4. SOCIO-CENTRIC APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY
(A Positive Perspective)

4.0. Introduction

The great enigma presented to our minds by the 'Phenomenon of Man' is not so much how life could ever have been kindled on earth as how it could ever be extinguished on earth without finding some 'existence' elsewhere, as it has already been noted that the word existence implies going out of any given state. It is obvious from the nature of the human living conditions. The human fulfilment consists in the continual increase and development of all the human resources and talents in every sphere of life: economical, educational, technological, cultural, sociological, psychological and spiritual. As the human spirit (mind) is understood to be limitless and to have infinite manifestations it is believed not to have any extinction whatsoever. This consciousness of the human self can by no means be made extinct, and such a reflection on the human self can be attributed symbolically to our understanding of the biblical idea of man having been created in the 'image of God', the spirit. The understanding is bound to make the human more a psychological (Psyc: spirit/mind) and social being than a biological creature. The foreshadowing of some form of existence, as it were a new being, has to be identified in the life here and by everyone. It was this reflection of consciousness that brought about formation of community or organized society in humanity. The law of biogenesis could naturally lead us not only to any question of well-being but also to a "thirst for greater being that psychological necessity can save the thinking world from the 'tedium vitae'".¹

¹ Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe (S. W:Collins son & Co Ltd, 1974) p 100
Any human concern for the future raises questions that are essentially spiritual in nature, referring to ultimate reality. This ultimate concern makes us a part of the world of parables and preaching of Jesus, like the concerned old Simeon in the temple who was "looking for consolation" (Lk 2:25) for the whole humankind found it in the child Jesus (an epiphany). The concern fundamentally demands a renewal, a real revolution within, a coup d'état of the heart. The renewal is manifested in proportion to how far we free ourselves to merge with or to accommodate others, by fixing "our gaze on the universal realities"², after the pattern of Jesus, because his spirit measures up to the human supreme destiny and it is the focal point of human history that is full of grief and grandeur in human experience. The Gospel with its personal centre of Jesus Christ is the essence of the whole Christian doctrine, as it claims or proclaims the infinite value of the human person based on the socially centred perspective of the brotherhood of humanity and the fatherhood of God.

The functioning of Free Self is implicit in the seed-parable: "If the word of God’s call is really to bear fruit, it must be received into deep, bare broken soil".³ The ‘bare broken soil’ stands for the centre of our self being set outside ourselves to become wholly the others’. This is meant by Jesus’ paradoxical saying of losing one’s life in order to gain it, otherwise the seed would remain only a seed, not become a tree. To be fully ourselves (to gain) we must advance towards convergence with all other beings, what is other than ourselves (to lose ourselves). The fullness of a person is indeed in the appropriate association with the

² McCowen p 120
³ Stockton p 100
fellow persons, and collectivization and individualization thus become complementary not contradictory principles. We must be the parts of all those who are around ourselves. The perfect personalization is in the well-ordered integration with the unified humanity. The human advance, it is seen must essentially be a social phenomenon, and for such a social integration, Jesus' Gospel contributes the axis through its emphasis on the society oriented spirituality for the transformed persons.

The modern hermeneutic procedures for interpreting the Gospels are "designed to ensure 'understanding' of events in the life of society through the subjective intention of historical figures ... which analyse objectified results of conscious human activity". These procedures have been successfully adopted by the modern scripture scholars to explicate the message of Jesus. A glance at the global scene emphasizes peace, for instance to be a value with no frontiers. War in the north does not mean peace in the south. Peace is much more than just the absence of war. It refers to the human well-being in every sphere of existence. Therefore ours is the period with the need of an authentic spirituality for social action for creating a new society that is qualitatively different from the existing ones. The gospel spirituality cannot lay in protective isolation but must be performed as a public duty. Such a social foundation is inferred from the actual incarnation of God in human society. The interaction or interrelation of these two factors, spiritual and material, psychological and sociological is considered very vital for any social development.

The interaction is explicit from incarnation to crucifixion realities. Jesus was not a prominent public figure but lowly by nature and stature,

4 Frolov p 170
and a God-man who came to serve. Likewise his good news demands for human action, hence we have the natural follow up of the Gospels in "the Acts of the Apostles". This act is well-symbolized in what Jesus told his apostles, the erstwhile fishermen, when he said that he would expect them to "become fishers of men", denoting their spirituality to have the necessary socio-centric perspective.

4.1. The Gospel view of Spirituality

Theory and practice of the gospel message is the real experience of the spirit of Christ for the emergence of the new person in us, as he is the means by which God becomes scientific, and the knowledge of God becomes tangible and understandable as Ludwig Feuerbach has said, "the God in your head is gas and wind; the God in Christ is fixed and solid body". Therefore Jesus' message is not only to be believed but also to be experienced, that is why the Word of God, both the message and the man Jesus continue to confront us personally and socially as it did in his time. In Jesus exists the unification of what our "human thought and experience would never have dared to join together... mind and matter, the infinite and the personal". The awareness of such a higher consciousness makes us capable of rising into a new sphere of existence making us wholly free, by insulating ourselves from the afflictions 'of' the world while getting ourselves actively engaged 'in' the world affairs.

The gospel perspective of God, self and others is one of liberating force in our lives, because to see ourselves as God sees us makes us

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5 Qtd. in George A. Maloney, *The Silence of Surrendering Love: Body, Soul, Spirit Integration* (Bombay: St. Paul publications, 1991) p 69
6 Chardin, *Hymn* p 69
realize the godly image in us. Besides the idea 'who we think we are' plays a key role in our treating others, in discovering ourselves, and in responding to God. If we look at ourselves as God sees us, for God loves us for what we are, it becomes both indicative and imperative on our part to make others aware of God's love for them, which in turn demands our spirituality to be necessarily practised in every social structure. This is manifested in Jesus who not only preaches a philosophy of life but also establishes a unique personal relationship between humanity and its estranged creator with a Father-Children relationship. It signifies the human person's infinite worth and value here and now and that he or she is not a cog in the machine.

The person made new by the gospel spirituality therefore must become a fact to be realized in life at present, not a goal to be attained in future. Living a spiritual life, according to the Gospels is not living an unusual life but a normal life in the world which is figuratively indicated in Jesus telling Zacchaeus "come down Zacchaeus, I must stay in your house". This coming down to normal life, expected of us by Jesus should bring about a drastic transformation in us, as it did in Zacchaeus' life. "Zacchaeus adds inches to his stature" on coming down, though he climbed up the tree earlier (due to his small stature) by throwing dignity to the wind. His 'giving half' of the belonging is the concrete expression of loving the needy neighbours 'like yourself'; as 'himself' and the poor neighbours equally shared his wealth. This is not all, the personal repentance is rightly stressed in his readiness to "restore ... fourfold" if he had defrauded anyone of anything, with the remaining half of his wealth that was all his possession now. Repentance must fulfill the requirement.

7 Aixala p 134
It is this release of the potential source in us that is needed to reveal the new consciousness in us as it had effected in Zacchaeus' life. The lack of this 'raised' consciousness is not realizing the potential in us, like the third servant who 'buried' the one talent not realizing its worth and value in the parable of talents. Our inner voice, conscience points to us to have such awareness and act, but conscience is not mind. Mind is always in a dilemma, which growing according to values of the world standard, tries to quench the human spirit (will) for disobeying the (conscience) inner voice. It was the obedience to the inner voice of God by the Virgin Mary, not to the mind of the world standard that brought about the Incarnation. It was this 'coming down' of God from heaven, symbolized in Zacchaeus' 'coming down' to realize and reveal the raised consciousness in himself, that underlines the gospel view of spirituality to have global responsibility. The coming down and the consequent actions of repentance and recompense by Zacchaeus made Jesus volunteer himself to Zacchaeus' house 'to stay', a kind of Incarnation and Immanuel mystery. Likewise the goodnews of the word of God must get continually 'incarnated' in each one of the transformed persons, who thus make the word of God the 'living Goodnews'.

If in the Gospels the milieu for the transformation of the old and hence the incarnation of the new persons through a new way of thinking, feeling and willing is not recognized and lived up to after the pattern of Jesus, any amount of interpretative methods and exegeses would simply be inadequate. The various ways in which such a spirituality can be realized are to be dealt with in the subsequent pages under different subdivisions focusing the freedom of human self as the responsible feature to realize spirituality globally.
4.2. Free Self for Global Responsibility

Spirit or spirituality brings in the notion of eternity. Eternity cannot be elsewhere, not outside the moment but in every moment. Zacchaeus' acts of kindness and charity in the social level and his attitude to repentance in his psychological level having effect in the society in the given moment did manifest the presence of eternity itself, as Jesus promised 'salvation' to his house. Similar collective or global consciousness must be shown by one's FREE choice to be made by the responsible SELF, that is why one finds in the story of the Richman and Lazarus, the Richman's plea to Abraham to send at least Lazarus back to the world to warn the Richman's five brothers (what a brotherly love shown even by the one who is in hell!) was being turned down, because miracle-oriented conversion cannot be called a responsible or willing act of the free self, but a slavish one or at least a commercial one. Besides the main emphasis in the story is that spirituality is directly proportional to one's social attitude and action while living in this world. Eternity is in the moment present.

As in a good 'problem or morality play', the human vexation or tribulation is brought out realistically and radically in the Gospels. The condition that Zacchaeus perhaps had experienced before encountering Jesus and the situation that the Richman was placed in after his death, depict the above realism. Similarly in the parables and allegories in the Gospels, the hearers and the readers, like the Chorus in ancient Greek tragedies or in a modern play like T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, perceive the reality of their participation that is made implicit for the emergence of the new persons in them.
The emergence of the new person should however have a 'substantial' development as it had in the raised Lazarus, who just before and after being raised from death by Grace, needed his tomb stone and the wrapped clothes get removed by others. The tomb stone did not move by an 'open sesame' nor did the new life break off the grave wrappings by itself and instantaneously similarly the spirituality or the raised consciousness of the new person, symbolized in the 'Raised Lazarus', needs a social setting of the people for its fulfilment. The social setting alone would help the new person attain and present a whole and healthy being. Hence it is imperative that the new person's growth should include developing a better view of everything in relational (sharing) experience and witnessing (breaking) experience both as the agent who suffers (sharing by breaking) and the patient who acts (breaking for sharing) as visualized by T.S.Eliot in Murder in the Cathedral. Such a concept of one in another, "... that action is suffering / suffering is action"\(^8\), is permeating the whole of the New Testament. This radical realism of the Gospel would provide us with a leap forward towards a renewed consciousness for a new way of living, loving and labouring. The new way would point out to us that "Christ's redemptive work, ... includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order, ... to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the gospel"\(^9\). Knowing the Gospel therefore is loving and living its message in social dimensions.

The society becomes the medium of the spiritual message of the Gospels, as they preach throughout what could be termed a 'social

\(^8\) T.S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) Lines 209-212
\(^9\) "Apostolate of Laity", Documents of Vat. II (New Delhi: St Paul Publications, 1966) para 5
When Jesus considered his words and wisdom to be greater than those of Jonah's teachings and Solomon's wisdom (Lk 11:29-32), he probably stressed the significance of spirituality having a social sanction and a global realization. It is revealed in the discourse that immediately followed on the 'lamp' image and the organic function of the 'eye' to be the lamp of the human body. He says, 'No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light... wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light' (vs.33-36). These images, the lamp and the eye as the lamp of the body, illustrate how one's spirituality should help illumine the social condition, and such a milieu - the images of the lamp and the eye help us understand the term 'milieu' better as the centrality of the lamp and the eye moves the whole atmosphere around, and the lamp and the eye behave as a kind of 'moving centre' - cannot illustrate anything else better than the responsibility of spirituality in social structure.

The social spirituality visualized thus should not however be construed as a kind of 'religious atheism' which is a religion without God whose place should be taken by a community of people or individuals. In such cases, the social actions are idealized and the individuality of the doer is established, which in turn paves way for an ego-centric spirituality. On the idealization of one's individuality, D.H.Lawrence observes thus: "hate is not the opposite of love, the real opposite of love is individuality".10 Such a love for individuality or a materialistic tendency in man and woman is ironically emphasized in

10 Qtd in Carey p 70
Jesus questioning "what man of you ... does not... go after the sheep that is lost, and "what woman ... does not light a lamp and sweep the house ... until she finds" the lost silver, because they are the loss to the materialistic world of the individuals, the man and the woman respectively. Moreover it was such an individuality, more than the hatred for his younger brother, that prompted the elder brother not to heed the entreating father, instead he distances himself from both of them by telling their father "when this son of yours came ... you killed for him the fatted calf", thereby not acknowledging the returned brother as his own, because he might pose a liability to his materials, his individual property. If the elder brother had been respectable and spiritual, it must be attributed solely to his materialistic tendency. If the Father, the Younger Son and the Elder Son in the parable could be compared to the good, the bad and the ugly in society, the spirituality, the elder Son was practising in his Father's House could be given the epithet of 'ugly' only. Instead it must have been the love for the Father (God) that should have dominated the elder son's spirituality. Hence the new person's true love for God should guide his or her spirituality to manifest freely and actively in all social conditions.

4.2.1. The Human Consciousness for a Corporate Involvement

The New Person had dawned in Christ Jesus. His message provides with the milieu of the highest point that could be attained by the consciousness of the humankind, through "the physical primacy of Christ and the moral primacy of Charity". The Consciousness of such a new and heightened vision of life is the point of illustration in most of the

parables. In the parable of the Sower, the sower lives out this vision, (dream of the future) confident of the decaying seed, which symbolizes the denying of one's self for the purpose of finding it in the Corporate involvement (a new view of life).

The spirit of incarnation is the mystical symbol of the truth of corporate consciousness and involvement. The humanness in Jesus was not like a cloth, a covering, as it were for the Incarnate God, but it was his full existence and full capacity. The existence can be equated to the modern term personality. His revelation of the compassionate and benevolent God to us in his essential humanness must effect our perception. Our human mentality and behaviour constitute our personality, that is revealed only in our corporate involvement. What is left in our essential personality if our consciousness get divorced from all human associations? The evolutionary principles need us march towards greater consciousness that would initiate us to the concept of God, as the Omega point. The very purpose of biological evolution is concentrated upon and confined to the sphere of consciousness and fulfilment of the human spirit. Such a self-knowledge, conscious of our place and responsibility in the universal order gains us superiority to all other beings. Our true selves continue to take shape on our acquiring consciousness of our corporate relationship with the whole of the universe-the recent ecological or environmental consciousness is one such. The priest-scientist Teilhard de Chardin calls it natural impulse for "a specific evolution of the moral value of our action" for transforming us into persons of corporate consciousness.

12 Chardin, Future p 17
That such a corporate consciousness had a gradual growth in Jesus can be inferred from the brief note that Luke records: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and Man" (Lk 2:52). The 'increased' denotes Jesus' consciousness having grown vertically towards God and horizontally towards the humankind, the symbol of the Cross present already theoretically. Though his initial interaction with his parents in the temple is greatly distressing (may be it is the growing boy, Jesus' excessive inquisitiveness), it confirms his return to Nazareth home and his growing in wisdom, in age and grade before God and humankind. Had he not returned home but continued instead to remain in the temple, it could be presumed that we could probably think of Jesus growing up to be another Rabbi-like of the Jewish synagogue. His new spirituality with social perspective needed development by interacting with the corporate body of ordinary people for the future corporate involvement in his public life. The scholarly interpretation of the word-seed must have its germination in the basic experience of life and fellowship. Only the Nazareth home, not the Jerusalem temple or the synagogues, could provide with the best environs to learn about and develop in him a corporate personality, for comprehending such people whom he will have to serve and save.

The Bible tells little about the paradisiacal state, but about present state of things, as individual's sins affect others because of our 'corporate involvement'. Sins affect others because of the irresponsible functioning of the human self in misusing the freedom in society. Positively did not the corporate involvement of Zacchaeus have an effect on others around him, socially and spiritually too when Jesus effected salvation to his house? Did not such an involvement bring about a lasting solution to
the problem of his inner conflicts both spiritually and socially? If we do not 'come down' like Zacchaeus to have corporate involvement in society, but instead make the inner conflicts within us get perpetuated and indeed get aggravated in our social relationship, it would only result in the obliteration of our spiritual dimension, and prompt us to defend, to boast and to protect the sins in us. The Gospel in its entirety provides with a milieu to discover the present state of things for fostering a transformation in us towards collective consciousness and corporate involvement.

The modern progress in science and technology, especially in the information technology, plays a constructive role in facilitating modern persons to acquire a truly collective consciousness, and awaken the persons to the sense of the universal. Evolution too improves a moral order on the human whose reflection would lead him or her to a higher form of life in the material plane. The higher form of life is the new dimension of the raised collective consciousness facilitated by the freedom of self. According to Teilhard, the organic mankind as an organized whole can have a future only due to human consciousness awakening to the perception of new dimension and new values, and "... a hunger for material [social] well being [Peace] is in reality a hunger for higher [spiritual] being ... to achieve fulfilment of its powers and possibilities".13

The power and possibilities thus achieved, it is presumed, might tempt one to consider the human the sole master of the human destiny and that of the world, and to deprive the person from looking for 'Another' outside the human self. This idea could only reflect the modern

13 Chardin, Future p 194
version of the heroic temptation of all time, that of the Titans, of Babel, of Faust and Faustus and that of Christ Jesus on the mountain tempted by the Devil. Incarnation when looked at from this perspective, is a penetration of the divine (higher form of life) into our nature that must strive in his direction to realize a corporate involvement in the global level and thus manifest Christ in the cosmic level. The cosmic writers John and Paul dwell on this theme of ascending christology, and "since Christ was born ... everything has continued in motion because he has not yet attained the fullness of his form". For realizing the Cosmic Christ, concretely termed in the Bible as his 'Second Coming', a true and total corporate consciousness to involvement by the persons made by the gospel message is perceived obligatory. Thus the Gospel of Jesus' consciousness of God's (Christ's) righteousness has a new and a very practical dimension of responsible obligation to the fellow beings, or else we should "rather than weeping for the victims of torture ... weep for ourselves as guilty by-standers", as Jesus asked the by-standers on his way to calvary (Lk 23:27-28).

4.2.2. Preferential Option for the Underdogs

The whole Gospel is an encounter between the Word of God and the human situation where a great concern for the underdogs is predominantly revealed. It is because of this, we find in the parables and preaching of Jesus, more than the narrative aspect, a closeness to ordinary people's life. The central revelation that permeates the various literary genres in the Gospels, is same, one of God's ready concern and genuine care for the weak, the poor, the sick, the oppressed and so on.

14 Chardin, Future p 320
Reflection of life in most of the gospel passages from the point of view of ordinary people, the despised and the oppressed, is bound to make the gospel message much more accessible and applicable to our everyday situation both individually and socially. The various events in the Gospels and the gentle attitude of Jesus towards sinners, publicans and samaritans who were very despised at his time, urge us to evolve a radical and a relevant outlook on such and similarly positioned people of today. Jesus authentically lived out what he preached authoritatively by receiving sinners and the oppressed, putting himself in God’s place whose love, like rain, is showered equally both on the just and the unjust.

An attitude, very akin to enemity is shown towards the underdogs in our society though we do not intend to do any wrong to them. Instead they must be considered our potential neighbours, despite every external difference. The Richman did not intend to do any wrong, but the fateful presence of the poor Lazarus by his side made a world of difference, leading to eternal difference as the story says. Another point that is rightly hinted at in this story is worthy of some note. The Richman despite his eternal damnation, shows great concern for his brothers probably sinners in the world. The attitude of the Richman appears quite unexpected to modern people’s mind, as modern people want company while suffering, even temporarily. This point must teach the modern mind of its concern for the underprivileged, the despised and the have-nots.

The whole assembly of characters associated with Jesus’ public ministry belongs to the ordinary fold and the weak ones according to
world standard. It is the very strength of the gospel message. In the very beginning of his public ministry Jesus makes it clear to people that the divine bias is in favour of the social underdogs which is well pronounced in his manifesto prophesied by Isaiah. The much recited Christian 'Lord’s prayer' depicts a clear social context for identifying ourselves with the poor, the sinners, the weak and the lost: in our praying for daily bread (poor), for forgiveness and forgiving (sinners), for helping us in the temptation (weak) and for delivering us from evil (lost) and thus we are urged to identify ourselves with the above mentioned underdogs in society.

The Good Samaritan is the embodiment of a person's concern for the underdog, a victim on the road, the absence of which is noticed in the characters of a priest and a levite who had passed that way earlier. These two could not give the preferential treatment of the divine option for the victim on the road, perhaps owing to their ritualistic divine office. Jesus' final advice "Go and do likewise", crowning the parable of the Good Samaritan, points to our role of the Good Samaritans in our living conditions. Such well-being in every sphere of human existence is what is truly meant by the term 'Peace'. Did not the Nobel Prize for Peace, awarded to Mother Teresa underline her continual concern for and attention to the chronic pains in society: the condition of the poor, the destitutes, the dejected, and all the underdogs of our society? It was also greatly stressed in the World Summit for Social Development\textsuperscript{16} held in Copenhagen, in March 1995, in which almost all the speakers observed the nature of this peace being directly inter-linked with poverty. The peace leading us to human unity and social security depends upon

\textsuperscript{16} Telecast by Doordarshan (India), 8 p.m., 11th Mar. 1995.
the equity by essentially eradicating poverty. It is this centrality of the underdogs in society that is prominently focused in the message and ministry of Jesus, and that is what is felt fundamentally essential for a genuine hope for the human progress today.

Furthermore, Faith in God can be considered genuine only when it seeks understanding of the living condition of the underdogs in our society and the readiness to move out of compassion towards the alleviation of their difficulties. In the cure of the paralytic, one of the few mentioned in all the three synoptic Gospels, (Matt. 9:1-8; Mk.2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26) the faith of the four men carrying the pallet that was carrying the paralytic was sufficient to show their understanding of and compassionate move for the suffering one. In this group promoting faith, the community was acting in solidarity that created all the difference from the pallet carrying the paralytic to the paralytic carrying his pallet now. So when persons show deep faith in God and in fellow men, grace flows naturally to forgive sins, as we find Jesus administering it in the cure of the paralytic. Getting forgiveness makes it obligatory to giving it, that is stressed in the Lord's prayer and in the parable of the "wicked servant" or "debtor servant" (Matt. 18:23-35), whose forgiven condition could not last long owing to his own un-forgiving attitude. In this respect even one's enemies get the right to be loved, not to be treated as underdogs.

4.2.3. Respect and concern for Women and Children

In the whole of human history, there could be no parallel to show that women and children, who are still considered by many to be almost non-entities in society, have been given so much consideration and respect
as that given by Jesus. To declare equality to woman, Jesus shook one of the main causes of inequality by emphasizing the indissolubility of marriage, and elevating it to an irretrievable covenant from a mere retrievable contract. To exalt children, he declared the inevitability of becoming like children for people to enter the kingdom of God. There are many instances in the Gospels to indicate the manifestation of true love and respect for women and children. Such an attitude in us must begin in the domestic situation, respecting one’s mother, sisters, wife, female children and so on. Jesus in all probability could have learned the attitude in his family situation. For instance even from his foster father Joseph who initially wanted to divorce Mary, his espoused wife probably not willing to believe the Angel story of her immaculate conception, Jesus could have learned to develop real tolerance to accept each one as he or she is, including Judas among the specially chosen twelve; and of course not chiding the woman in the sychar well inspite of her irregular marital situation; and even making Peter his successor though he would deny his master thrice.

In Jesus’ view both man and woman are equal partners in search of and in realization of fuller humanity. In the creation story taking the rib of Adam, the ‘middle part’ of his body, to create Eve, is symbolic of the reality that woman must be equal to man, neither superior nor inferior to him. Again in answering the Saducee’s question about the nature of woman (wife) in Resurrection, he asserts that woman has full entity like any man. He told them that none of the seven brothers who married her in the world could have any claim over her (Lk 20:27-37), thereby underlined the fact that for establishing the kingdom of God on earth, it would become obligatory for humanity to treat man and
woman equal. Even in the domestic level this kind of emphasis could be inferred from the way Jesus reacted in the house of Martha (Lk 10:38-42) at Bethany. His stand was radical. When Jesus went to the house of Mary and Martha at Bethany, Jesus’ reaction to Martha’s complaint about his sister Mary’s indifference towards the details of hospitality revealed that it was not the only responsibility of the women-folk to be engrossed in service of their earthly male masters with all the favourite dishes; they too, like Mary have the right to choose the "good portion" of the game, "which" Jesus says "shall not be taken away from her" (v.42), who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teachings. Thus perhaps Jesus was the first one in history to emphasize equal right to education for women.

Though the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, Jesus carried on a deep theological discourse with a Samaritan woman about worshipping God "in spirit and truth" far more interestingly than he did with Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews. Having received the "living water" from Jesus, "the woman left her water jar". The man and woman, a Jewish rabbi and a Samaritan sinner provide with a good case-study of sheer contrast and positively Jesus’ great concern for woman’s equality. In his dialogue with her, he made her realize that one cannot devalue sex which will devalue woman. A detail analysis of this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is reserved rather for a more appropriate concluding chapter.

Another incident that Luke records in his Gospel reveals how Jesus chose a woman sinner to teach a self-righteous Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50) by name Simon who had invited Jesus to eat with him. Answering to his
host's thought, Jesus made a contrast between the attitude and behaviour of Simon, a self-righteous man and that of an unrighteous woman sinner. Her tearful washing of Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair and kissing them elevated her love 'ten times' more than the hospitality of Simon (who perhaps did not bother to follow the external rituals for Jesus), because Jesus asked Simon saying "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred dinarii and the other fifty. ... he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" (vs. 41, 42). The pharisee represented by Simon establishes the 'proper-self' or the individuality of the patriarchal society and the sinner, a common noun, generalizes the common woman folk who were normally despised, but her love is considered 'ten times' more than that of the self-establishing, righteous menfolk. Incidentally it has also been treated by the other gospel writers, (Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Jn 12:3-7) who record Jesus saying "In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare for my burial ... what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Matt. 21:12-13). The remembrance of this last act to Jesus' body perhaps has got its impact and influence in the Risen Christ appearing for the women first of all when witness by woman was not at all considered valid. Thus the invalid witness by woman was indeed elevated to become the most valid witness for the unique and quite unprecedented Event that was unheard of in the human history till then. As a woman's 'fiat' facilitated Incarnation, it is but fitting that woman, again Mary by name was the first to see the Risen Christ even before he had gone to his Father-God.

It is true that the children are always associated with women as both become the victims of oppression and exploitation even in the modern times. Accordingly Jesus' exaltation of children too has no parallel
in history. The elevation of children can be perceived from what Jesus declared regarding the inevitability of becoming like children as the precondition for the people to enter into God's reign.

4.2.4. Attitude towards Wealth

Wealth is often misconceived as a 'divine distinction' conferred on oneself, but instead it must be considered a 'divine demand' of love, as the 'boy' in the crowd in the multiplication miracle responded to such a divine demand of sharing with his 'wealth' of five loaves and two fishes. What a fatherly lesson it is by the small boy to the grown up persons! In the event, the social sense of sharing is also hinted at in Jesus asking the people to sit in groups of fifty on the green grassy landscape. The sharing is lacking by its conspicuous absence among the rich: the Richman and Lazarus; the Rich ruler going melancholic at Jesus' 'counsel' (Lk 18:18-24).

Wealth makes the human beings heartless - "where your treasure lies, there your heart will be" - and therefore an imprisoned self with no space for God and neighbour. The person who grows rich for him or herself becomes insensitive to the promptings of the spirit; for his heart is not with him. But on the other hand, salvation is declared to be 'at hand' that is within one's experience and decision when one, like Zacchaeus, spontaneously comes out with what one should do with the riches. The satisfaction of Zacchaeus was much akin to that of the Christian in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, who felt the burden falling off his shoulders, as there had been the moral association of possession of wealth with sins. Riches, like law must not confine us to themselves, but instead like the spirit of the law, the spirit of the riches...
must be given prominence as it was given by Zacchaeus. After all was not the after-death separation of the Richman from the poor Lazarus only the continuation of what the Rich in all his heart and spirit wanted earlier when he was in the World? Moreover a similar separation for the sake of 'unrighteous mammon between brothers' was not thought to be correct by Jesus, hence when a man approached Jesus to help divide up the property between brothers, he rightly refused to be the arbiter between them (Lk 12:13-15). The brothers living in unity is idealized here, a corporate consciousness is the emphasis here. Jesus is no divider.

Wealth is also a synonym of utility value and the antonym of spiritual value. One must demonstrate spirituality that influences an individual to have a true humanitarian self; not just a person's utility value but the dignity of being the very human person. The utility value of a person could be there not more than one third of the individual's life span. Do we not all love children inspite of their not having any utility value? It is from this stand point, that Jesus' emphatic statement like "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Lk 18:15-17), because it is a kingdom where love alone rules, and it is just because children exist, that the grown-ups endure the presence of each other, and in this way the children are grown-up persons to teach the humankind about their love for one another. Does not the famous poetic and paradoxical line of Wordsworth "the child is the father of man" bring out this universal philosophy? The contrary is also made explicit when Jesus said how difficult it would be for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, as wealth points to only the utility value that is worldly, not heavenly.
4.3. Spirituality in Secular context

"The most unchanging elements in human history are the deep experiences of man's spirit"\(^\text{17}\) and in this respect a true verdict on Jesus depends on the test of his contemporary relevance and importance to the aspirations of the human spirit. Such aspirations are experienced in the gospel characters encountering Jesus, to mention a few: Zacchaeus, the Centurion, the Phoenician woman, the Samaritan woman. They did not belong to the legalistic Judaism but had the deep experience of their spirit that revealed the truth of their 'free' personhood, inspite of their widely different attitude in mental, moral and spiritual apprehensions.

It is no exaggeration to say that all the problems within an individual and in one's relationship with others in society arise out of poor personhood or poor self-image that has been developed by him or herself. A true awareness of the gospel message would form the source of our knowledge of a personal God who loves humanity for what it is. The knowledge of a personal God in Jesus enhances one's personhood in the life here and now resulting in true transformation of every one into a child of God, a New Person. It in turn enhances a true relationship with others. The concern of the gospel writers was not so much with theological or christian doctrinal phenomena as with the enduring elements that actively direct or directly activate the lives of all the people at any time.

Any search made in the Gospels is bound to be a research on the personhood of Jesus who focuses on the true dignity and worthiness of the human self. This focus helps the individual for the personality

\(^{17}\) Badham p 17
development and human fulfilment. It is a pity that the Gospel is being preached mainly pointing to sinners more than to their Saviour. Whereas a genuine proclamation of it must lead such sinners and unbelievers to know the person Jesus Christ and the worth of the human self, that the modern situations in family, in friendship, in society, in politics and even in religion have been desperately attempting to teach people.

If the twentieth century person, especially in the multi-cultured and the religiously pluralistic society of India, believes in the Gospel, it is because he or she professes the present reality of the spirit of Christ which is very akin to that of the first century Christians in Palestine, hence the interpretation of the Gospel gains great importance. The present christology is to look for Christ within human experience and to have awareness of the true meaning of the spirit of Christ at work in human condition and situation which are greatly varying socially, economically, politically, educationally and religiously in our Indian context.

Applying Jesus' principles and priorities to the dilemmas of the modern world, an individual enjoys freedom from egocentric self and the resulting spirituality gets rooted in the social ground, thus the Gospel is interpreted to meet the current needs (it is known as 'aggiornamento'). To 'live simply so that others may simply live' becomes the efficacy of true spirituality that never evades service to society. The gospel spirituality is not just a salvation from sins, but much more basically as the human 'wholeness' is insisted upon that is manifested in Jesus' miraculous cures and symbolized in his parables and allegories. The vision of his mission is really different in incorporating within it the mass collective consciousness for socially-centred global spirituality. The global vision is
centred on Cosmic Christ who visualizes one God, one humanity and one world vision, and as Paul says, "... in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven".¹⁸ This unification is not to be construed as uniformity, especially in an Indian context, as there is a factor called, 'inculturation'¹⁹ that fosters the communion of local cultures and other religions as active collaborators of the human values. It is thus really a sociological or anthropological process, because people are not monads but must grow up in relationship to the society they belong. Such a community experiences the reign of God envisioned by Jesus. Do we miss in the 'small actions' of the Good Shepherd and of the Good Samaritan the great principle of the 'eternal action' of the God-Saviour? It is the infinite in the finite.

The spirituality in the secular context impels one to keep a delicate balance to turn the impersonal things in society into a personal experience of sharing by 'reading the signs of the time'. Struggles for human rights, rise of various kinds of terrorism, conflict between castes and ethnic groups, abuse of children, oppression in all spheres of activity, polarization in education, law and social welfare and so on and so forth are some of the signs of the time which would impel us for our personal experience of sharing and realizing the new horizon that is emerging in Jesus' message. It is echoed in the observation of Rousseau who says, "Christianity ... of the gospel which is entirely different, is the religion of man, not of the citizen. This would form the most perfect society

¹⁸ Col. 1:19, 20; also Eph. 2:16.
imaginable ... the country of the Christian is not of this world", that has human-made barriers, huge and small, built in the name of religion, politics and so on, which try to divide the world into fragments. When highly technological know-how has made the whole world into a sort of 'global village', is it difficult for true spirituality to be realized global? No, but then it needs breaking barriers, co-ordination between people of different faiths, and not mixing up religion and politics, the two most sensitive fields of the human society, especially in India. How does the teaching of the Gospels help us continually and creatively achieve the aforesaid objectives are the things treated, though briefly, in the following sections.

4.3.1. Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges

Social relationship is the mark of Christ's discipleship or the believers of his Gospel, and it is initiated by one's freedom of self that treats all as persons of equal dignity, because as individuals (closed or exclusive selves) we find barriers fostering inequality in modern society. The individuals are found to be commodities as both the employer and the employee, for instance in our social set up, use each other for gain in the highly materialistic world. The resulting non-recognition leads to personal disorientation. It is one of the many existing barriers.

The secret appeal of Jesus' teaching is "its firm earthing in ordinary every day life and in the unchanging feature of human character". All

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parables and proclamations of Jesus challenge every person to make personal choice of the way of life by breaking barriers in the relationship towards the rest. The parable of the Seed is the foundation to Jesus' teaching of the mental disposition of the barrier-brakers. The good and broken soil represents not merely the spirit of openness of the 'individual', but also, consequent to it, the spirit of social relationship (a different niche) in becoming the 'person' for others, significant in the seed growing out of the well-broken soil into the different medium of the air to become a fruitful plant. Such breaking of barriers must be manifested by the right use of the freedom of the human self in the lives of the New Persons who could essentially 'build bridges' for realizing the kingdom of God that belongs to two different media: the earth and the heaven, the body and soul, the matter and spirit, as the seed buried (denial of self) does in the ground and the air.

As the seed fallen on good soil 'breaks out' of the darkness of the earth, and grows firmly on the ground in order to reach the medium of air for its newness and wholeness, the living word of the Gospel must break the barrier of darkness of one's ego-bound self (proud and exclusive) and dwell firmly in the social medium of neighbourly love in order to reach the spiritual medium of one's love of God. The whole life of the Word become flesh is a marvellous metaphor of such a living with the double dynamic of breaking all the barriers of his time and building bridges within the humankind, and between the humankind and the Godhead. The nature metaphor of rain, that has an intrinsic value for the growth of the seed, and that is showered equally both on the just and the unjust, makes us enter into the character of the Creator - God Himself. When the persons made by the Gospel behave
like the seed (Word) and the rain (God) in their social relationships, they help realize spirituality in every secular structure and situation. The truth of this Word-God is thus enfleshed by the ‘Peace-makers’ who really break barriers on the way to interpersonal, interracial and international relationship, and who are elevated to the blessed position of the ‘children of God’ (Matt.5:9) by Jesus, the Word-God enfleshed. Thus in the continual breaking of barriers, the Word of the Gospel gets continually incarnated, the Christ truly manifested and it is indeed a real Christmas.

4.3.2. Free Self extended to Inter-faith Dialogue

The right use of freedom by the human selves helps achieve the factor called ‘inculturation’ that incorporates everything in the day to day life of the pluralistic society. To achieve this the human freedom must be extended to the people around who belong to different religions or faiths, especially in a context like India. If there has been a religion that first came very close to the day to day life of the people, it is only, without second opinion, the Christianity of the Gospels. Therefore, it would appear very appropriate for Christianity to co-ordinate and collaborate with the other religions in India, especially after seeing many positive developments in them in recent years, when they have proved that they too could translate the gospel spirituality in the existing social conditions. In such a situation if Christianity has to steadily manifest the process of continual evolution and be ahead of all others in the endeavour to realize spirituality in all social structures, there is the imperative on the part of the Church, representing Christianity and Christ, to act as an organic instrument in the process of an effective
inculturation and socialization. The pluralistic society in India becomes an apt medium for the realization of the social doctrine of the Gospel.

In the past two hundred years, the world has changed more than in all the preceding millenia and so the practopian in us is able to feel the true dimension of the phenomenon of man, but a true advance of humankind is possible only by a "great hope held in common that brings about a common soul" to the vast mass of humankind, a unanimity in the common vision and common actions. Such a socially structural evolution will eventually and ultimately culminate in the Impersonal Reality, the Omega point in Almighty.

The twin commands of the love of God and of the neighbours do not mean just worship and compassionate charity, but life itself in the spirit of togetherness through a common vision that is stressed in "like yourself". In spite of various contradictions within one self, does not the person bother to achieve a proper unification within him or her self? When such a vision of the world and perception of the human values are effected, the earth is not a meaningless one but a matrix in which the unity is forged by people belonging to different faiths, not merely different religions.

4.3.3. Spirituality and Politics, the Parallels

The social fabric of the modern humanity is woven with the two realms of human existence, namely politics and religion. The model of Jesus provides with a tremendous power house for both religious and political reforms at anytime. When religious controversies have been

22 Chardin Future p 75
existing in human history, political controversies too have become part of human experience. The objective of these two sensitive areas of human life has been one and the same: a ready and real concern and genuine care for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the despised and the like.

One who has got involved in religion or politics ceases to be a ‘loner’ in society, instead must turn out to be a ‘corporate personality’. Religious and political involvement must stem from the loving concern for the people, especially the needy, in whose midst the politically and religiously involved person’s public life must be meaningfully and purposefully cast. The Gospel’s way of life puts the persons loved in the situation of being served, and to ‘minister’ means to serve not to be served. Accordingly both religion and politics must move towards the empowerment of the people, and it is a saving grace that, of late religions and seasoned politics take steps towards this goal. But there is still a lack of total conviction and determination of purpose in them. That is why we find Jesus becoming uneasy after the multiplication miracle, when he saw what was happening to the crowd who "were about to come and take him by force to make him king" (Jn 6:15) the one ‘to be served’. As Jesus reacted with the real conviction and determination to such a notion of the crowd, the people at the helm of affairs in both religion and politics must realize their true servanthood in the society.

It is true that as long as humanity exists, the opposites continue to exist at all levels. This polarity should not turn out to be a polarization in which the opposites pull away from each other and conflict; whereas in polarity, the opposites are related to each other by mutual attraction
and they are drawn to unite each other. This polarity must underlie the human experience of religion and politics in the modern world, especially in a country like India where religious pluralism and multiparty politics are very much present. A healthy relationship between these two realms would be possible only when the rendezvous of both becomes the people at the low stratum of society: the poor, the marginalized, the deprived and so on. The absence of this experience on the part of Jesus’ critics made them get polarized from both the Roman political scenario and the true religion of Jesus. These critics’ reaction to Jesus’ mission shall be dealt with at length in the following chapter, to indicate that their exclusive and self-righteous religiosity could not approve of nor appreciate the all encompassing new movement of Jesus.

4.4. New Person’s role in the Gospel Movement

The Gospels have the pre-eminence among all the books of the Bible as the Gospel’s chief proclamation of the ‘kingdom of God’ points to the whole humanity’s final and common goal in history. As the people of a kingdom fulfil the plan and will of their king, those who try to fulfil the plan and will of God, become truly the people of God’s kingdom and make the secular human history into a sacred one. Therefore the kingdom of One God becomes essentially the kingdom of every person, with spiritual dimension of God and the social dimension of the kingdom getting mutually enhanced and enriched; and the (Will) Word of God living continually in the human fulfilment, becomes the human document of God’s reign. It is underlined in the Nicene creed in which the Church asserted the doctrine of Incarnation to be a continual process towards absolute goal of human history. As the freedom of the
responsible human selves facilitates the on-going incarnation, their spirituality realizes the goal of incarnation in social history.

The general orientation of Jesus' teaching was aimed at interpreting the various parables to illustrate what Mark calls 'the mystery of the kingdom of God'. The first recorded parable, the parable of the Seed, that Jesus said while "preaching and bringing the goodnews of the kingdom of God" (Lk 8:1) explicates this truth. The Hebrew word 'malkuth' for kingdom refers more to the active rule of God over his persons than the territory. It has also been stressed in Jesus' words, "the kingdom of God is within you", that is in an honest and good heart. Otherwise the word kingdom as a matter of fact, has no practical application to the modern world but to signify the primary idea of a well-ordered society that Jesus brings to focus in all his teachings. Thus the chief proclamation of Jesus' new movement or the essentially religious idea of "God reigning in the lives of men and in human society lies at the bottom of all,"23 realizing the God's reign as a matter of present experience rather than future expectation only.

Though the absolute truth of the nature and mystery of God's kingdom is a bit abstruse, it has been made known to us through homely, natural and easily understandable imagery and parables. The nature parable of the Seed reveals the mystery of the kingdom. The seed, frail and insignificant, grows to blade, ear and grain where two worlds are at work; the tangible, realized and demonstrable one of the earth and the other being the generation power of the Sun and the Soil on which the farmer places his faith that yields to glorious fruition.

23 Dodd p 30
Thus the frail seed being creative in the two worlds bears the characteristic
goodness in a spirit of openness, like a child, without any inhibition
whatsoever. It is this child like 'simplicity' required of us, like that of
Mary's fiat, that will help us know the truth that will make us free to
act according to God's will and plan, which help establish His kingdom,
and make the child like persons eligible members of the kingdom. The
child image is a symbolic of the person born anew.

"Dodd made an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of the
gospel behind the gospels ... that the kingdom preached by Jesus in
the parables was a present rather than future reality".24 Accordingly all
gospel passages are enquired into the 'setting in life', demanding a
decisive act on the part of the people like the Tower-Builder and the
King going to war were made to take (Lk 14:28-33). Jesus' followers are
given therefore a new and decisive direction to their lives that portends
an epiphany of Jesus in their lives. Even father and mother should not
be on the way to one's realization of God's kingdom that cements one
to the spirit of Christ. It is witnessed in Peter and Andrew renouncing
their possession, symbolized in their leaving the fishing nets; and in
John and James, their family ties, symbolized in leaving their father.
Had Jesus too got some possession in order to renounce, it would appear
better, but it was the best of him to have fully identified himself with
the poorest of the poor having no possession at all. It is echoed in

24 Raymond E. Brown, et al., eds. The Jerome Biblical Commentary vol. II
(India, Bangalore: Theological Publication of India, 1972) p 17.
Gandhi's view on 'voluntary poverty'. He says, "I can only possess certain things when I know that others who also want to possess similar things, are able to do so. But we know ... that such a thing is an impossibility. Therefore the only thing that can be possessed by all is non-possession." As non-possession is idealistic, passion for possession is materialistic. It is from this perspective, the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3) must be comprehended. Freedom of self takes away the passion for possession in the new person, who does not place his heart (self) on the perishable materialism.

In Jesus teaching us to pray, he asks us to remember God, our Father and His will for us to be our 'goal' in life on earth. Our genuine trust in God for eternal things should make us trust Him in this worldly life too: our bodily as well as spiritual needs, that is food and forgiveness of sins and victory over evil, which follow the first plea to God "Thy kingdom come". These goals point to the new person's role in fulfilling the demands of sacrifice and love for the establishment of the kingdom of God, as there are such great demands in finishing an establishment of a building for instance. Jesus' mission in essence is to establish the reign of God in this world, so the community aspect of his message gets prominence. The 'tone' of his message and the spirit of his ministry give the experience of such an atmosphere. The reader is taken to the depth of the meaningful atmosphere which is more experiencable than expressible. The literary aspect of the metaphorical process could go beyond the metaphor proper. Jesus getting the experience of God in him is the metaphor of God, focussing the kingdom of God as the kingdom

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of the Son of Man, as Stanley relates Jesus to be the "one sent by the 
Father with the message, the Truth about God no one has ever seen, 
which he can only disclose fully by successfully revealing who himself 
is, the Son come as member of the human family"\textsuperscript{26} the real Son of 
Man. Accordingly an intrinsic and condescending movement with fellow 
beings must be manifested by the incarnational role of the new persons.

The truth of incarnation must be realized not merely in faith, but 
in the macro human perfection of evolution, that lies in the dignity of 
the reflecting human person's 'reason for living', as the end of the 
thinking species, according to Teilhard "cannot be disintegration and 
death, but a new break-through, and rebirth, this time outside Time and 
Space, through the very excess\textsuperscript{f} unification and co-reflection"\textsuperscript{27} Such an 
evolution of the human perfection and unification consummates the role 
of the new persons in inheriting the kingdom of God as the kingdom 
of 'our Father'.

4.5. Conclusion

The human being is the rendezvous of the two spheres of life: 
physical and spiritual. When there is lack of attention to either of these, 
human problems loom large. Jesus is the clue to these problems, as 
christian insight into modern social life is effected in our understanding 
the reasonableness and integrity of his message. Though the Gospel does 
not appear to be a social message, its full and practical implication is 
social. Jesus teaching the truth of God's kingdom necessitates 
transformation of persons for making in-roads into human society,

\textsuperscript{26} David M. Stanley, "I Encountered God!": The Spiritual Exercise with the 
\textsuperscript{27} Chardin, Future p 316.
metamorphosing its values in the process. Thus the human consciousness of self is very much related to the social milieu, as abstract personhood cannot be visualized.

The modern advancements in science and technology miraculously enhance our sense perception to a maximum of consciousness with minimum of effort. The microchip industry for instance leaves the human self more free than before. The more one is free, the more time one has; more time means more reflections; the more one reflects more the furtherance of shaping of humankind is possible. The human both inspite of and because of shadow of death, becomes reflective and conscious of future. It is realized that the corporate consciousness of the earthly humanity alone is a meaningful event and a pre-condition for the final 'Parousia'. Such an awakening to achieve full fruition of the human urges for 'something', say a moral society or global spirituality. It is made possible only by combining the human urge for 'something' with another fundamental aspiration towards 'Someone', aspiring to be the 'New Person' in the role of the true son or daughter of God.