁵

The above observations on multiple religious belonging and hybridity, in India, drive home the fact that the church cannot neglect the reality of this phenomenon. Multiple religious belonging continues to happen not only intellectually but concretely in rituals, ceremonies and religious life of individuals and communities. Multiple religious belonging is a grounded reality for many common people in India; it is not limited to religious experts as we have found. As the majority of the church in India consists of *dalits*, tribals and the marginalised groups, it is expedient that the church should recognise this situation. In this case can there be a way out in terms of re-organisation or re-conceptualisation of the boundaries of the church? Here is where the significance of a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model shows itself. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology parallels the efforts of many who practice multiple religious belonging in terms of negotiating boundaries. Essentially a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model does the same. It enables the church to

⁹⁶⁵Lovely Awomi James, "North East Indian Tribal Christianity and Traditional Practices: Implications for Theology of Religions Today," in *Current Dialogue* 57, (December 2015): 52-62.

negotiate its boundaries, making it softer while not losing its distinctiveness in Christ. In the Indian context and especially through our discussions of the kind of multiple religious belonging evident in the North Indian context, such an ecclesiology provides the avenues to relate to people's past and also provides occasions to witness to a particular faith. It allows the people, especially *dalits*, to continue to live in multiple religious belonging for their own survival amidst oppression and also allows them to determine their identity in their rootedness to their own culture and traditions. It works similarly in the case of tribals who will then be able to uphold their particular tradition while being Christians. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology, with its character of unity and diversity, universality and particularity, and spiritual and the concrete, could help ground the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging in the lives of common people in terms of rituals and practices. Rajkumar and Dayam point out with Stephen Barton the possibility thereby to live life in '*creative fidelity*':

Where fidelity involves recognisable continuity with our scriptural faith tradition, and creativity involves an openness to the Spirit for the inspiration to interpret and 'perform' that tradition in ways that are life-giving?⁹⁶⁶

Thus I have shown that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology does not shy away, but recognises the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, while negotiating its borders in concrete ways both to be faithful to a particular tradition while being open to relate to the other in concrete ways towards flourishing of life and freedom.

⁹⁶⁶Stephen C. Barton, "The Epistles and Christian Ethics," in Robin Gill, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63 cited in Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction" in *MYO* 3.

SECTION THREE: INTERFAITH RELATIONS

In the previous two chapters I described the different approaches of Western and Indian theologians regarding the church and interfaith relations, including theology of religions. In both Western and Indian Christian traditions there is the acknowledgement that the church should be in relationship with other religions or people of other faiths. I do not propose to repeat the different approaches of the theologians regarding church's interfaith relations and theology of religions that I have already discussed in chapters two and three. Instead, what I intend to do is to bring out the particular interfaith relationship a permeable Spirit ecclesiology would facilitate in the sense of this dialogical relationship. In other words, I will elaborate on how such dialogical relationship is upheld by a permeable Spirit ecclesiological model. I will argue that a particular understanding of dialogical relationship between religions is required in the context of plurality and marginalisation in North India. It will be evident that a discussion of interfaith relations of the church in India cannot be carried out without considering the issue of marginalisation and oppression of *dalits* and tribals as they constitute the majority of the church. In essence, what I am arguing is that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology provides the appropriate paradigm for interfaith relations, which is not simply elitist, but where the issue of marginalisation is taken seriously. In order to explore this particular kind of dialogical relationship it is essential to begin by briefly outlining the development of the dialogical approach through the 20th century. This will help us understand how we entered the stage of dialogue in interfaith relations and how dialogical relations with other religions should be understood within the Indian context.

During the modern times, the church's interfaith relations were integrally connected to the mission of the church. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Christian missionary attitude was marked by the superiority of the Christian religion and the denial of the worth of other religions. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) harboured many of those attitudes. Gustav Warneck used the language of military conquest to describe Christian mission.⁹⁶⁷ Henry Venn shared in the Conference the view of the Scottish missionary to India, Alexander Duff that Western education could prepare Indians for the gospel.⁹⁶⁸ The conference also came to learn from other missionaries from 'lands of living faiths' that a superior attitude to Christianity was unwise in the context of relationship between Christianity and other religions.⁹⁶⁹ Following the Conference, a change of attitude was recognisable among theologians and missionaries. Kirsteen Kim highlights some of the reasons for this change in attitude: the First and Second World Wars, which undermined European supremacy; the development of a pragmatic approach to mission work; decolonisation and growth of churches in the global South; and complaints of proselytism from Hindus.⁹⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the Conference, different attitudes were recognisable, but most of them revealed a softened attitude towards other religions. J.N. Farquhar proposed the 'fulfilment theory,' where Christ was considered to be the fulfilment of Hinduism. A.G. Hogg rejected such a theory instead highlighting the contrast between Hinduism and Christianity. Later in the

⁹⁶⁷See Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 31-32 cited in Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, London: Epworth Press, 2009) 21.

⁹⁶⁸Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 27-28 cited in Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, London: Epworth Press, 2009) 22.

⁹⁶⁹K.P. Aleaz, "Christian Dialogues with Hinduism" in *Interfaith Relations after One Hundred Years: Christian Mission Among Other Faiths*, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series, edited by Marina Ngursangzeli Behera (Edinburgh: Regnum Books, 2011) 79.

⁹⁷⁰Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, 22-23.

second Missionary Conference at Jerusalem in 1928, there was a softer approach to other religions. Religions were beginning to be considered as allies rather than enemies. W.E. Hocking was in favour of seeing the best in other religions; he was not in favour of conversion, but of seeing the emergence of religions into a world fellowship.⁹⁷¹ This was challenged by a later book by Hendrik Kraemer, entitled the *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, written as a preparatory volume for the Third Missionary Conference held in Tambaram in 1938. It was in response to this document that the *Rethinking Group* of Indian theologians like Chenchiah and Chakkarai showed their opposition to Kraemer and the Tambaram message; that favoured a discontinuity between Christianity and other religions. Instead, Indian thinkers upheld the value of continuity as Chenchiah argued that his Hindu background helped him to appreciate Christ and Christianity.⁹⁷² In the 1940s and 1950s openness towards other religions gradually grew and paved the way for dialogical encounter between religions. Aleaz writes: ‘Wide ecumenical recognition has been given through both the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Second Vatican Council, for this dialogical approach.’⁹⁷³ While the WCC established a *Department for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), changed the way the Roman Catholic Church understood itself, moving from an understanding of itself as a hierarchical church to a being a ‘people of God.’⁹⁷⁴ Since the Central Committee meeting at Addis Ababa in 1971, dialogue with other religions has occupied a prominent place in the work of the WCC. In later stages the concept of dialogue began to be described in terms of

⁹⁷¹Aleaz, “Christian Dialogues with Hinduism” 80.

⁹⁷² Ibid., 81.

⁹⁷³ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁴ Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, 26.

mutuality between religions while the role of the Spirit of God is recognised. The Baar Statement of the Dialogue sub-unit of the WCC is significant enough to be quoted at length:

We need to respect their religious convictions (i.e. of people of other living faiths), different as these may be from our own, and to admire the things which God has accomplished and continues to accomplish in them through the Spirit. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore a 'two-way' street. Christians must enter into it in a spirit of openness prepared to receive from others, while on their part, they give witness of their own faith. Authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other. Through the witness of others, we Christians can truly discover facets of the divine mystery which we have not yet seen or responded to. The practice of dialogue will thus result in the deepening of our own life of faith. We believe that walking together with people of other living faiths will bring us to a fuller understanding and experience of truth.⁹⁷⁵

The above statement shows that dialogue in the character of mutuality of religions was accepted during the 90's. This speaks of the dialogical mutuality that I argued earlier as one of the twin features of relational-distinctive dialectics of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. This dialogical-mutuality, on the one hand, treats various religions as working grounds for the Spirit and on the other allows a two-way communication and mutuality between religious partners.

Particularly speaking from the Indian context, this dialogical mutuality bears the character of the rejection of the colonial supremacist position of Christianity with respect to other religions, which have been found in pioneer Indian theologians right from the 19th century. Although some of them can be categorised as inclusivist, they treated all religions as being equal and discarded the notion of the superiority of one

⁹⁷⁵“Baar Statement,” *Current Dialogue* 18, (June 1990): 7 cited in Aleaz, “Christian Dialogues with Hinduism” 82.

religion over other.⁹⁷⁶ Aleaz, writing on the pioneering contributions of Indian thinkers and theologians, gives the example of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885), whose theology discarded superiority of one religion over others even earlier than his Western counterparts. I quote Aleaz at length here:

Krishna Mohun Banerjea(1813-1885) was the first Protestant Christian to interpret Jesus Christ and Christianity in terms of Vedic thought [...]. Banerjea's exposition of Christ as *True Prajapati* was an attempt to establish the fact that Christianity is not a foreign religion but rather the fulfilment of the Vedas. In fact thirty eight years before J.N. Farquhar it was Krishna Mohun Banerjea who first proposed 'Fulfilment Theory' or Inclusivism in Indian Christian Theology of Religions, that again without any negative criticisms of Hinduism as are found in Farquhar's book.⁹⁷⁷ Also some eighty-four years before Raimon Panikkar,⁹⁷⁸ K.M. Banerjea was the first person to hint at *Prajapati* as unknown Christ of Hinduism, that again without any negative criticisms of Vedanta as are found in Panikkar's thesis. Again, sixty-three years before H. Kraemer proposed his theory of discontinuity between Revelation and religions here is an Indian theologian in the person of Banerjea expounding a point of contact and continuity between Christianity and Hinduism.⁹⁷⁹

In the contemporary times, Aleaz, in his theology of religions, also shows dialogical mutuality, which combines the two-way interaction of religions through pluralistic inclusivism and relational convergence of religions while discarding the superiority of one religion over the other. I discussed this at length in the previous chapter in the section on Aleaz' thoughts on theology of religions.

⁹⁷⁶Aleaz gives a description of several theologians from the 19th century onwards who engaged in interfaith relations, especially Hindu-Christian relations. He cites H.S. Krishna Pillai, A.S. Appasamy Pillai, Brahmabandhav Upadhaya, Pandipeddi Chenchiah, Vengal Chakkari and others. See Aleaz, "Christian Dialogues with Hinduism," 83-99.

⁹⁷⁷J.N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913); *Gita and Gospel*, Third Edition, (Madras: CLS, 1918) cited in Aleaz, "Christian Dialogues with Hinduism" 84.

⁹⁷⁸Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) (Revised and Enlarged Edition by the same publisher in 1981). For a summary of his thesis, Cf. "Isvara and Christ as a Philosophical Problem," *Religion and Society*, Vol. VI, No.3 (October 1959): 8-16, cited in Aleaz, "Christian Dialogues with Hinduism," 84.

⁹⁷⁹Aleaz, "Christian Dialogues with Hinduism," 84.

Thus, while principles of dialogical mutuality between Christianity and other religions were established early on, the churches of North India have still got to put this into actual practice. The concept of inter-religious relations in the nature of dialogical mutuality seems to be guiding ecumenical institutions and academia, but it has not yet profoundly affected the church on the ground level in North India. There might be two particular reasons for such a condition. One reason that I have discussed at length is the colonial captivity of the church and I need not repeat it here; on the other hand, to date, the issue of interfaith relations and theology of religions have been mostly an elitist and intellectual enterprise. Interfaith efforts and theology of religions in India have been largely done in Brahmanic and Vedic categories as is shown in the efforts of Krishna Mohun, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, Aleaz and others. While interreligious dialogue at this level has considerable value and continues to be done, it has failed to influence the common life of Indian Christians. For interfaith relations to be realised among the common people of the church, it needs to be grounded in the daily life of the people in their everyday relations. Stanley Samartha's categorisation of dialogue is helpful here, where dialogue is not only understood as an intellectual or elitist enterprise, but one that relates to our lives:

(1) Dialogue of Life, in which participants are more concerned with issues that pertain to daily living and common values; (2) Dialogue of Action, which involves common work for justice and shared concerns such as HIV/AIDS and the cause of the poor; (3) Dialogue of Experience, which concerns daily spiritual experience and expressions; and (4) Dialogue of Experts, which is interested in theology and philosophy of the faith traditions.⁹⁸⁰

⁹⁸⁰ Stanley J. Samartha, *One Christ, Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 88. This is a summary by Veli Matti Kärkkäinen, "Theologies of Religions," in

This understanding of dialogue not only engages the intellectuals and experts, but opens the way for interfaith relations to common people in the church in the context of common concerns of life. This actually broadens interfaith relations in at least two aspects: one, it brings concreteness and particularity in interfaith relations while being a Dialogue of Life and Dialogue of Experience; on the other hand, it gives a critical edge to dialogue while it is done in terms of Dialogue of Action, i.e. shared concerns and work for justice for the poor and the marginalised. I would like to apply the permeable Spirit ecclesiological model to this wider understanding of interfaith dialogue and show that it can uphold the dimensions mentioned by Samartha.

I have previously argued that the relational-distinctive dialectics have the capacity to uphold the relational character of the church in its dialogue with other religions through the Spirit's presence and action in them. I have emphasised plurality and diversity, and also the distinctive character in terms of the Indian-Christian identity of the church, and the critical criteria regarding itself and against the structures that perpetuate marginalisation. In the Indian context, interfaith relations cannot be separated from the issue of marginalisation and oppression since they are interrelated. Since the majority of the church is constituted of the marginalised, interfaith relations cannot bypass their perspectives while the church engages in interfaith dialogue. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology, I will show, has the capacity to ground the church's dialogical relations in the concrete lives of the people. I will thus deal with interfaith relations from the perspective of the marginalised, i.e. from the position of the *dalits* and tribals. Interfaith relations take

Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission among Other Faiths, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series, edited by Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen, (Edinburgh: Regnum Books International, 2011), 111.

on a different level of complexity when approached from the context of the marginalised in India.

The relationship of Christian *dalits* and tribals to other religions, especially Hinduism, is particularly problematic. Peniel Rajkumar explores this in his article *Re-Cast(e)ing Conversion, Re-visiting Dialogue: Indian Attempts at an Interfaith Theology of Wholeness*, where he brings a whole new dimension to interfaith thinking from a marginalised perspective. I quote the abstract of this article to highlight the problem:

In India the Christian commitment to interfaith engagement produces a paradox. On the one hand dialogue between Christianity and other religions, especially Hinduism in this context, is seen as an advance in redressing an earlier unjust position of assumed religious exclusivity, triumphalism and superiority on the part of an evangelical missionary Christianity. Dialogue presumes mutuality of recognition, respect and religious value, including freedom from coercion and freedom of personal choice. However, on the other hand, in the Indian context, the caste system presents intractable problems which, in being identified with Hinduism and thus, in the context of dialogue, to be recognised and respected as a religious value on the part of the Christian dialogue partner, then results in the Christian colluding with a manifest injustice with respect to Dalit and Adivasi (tribal) peoples for whom the caste system is oppressive and restrictive.⁹⁸¹

What the above essentially means is that the aspect of Christian dialogue with Hinduism nowadays is usually taken as a development and remedy on the previous stance of interfaith engagement which was triumphalistic. But on the other hand, caste system creates a barrier to interfaith engagement because according to the marginalised, Hinduism is to be blamed. In this circumstance dialogical relations between Christianity and Hinduism in the context of caste becomes problematic. This is the paradox of the Indian situation that is expressed here.

⁹⁸¹Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, *Cast(e)ing Conversion, Re-visiting Dialogue: Indian Attempts at an Interfaith Theology of Wholeness*, Abstract, *JASR* 26.2 (2013): 157.

In India, *dalits* and tribals have always sought to resist Brahmanic hegemony and oppression in their opposition to Hinduism. They, especially the *dalits*, have shown their dissent in various ways: following a survival strategy of accommodation in appropriating upper caste rituals and practices; through ‘sub-alterations’⁹⁸² in terms of non-compliance to the world-view of the high castes, for example, in their myths of origin rejecting the doctrine of *karma*; ‘subversion’⁹⁸³ in terms of overtly debunking old templates and meaning systems to embracing symbols of *dalit* identity.⁹⁸⁴ Dalit theology, carried out by *dalit* Christians largely remains a counter-movement against Hinduism.⁹⁸⁵ The complexity increases when the traditional *dalit* religion is included within the ambit of Hindu religion. This resemblance; however, is partly due to absorption by Hinduism, historically of *dalit* and tribal rituals, gods and symbol systems.⁹⁸⁶ This not only led to dissolution of their religio-cultural identities, but also their socio-religious autonomy. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel writes that they:

[. . .]not only lost their social autonomy and economic independence but also their religio-cultural self-identity as a separate group by losing control over their gods, places of worship and the right to administer to their own people's religious needs. Furthermore, many of them internalized brahminical versions of myths relating to this historical process and voluntarily accepted demeaning ritual roles in

⁹⁸²Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, “The Diversity and Dialectics of Dalit Dissent and Implications” in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, edited by Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 56.

⁹⁸³Rajkumar, “The Diversity and Dialectics of Dalit Dissent and Implications,” 57.

⁹⁸⁴ Rajkumar, “The Diversity and Dialectics of Dalit Dissent and Implications,” 55-58.

⁹⁸⁵See Sathianathan Clarke, “Dalit Theology: An Introductory and Interpretive Theological Exposition” in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, 20-22. Clarke discusses methodological exclusivism of *dalit* theology in relation to Brahmanic ideology.

⁹⁸⁶A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, “The Dalits, Religions and Interfaith Dialogue,” *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 7 Art. 6 (1994): 14.

village festivals, temple rituals and domestic rites corresponding to a servile class in a semi-feudal economy.⁹⁸⁷

One of the other ways in which *dalits* have responded to high caste Hindu brahmanical oppression is to convert to Christianity, Buddhism or other religions.⁹⁸⁸ *Dalits* who followed B. R. Ambedkar⁹⁸⁹ are convinced that they cannot reclaim their identity, self-dignity and humanity by staying within the Hindu fold.⁹⁹⁰ This brings us to the problematic position of how conversion is seen differently by different groups and in its relation to interfaith dialogue. Rajkumar writes:

While commitment to Hindu-Christian dialogue has demanded that Christians compromise on conversions, nevertheless commitment to the liberation and empowerment of the Dalits and Adivasis has implied that Christians affirm the rights of the Dalits and Adivasis to convert to Christianity as a way of liberation from the caste system.⁹⁹¹

Rajkumar argues that the Christianity's colonial entanglements have to be understood in a different light when considered in connection with the liberation of the marginalised. Although colonial captivity has to be decried in different manifestations of the church and society, he contends that the contributions of the missionaries and the colonial power led to the empowerment and liberation of the oppressed *dalits* and tribals in certain spheres. Rajkumar quotes Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim,

⁹⁸⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸Numerous conversions to Buddhism occurred from the *dalit* Hindu community after the conversion of Ambedkar to Buddhism in 1956.

⁹⁸⁹Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891 – 1956) was a jurist, economist, politician and social reformer who inspired the Dalit Buddhist Movement and campaigned against social discrimination against *dalits*, while also supporting the rights of women and labourers. He was Independent India's first law minister and one of the framers of the Constitution of India.

⁹⁹⁰Ayrookuzhiel, "The Dalits, Religions and Interfaith Dialogue," 14.

⁹⁹¹Rajkumar, *Cast(e)ing Conversion, Re-visiting Dialogue: Indian Attempts at an Interfaith Theology of Wholeness*, 158.

These conditions of mission were seen as a liberative-transformative space by Dalit communities for self-assertion and reclamation of their place in society rather than as components of the colonizing process. Therefore, Dalit entanglements with missionaries are much more complex than patron–client or colonizer–colonized relationships. Dalit communities, which had no stake in local power, viewed those in their own country who had power as ‘colonizers’. For them, the conversion experience of which they were the primary agents helped in their quest for freedom from oppression. In this the conditions of mission played and continue to play the role of midwife.⁹⁹²

Rajkumar contends that Hindu-Christian dialogue cannot therefore continue in terms of laying the burden of colonial guilt on Christians, and viewing Hindus as victims with respect to the marginalised.⁹⁹³ Victimhood has changed sides; now the Hindus are perpetrators of discrimination and violence against Christian *dalits* and tribals. Rajkumar argues that if we continue to reject conversion of *dalits* and tribals on the basis of promoting interfaith dialogue we might end up in colluding with the Hindu oppressors. Rajkumar also points out that while engaging in Hindu-Christian dialogue we must judiciously choose partners. Considering Hinduism as a non-monolithic, non-homogenous religion, we must be careful to avoid dialogue with those Hindu oppressors who perpetuate discrimination and violence and instead choose Hindus who are against caste and who support the dignity of life.⁹⁹⁴

In the preceding section I have highlighted the trajectory that is involved in interfaith relations while considering it from the marginalised perspective. This kind of approach is actually a contrast to the elitist dialogical approach that is common in

⁹⁹² Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today, Vol. II, Edinburgh 2010*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010),15.

⁹⁹³Rajkumar, *Cast(e)ing Conversion, Re-visiting Dialogue: Indian Attempts at an Interfaith Theology of Wholeness*, 164-165.

⁹⁹⁴Ibid.

academic and intellectual circles. This actually opens the way to understanding interfaith relations broadly in two different ways: one, in intellectual and institutional terms, and two, in terms of more concrete and grounded form that includes the dialogue of the marginalised including their aspirations and liberation. If we return to the different forms of interfaith dialogue as expressed by Samartha quoted earlier, I argue that interfaith dialogue should continue at both levels, while emphasising the importance of dialogue particularly in the concrete level that includes the marginalised. I also affirm the freedom of the marginalised to convert into whichever religion they choose.

I also argue that different facets of interfaith dialogue can be accommodated in a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. I have already shown that the dialectic of dialogical mutuality forms the basis for respect for religions and sharing and exchange between religions at an equal level. On the other hand, the dialectic of particularity and universality has its place too. While universality upholds that relationality among religions is to be upheld, no particular religion should seek to homogenise the diversity and particularity of religions. This is true in the case of the efforts of the Hindu fundamentalists to homogenise Hinduism and bring the other minority religious communities under its fold. One of interfaith relation's roles is to obstruct any such efforts towards religious hegemony. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology upholds the critical character of interfaith relations through its borders. While porosity determines passage of religious concepts and facilitates dialogue, the borders filter and determine both the dialogical partners and the critical attitude towards religions and religious establishments that perpetuate the oppression of the marginalised in the name of religion. The borders of the church here play a critical,

prophetic and liberationist role. While the Holy Spirit helps to relate to religions through the Spirit's presence and action among religious communities beyond the church, the Christological criterion provides the critical and prophetic edge to engage in interfaith relations with concerns of justice and liberation. Christ's life, death and resurrection continue to be the locus of liberation for the marginalised and a prophetic critique against structures of oppression. Thus a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with its relational-distinctive dialectics can provide the basis for the church's interfaith relations.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSION

In the previous three sections I demonstrated the particular character of ecumenism, multiple religious belonging and interfaith relations when understood in the context of India or particularly North India. I have been able to show some trajectories in these issues which are different from that of the West. In other words, I have shown that in all three issues there is an additional trajectory from the perspective of the marginalised that needs to be taken into account in the Indian context. I argued that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology has the potential to uphold the dynamics at play regarding these issues in this particular context. However, the question remains as to how a permeable Spirit ecclesiology can tangibly help the churches to deal with the above issues? What practical tools or resources does this theology of the church provide to work with? In this concluding section I will turn to these questions.

To begin with, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology provides some inevitable basic methodological orientations for the churches in North India to consider. These

orientations are twofold: a turn towards plurality and diversity, and an emphasis on the struggles, aspirations and liberation of the marginalised and oppressed people. The turn to plurality and diversity is facilitated by the church's recognition that the Spirit of God, along with the Logos / Word are present and are working in the church and in different Christian denominations and other religious communities. This recognition and appreciation of the reality of diversity and plurality essentially opens the door to the aspect of relationality that the Indian church should develop. Particularly in terms of ecumenical relations, this becomes far easier as a starting point rather than beginning with the affirmation that we are all one and united in Christ. It helps the churches to start from the stark reality that we are manifestly plural and diverse, while it does not provide justification for our divisions. Here diversity is turned from a problem to be shunned or a barrier to be overcome to an opportunity for relationality and engagement. Here unity in Christ is the goal that we work towards in the practical level starting with our appreciation and acceptance of the other in the Spirit. This also reduces our often unintentional tendency to take unity for uniformity in the ministry and mission of the church. Appreciation of diversity involves learning from others and accepting the gifts that others bring into the meaning and life of the Christian community. The recognition that the Spirit values plurality and diversity might go a long way into accepting and affirming each other's ministry and mission, which would eventually pave the way for a closer relationship and ultimately unity.

However, in the Indian situation the issue of unity and ecumenism do not end here. A permeable ecclesiology further leads the church into understanding unity and ecumenism in terms of particularity and concreteness. What this means is that

Christian unity has to be pursued at the ground level, at the local level, at the level of the people. Christian unity should be a people's movement rather than merely an institutional one. The movement of unity should start from the Christians themselves in their local context. This could on the other hand mean that no single model of unity could be universally applicable. While not neglecting the principle of catholicity and universality of the church, each local situation will determine what sort of unity the churches require in their context. For example, a particular area or region in North India could decide what brings them together. In other words, the nature of Christian or ecclesial unity may differ in their concerns for the states of West Bengal, Orissa or Bihar which have negligible Christian minorities from that of some of the Northeastern states like Nagaland and Mizoram which are more than ninety percent Christian. The agendas, approaches and concerns for Christian unity would be significantly different in these two regions. For example, Christian unity in the former group could be more related to the witness it can give to the people of other faiths amidst which the churches live and work; on the other hand, for Northeastern states it could be more in terms of solving the western denominational problems that they have inherited. Therefore, at any rate, it is for Christians of different areas in North India to decide what works best for them rather than have unity thrust upon them from a higher institutional level. On a general level, however, Churches could come together on issues like ministry to the poor, standing up for their own minority rights, other socio-political-economic issues or at a deeper level in their spirituality of prayers, worship and liturgies. However, all these are simply means to an end for further, fuller and richer unity in Christ. Speaking from the particular context of West Bengal from where I come, churches could witness more

effectively within their own diverse religio-cultural context by being concretely and particularly engaged in their own communities in unity than in a kind of unity that the wider society has no conception about. In other words, rather than trying to solve the historical denominational problems which have been imported into India and about which the wider society are hardly conscious about, Christian engagements in the wider society have more promise for effective witness and as a means to Christian unity. However, I am not suggesting that the historical denominational problems should not be dealt with. Rather, that they cannot be our starting points. In Christian unity, relationality in terms of building relationships of trust, confidence and friendship in each other are crucial towards any further visible unity. And the best way to achieve it is to agree to work together in the particular society where we live, engaging in concrete struggles and issues.

However, church-unity becomes more complicated when it is understood from the perspective of the marginalised. The churches in India divided and segregated by caste and tribal affiliations face huge obstacles towards realisation of unity. In other words, how can unity be envisaged between the high caste Christians and *dalit* Christians? How can the oppressor and the oppressed be united without questions of justice? How can unity between competing tribal Christian traditions be worked out? While engaging in unity from the perspective of the marginalised and the oppressed; what matters are the essential dimension of solidarity with them, a critical edge and a liberationist perspective, with a desire for justice and peace. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology helps the church in North India to face up to the stark reality and difficult challenge of unity amidst caste and tribal divisions in the church. It's distinctive, critical and liberationist outlook remind the church that questions of

unity of the church cannot simply bypass the question of justice for the oppressed. This involves the issue of rights and agency for the marginalised before proper unity can be worked out. The dynamics of repentance and forgiveness in Christ are crucial dimensions before Christians in India can be justly united. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology points the churches to the fact that the Spirit of God who is for liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17) and Christ our liberator (through his death and resurrection) continue to work between segregated Christian communities and thus it is should be our pleasure to join in. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology through the unity and oneness in the Spirit and Christ helps the churches to realise that unity also means solidarity with the marginalised Christians and building bridges with the other marginalised communities within the churches and beyond.

In terms of interfaith relations again, how does a permeable Spirit ecclesiology help the churches? Here also it points out to the North Indian churches that interfaith relations should not be limited to academic, elitist or intellectual enterprise. Interfaith relations in India ought to start from the ground, from a concrete level, from the living communities themselves. Interfaith relations for the Christian minorities in North India, living amidst a plural, multi-cultural and multi-religious environment actually begin outside the church in their daily concrete lives. Interfaith relation is essentially a dialogue of life that continues to be held every day. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology's affirmation that the Spirit and the Word continue to work jointly in various communities in everyday situations, is just the right starting point for the churches to engage in interfaith relations. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology's stress on the concrete and the particular helps develop these starting points. It provides opportunities to the common people rather than merely the experts

to explore interfaith relationships with people from different religious backgrounds whom they meet, converse with, and work with on a day-to-day basis. Essentially, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology shows the churches in North India that alternative, informal spaces outside the church and outside the academy could be created that would facilitate interfaith interaction.

I have shown earlier that interfaith relations have been largely elitist and intellectual with little substantial outcome on the ecclesial and ground level. One of the reasons of course is the colonial captivity of the church. There have been genuine efforts therefore throughout to remedy the situation in terms of inculturation, contextualisation, indigenisation and other similar means. However, these efforts have not been very fruitful and are often looked upon with suspicion, if at first cordial relationships are not forged between people from different communities. While not negating the role of the official ecclesial efforts, and the professional theologians or intellectuals in the task of interfaith relations, I argue that a turn to alternative spaces can be more practically effective to forge such relationships. The organised churches themselves could create such spaces in different ways. One of the ways these alternative interfaith interactive spaces could be created is by turning to social-cultural festivities. Public socio-cultural festivities draw people from all religious backgrounds to a common platform. The churches could organise such festivities inviting people from different backgrounds to interact, share and relate; thus building friendships and relationships. The other way in which the churches can engage with other religious communities are through joint efforts towards socio-economic-political issues that affect all communities, especially the minorities. Movements for justice, peace, poverty, unemployment and a host of other common

issues can bring churches and other Christians in close relationship with other communities. These will not only better interfaith relationship but be occasions of witness for Christ in a non-supremacist, non-patronising, non-proselytising manner. These will be also occasions for learning, sharing and enriching each other through the gift of each other's rich religious resources. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology informs the church that the Spirit and the Word are present and active within the various communities in their struggles both spiritual and secular for dignity, justice, peace and a decent human life. To that end the churches can look forward to cooperation with other communities, work in solidarity and enrich each other.

However, a basic question remains as I have highlighted before. This is a question of the relationship of caste segregation and interfaith dialogue with Hinduism, especially with those Hindus who perpetuate marginalisation in the name of caste and religion. These include those fundamentalist Hindus who propagate the sectarian notion of Hindutva, ones responsible for persecution of minorities including Christians. Should we engage in interfaith relations with them? If so, what could be the nature of such a dialogue? Or if we shun them, do we not lose opportunities for witnessing for Christ among them? These are difficult questions. A permeable Spirit ecclesiology helps the church situate itself in the reality of the situation. On the one hand an ecclesiology with permeable borders would encourage the church to forge relationships as the Spirit and Christ are always engaged in building relationships with not only the like-minded but the different and the other. Such an ecclesiology would allow the church to work critically with these communities in justice with the goal of transformation and liberation both for the oppressed and the oppressor. Practically speaking, the more cordial relationships and networks are developed with

the wider religious communities; the easier it will be to counteract either caste or fundamentalism. The confidence, support and trust of people from different religious faiths who are for justice and peace are crucial for standing up to these challenges.

As regards multiple religious belonging, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology helps the church in North India to recognise its reality in the first place. This recognition is then followed by an effort at comprehension. It encourages the church to seek to understand the phenomenon in its diversity and complexity instead of simply dismissing it as some form of syncretism. The fact that many Christians and many people belonging to different religions are consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly involved in multiple religious belonging for different reasons gives food for thought and reflection for the church. However, the prime difficulty is not in the fact that the churches might recognise the reality of the phenomenon. The problem arises in acknowledgment of the statuses of those people or groups who engage in multiple religious belonging. They are often misunderstood or misinterpreted by both religious communities, as I have shown previously in the case of Swami Abhishiktananda. There are also those who engage in it without any commitment to any particular religion at all. While this latter kind of spirituality has to be criticised, I have also shown that common people including Christians engage in multiple religious belonging through shared rituals in different shrines in India without much opposition. Thus, in the case of organised Christianity or churches finding difficulty in acknowledging or accepting persons or groups who transcend religious boundaries, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology suggests that alternative spaces could be created where such people can be appreciated or their richness of experiences can be welcomed. These spaces also can become nurturing grounds for them to make

commitments towards a particular religion if they find themselves so disposed at some point. In other words, a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with its negotiable and soft boundaries can provide motivation for the churches to create extra space for such people. These spaces can be fellowships of like-minded people in a non-judgemental environment while providing them with opportunities for growth and nurture in their spiritualities.

However, this complex phenomenon is rendered acute while the marginalised people practice multiple religious belonging either for their survival or as a strategy to counteract oppression as I have earlier shown. Multiple religious belonging here does not remain only a matter of religious practice but a subversive posture of the marginalised. I have shown how this becomes a critique of organised, institutional religion with its strict boundaries, rituals and practices. Here a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with its affirmation that the Spirit and the Word works both in the centre and the periphery, in the midst and in the boundaries of people's religious and spiritual lives, offer motivations for the churches. It helps the churches to recognise that God's dealing with people cannot be confined to set institutions and practices. It shows the churches the need to create alternative, liberationist spaces where religious and spiritual creativity can flourish. It suggests that the churches should go beyond from their narrow confines where God is at work even at the boundaries.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the objective has been to develop a permeable Spirit ecclesiology in the context of North India. The notion of permeability was expressed in terms of the feature of relational-distinctiveness in ecclesiology. In other words, it was argued that a North Indian ecclesiology needs an orientation towards relationality affirming the diversity and plurality of other faith communities, including its own denominational diversity. On the other hand, in dialectical relationship to the above, a North Indian ecclesiology needs an orientation towards distinctiveness in terms of an Indian identity and developing an embodied community of Christ. Included in this distinctiveness is a critical stance both towards itself and the wider world and a particular liberationist turn towards the marginalised. The relational-distinctive dialectics in North Indian ecclesiology is argued to be fulfilled with a dialectics of a pneumatological perspective and a Christological dimension working together.

The North Indian ecclesiology with the above dialectics would particularly stand out in contrast to South Indian ecclesiological orientations in subtle ways. The linguistic, socio-religio-cultural and ethnic differences between North and South India would call for specialised and focussed ecclesiological treatment. For example, the concerns and challenges of the Northeast tribals and their Churches are unique in their own respects which are not the same concerns of majority communities in South India. Moreover, since the Christian population in North India (except the Northeast states) is considerably lower than South India, and due to Hindu fundamentalist strongholds in North India, ecclesiological approaches ought to be more carefully worked out. In other words, churches in North India are in an

arguably less privileged position in terms of support for ministry and mission than the South.

This project has led to several important insights and outcomes. The very first insight is an understanding of the North Indian context especially the challenges and struggles for the churches. The struggle for the churches in North India are broadly two-fold. On the one hand the churches still struggle with colonial captivity, while they must make sense of the religio-social-cultural plurality around them; on the other, they must respond to the marginalisation of their members with a liberationist perspective. In other words, the first challenge is the challenge of the issue of identity of the churches. The second regards the church's response to the Dalits, adivasis, tribals and other marginalised groups.

The first struggle is essentially for the churches is to be released from their colonial captivity in its structures, theology and mission, which as argued requires a decolonisation approach and a dynamic approach in tension with the institutions. Included in this is the church's seeking an Indian identity in terms of situating itself within the context of North India religio-culturally and socio-politically. This implies both a discontinuity from its colonial moorings and a continuity and relationship with other communities. The church ought to be relational with other communities in North India, correcting and eradicating the alienation caused by a colonial Christianity. Yet it must be a distinct, embodied community in terms of its rootedness and Indian character in the particular context. The distinctive rootedness and diversity of the Christian community is argued to be a critical counter approach to fundamentalist Hindu assumptions of a homogenised and mono-cultural Indian identity. The distinctiveness of the church in its particular local and cultural context

will both manifest its 'Indian-ness' and also its diversity and particularity. The unity that the church has ought to be manifested in such diversity.

The other challenge is that of marginalisation of *dalits*, adivasis, tribals and similar groups within the church and in wider society. The challenge is to consciously forge relationships with the neglected, oppressed and marginalised groups in the church and outside, in the wider world. This is the church's relational and universal dimension, which takes it beyond the church into the wider society. This takes the form of solidarity with the oppressed groups and developing an integral theology of life and critical witness that caters to the hopes and aspirations of such groups. It also involves a simultaneous critical approach towards those structures within the church and in the society, and even the political establishments that perpetuate such marginalisation. In this sense the church ought to be relational in terms of integrating the concerns of these marginalised groups in its understanding of the nature, ministry and mission. The church also ought to be distinctive in its critical approach towards its segregated character and towards those forces that perpetuate marginalisation and oppression. This approach is particularly distinctive in its emphasis on justice and liberation.

Apart from an understanding of the North Indian context, the thesis argued that a permeable Spirit ecclesiology, characterising a relational-distinctive dialectics would help the church in North India to broadly address the above mentioned challenges. In other words, a permeable church, conceptualised in terms of an emphasis on a pneumatological perspective, coupled with a Christological dimension could help maintain the above mentioned dialectics. This is a dialectical engagement where both the Spirit and Christ would be each responsible for

maintaining the relational and the distinctive dimensions. In other words, as the Spirit of God manifests relational-distinctive dialects in terms of holding in tension universality and particularity, unity and diversity, spiritual and concrete, so does the Word / Logos or Christ.

To arrive at a permeable Spirit ecclesiology, where the Spirit and Christ jointly ensure a dialectical criterion, available models of ecclesiology were considered. Several models of ecclesiology, beginning with a Social Trinitarian model with Jürgen Moltmann, an ecclesiocentric model with Stanley Hauerwas and a Christo-theocentric model with Kathryn Tanner were explored. After finding them inadequate, Amos Yong's permeable Spirit ecclesiology based on the Irenaean's metaphor of the Spirit and Christ working as two hands of the Father was found to uphold the relational-distinctive dialectics. The previous three models did have notable strengths, but they all fail in maintaining the dialectics required. Moltmann's Social Trinitarian model offers considerable relationality in terms of God-church-world relationships, but fails to express this relationality in a distinctive and concrete manner. His ecclesiology, which has a pneumatological perspective and eschatological orientation, is largely conflated in terms of God-church-world relationship. He fails to maintain enough distinction between God and the world and an embodied and concrete character for the church, which is required in the North Indian context. Essentially the model of Social Trinity is problematic in imaging human relationships and the church.

Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesiocentric model places significant emphases on a number of desired characteristics: concrete and embodied community of witness to Christ with its distinctive character of virtue and discipleship, the concrete liturgy

and practices of the church and a critical edge with respect to assumptions of the world, which should be relevant for any context. However, Hauerwas's ecclesiocentric approach is essentially exclusive and detrimental to building relationships with other communities on a dialogical level. While highlighting the distinctive character of the church, it is without relational potential which is crucial for the North Indian context.

Tanner's Christo-theocentric model is significant in terms of overcoming many of the problems found in the Social Trinitarian model. She offers a less complicated avenue of imaging human relationships and the church on a Christological model based on Christ's relationship with the Father and Jesus' human relationships. It is a critique also of an exclusive nature of ecclesiology of the post-liberal school. On the other hand, her model based on the transcendence of God allows the Christian community to be relational towards the other while critiquing socio-economic structures for human dignity and justice. Although she leans towards a permeable ecclesiology, it lacks a dialectics where the Spirit and the Word can work together in the economy. Tanner also lacks a developed ecclesiology in terms of the nature, ministry and mission of the church. The relational-distinctive dialectics that I have been arguing for is not present in this model in terms of expressing how universality is related to particularity, unity to diversity and so on and so forth. Further, Tanner does not deal with the question of how a Christocentric approach would account for relation with other religions.

After finding the above approaches or models inadequate, the Spirit ecclesiology of Amos Yong was explored, which is based on the Irenaean metaphor. Yong's ecclesiology is pneumatologically driven while being Christologically

particular. Yong shows mutuality between the Spirit and the Word, Spirit Christology and Logos Christology as working in creation, the world and the church. His ecclesiology shows relationality in Spirit and Christ as well as distinctiveness and particularity through the Spirit and Christ. This is expressed in the nature, ministry and mission of the church. The nature of Spirit ecclesiology in Yong shows a dynamic, eschatological and relational character with the possibility of holding in tension different approaches of ecclesiologies together. His understanding of the four marks of the church also demonstrates the dialectics between universality and particularity, spiritual and concrete, static, and dynamic and unity and diversity dynamics. In terms of the ministries of the church, the fact that the church is constituted by the Spirit and instituted by Christ ensures an egalitarian character where the members are equal on the basis of shared gifts of the Spirit and that the offices of the church and its hierarchy are understood as functional and derivative of the joint ministry of the Spirit and Christ. The mission of the church in Yong's ecclesiology extends to other religious communities on the basis of the presence and work of the Spirit and the Logos in them. In terms of relational expansiveness, Yong's permeable Spirit ecclesiology does not limit itself to human beings, but also is open to rest of creation. Thus, a particular shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology with Amos Yong was built.

Arriving at a shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology was only tentative at this stage as developing any Indian ecclesiology without taking into consideration the ecclesiologies of Indian theologians would be unjustifiable. Thus, contributions from Indian theologians were sought to see whether further revisions of this model were to be required. It was found with Indian theologians like Chenchiah and Aleaz

that formulating any Indian ecclesiology would require addressing the questions of colonial captivity and rigid institutionalisation of the church, and the need for a decolonisation approach. Furthermore, the Indian religio-cultural context and religio-philosophical sources should play a major role in the construction of Indian ecclesiology. There ought to be the acknowledgement of the reality of multiple religious belonging too. The Western theologians along with Yong understandably lacked these perspectives. Chenchiah and Aleaz's contributions, while being significant in these terms failed to show the relational-distinctive dialectics required for our ecclesiology. Thus, the permeable Spirit ecclesiology of Samuel Rayan who combined the above particular approaches and an added theology of life and most importantly a liberationist perspective, was deemed adequate. Thus, with Rayan a suitable shape of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology for North India was developed.

Another important finding in the project refers to issues of ecumenism, multiple religious belonging, and interfaith relations. It was found that an Indian dealing with these issues need an integrated approach. In other words, questions of ecumenical unity or multiple religious belonging and interfaith relations cannot bypass questions of marginalisation and liberation. The voice of the marginalised sections of the society and the church needs to be taken into account while engaging in these issues. These endeavours cannot be merely elitist but grounded in the everyday reality and context of the people of North India.

In conclusion, another important issue is to be highlighted. The question of significance of this thesis in the wider ecclesiological discourse. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen in his book *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (2002) categorises various ecclesiological traditions and major contemporary ecclesiologists and he also

includes in his survey the category of contextual ecclesiology.⁹⁹⁵ Kärkkäinen observes the emergence and growing significance of contextual ecclesiologies in the field of ecclesiological reflections.⁹⁹⁶ He highlights ecclesiologies from the Asian, Latin American, African and other Third World contexts. The present research will hope to contribute to that wider discourse about contextual ecclesiology bringing the particular voice of Indian (particularly North Indian) ecclesiology. The Indian ecclesiological turn towards plurality or diversity and marginality proposed in this thesis is hoped to add to the existing discussions of the implications of being the church in a plural context and within situations of marginalisation and oppression.

Moreover, in ecclesiological discussions an emerging trend is to explore the nature of a Third Article Ecclesiology. The important aspect of understanding the church from the perspective (or lens) of the Spirit is gradually coming to the fore. Gregory Liston in his work, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* uses Christology and Trinity as vantage points through which to examine ecclesiology pneumatologically.⁹⁹⁷ Liston's argument is that the church essentially links with Christ and Trinity through the Spirit. In this discussion of the development of a Third Article ecclesiology, the present thesis highlights the importance of the Irenaean metaphor of the Spirit and the Word as two hands of the Father which could be considered. The present thesis also moves forward on this basis to propose the relational-distinctive dialectics required for a permeable ecclesiology and this is an added contribution from this thesis.

⁹⁹⁵ See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2002).

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹⁹⁷ See Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) See also Gregory J. Liston, 'Where the Love of Christ is Found: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology' in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, edited by Myk Habets (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 342.

Furthermore, this project opens the way to further reflections of the church's engagement from a pneumatological perspective with the Dalits, the *adivasis* and tribals, women's issues and ecological crisis. Ecclesiological discourses in these arenas from a pneumatological perspective and a corresponding Christological dimension in dialectical relation is still to be undertaken in a recognisable way in India. Towards that end this thesis provides further motivation and direction.

Overall, it is believed that this thesis will encourage further reflections in the theological arena regarding how Spirit and Christ continue to work dialectically together for building a church in North India (and the rest of India) which is both Indian and Christian.

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