CHAPTER – III

CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

A. THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNALISM

Introduction

It seems that it was God’s purpose in creation that the human beings and the whole creatures should find their fulfilment by living in harmony with God and with one another. But this harmony has been disrupted and hence discord has become the hallmark everywhere in the universe. Different religions with different worldviews and value systems derived through the quest for and perceptions of Reality with numerous interpretations may be the reason for this anomaly of disharmony. According to M. Bage ‘Religion may be understood as an expression of the Human search for an ultimate truth or Religion may be seen as an expression of the human desire to have a union with ultimate Reality or Religion may be understood in cultural terms as an expression of a particular way of life’. The worldview and the value system derived out of the perception of the ultimate Reality differ according to the cultural terms when it is expressed. Hence religious plurality is an issue from our existential life situation. According to Raimundo Panikkar:

Pluralism is today a human existential problem, which raises acute questions about how we are going to live our lives in the midst of so many options. Pluralism is no longer just the old school book question about the One-and-the-Many it has become the concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies. Today we face pluralism as the very practical question of planetary human existence.
As the history of religions shows, each religion arose in a religiously plural environment and shaped itself in reaction to that pluralism. Harold Coward says:

The creative tension Pluralism occasions has often been the catalyst for new insight and religious development.³

This is true with most of the ancient religions both Semitic as well as Mystic. The challenges of pluralism in one sense it is a crisis of our age and at the same time it is an opportunity for spiritual growth. Different religions have responded and are responding to the challenge of religious pluralism at least in three attitudes or principles which generally seem to be held in common especially in the Christian theological circles namely, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.⁴

This chapter is intended to discuss Christian Response to Religious Pluralism in three sections. The first part will concentrate on the absolutistic standpoint of Christianity to other religions with its exclusive and inclusive attitudes, which creates suspicion, ill feeling and hatred from other religions. This absolutistic standpoint is one of the causes of communalism in India. The present turmoil in the Indian sub-continent is mainly centered around on the issue of conversion and Christian missions. The Christian missionary policy of conversion has been vehemently criticized by the Hindu Organizations. The present Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for a national debate to discuss the religious conversion issue and he reiterated to the Christian missionaries to abandon the policy of conversion.⁵ Hence the second section is concentrated on Christianity and conversion. The third section deals with the Pluralistic standpoint of Christianity and its way to open a synoptic view of
things to foster healthy relations among religions. This attitude also provides
the platform for modality of dialogue.

1. ABSOLUTISTIC STANDPOINT

In this section two questions are mainly discussed. Firstly, how do the
Christians see other faiths in the light of religious pluralism? Secondly, How
do other faiths especially Hinduism see Christianity in the multi-cultural
context?

Of late Christians assumed that Christianity was the one and only religion
revealed by God. The tendency in the Church was to treat the people of other
religions as pagans with scorn and condescensions and to think that pagans
needed to be enlightened. They also considered that the revelation in Jesus
Christ is the sole criterion by which all religions including Christianity can be
understood and evaluated. This is called the exclusive attitude of Christian
religion. The exclusivism stresses the point that salvation comes from God
alone through Christ. Martin Luther called Christianity as the true and only
religion. The traditional Catholic nation has been ecclesio-centrally rendered
in the Cyprian maxim, ‘that outside the Church there is no salvation.’ Early
Christians also claimed that they were the chosen people of God.

This paradigm holds that other religions are marked by humankind’s
fundamental sinfulness and are therefore erroneous. Only Christ and
Christianity offers the valid path to salvation is a firm affirmation. In this
standpoint Christ factor is normative and absolute for salvation. Church too
assumes significant position. This standpoint denies the Universal Salvific
will of God. Christ is the norm to judge and evaluate other truth claims. The
world renowned theologians Karl Barth and Hendrik Kreamer are representatives of this approach.

a. According to Karl Barth, revelation as the abolition of religion. God’s Truth is revealed in Christ, the word of God for all peoples and all religions. He attempts to construct a significant difference between ‘revelation’ and ‘religion’. For him Christian faith belongs to the former and other faiths to the latter. He made a distinction between the general knowledge about God in nature with the special revelation in Christ. He held that only revelation can reveal God and save humanity. The Christian gospel belongs to ‘revelation’ and other faiths are the product of ‘religion’, which are ‘unbelief.’ He observed that, religion is a concern...the one great concern; of the godless man. He also held that, revelation singles out the Church as the locus of true religion. Hence Barth’s position was that Christian religion is the true religion, fundamentally superior to all other religions. His aim was thus to secure both the central place of Christianity in mediating the salvation of humankind and the absolute uniqueness of Jesus for all humanity.14

Thus for Barth the Revelation of God in Christ becomes normative for all. This approach does not provide any room for mutual enrichment between Christianity and other religions. This standpoint does not approve other religions and their identity. This will only widen the gulf between religions. This is also called Separational Theological Model.15

(b) Hendrik Kreamer was a life long student of world religions. He wrote The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World as a preparatory volume for the Tambaram International Missionary Conference held in 1938. Kreamer also applied Barth’s Theology of Religion to mission, thereby affirming a
Separational Theological Model, which tremendously influenced Asian theologians, for several years. According to Kreamer the gospel was essentially in discontinuity with the religions and cultural traditions of humankind. He rejected both Natural Theology and General revelation to emphasize the concept of ‘radical discontinuity’. He states:

The revelation in Christ is special revelation, which contradicts and upsets all human religious aspiration and imagination as an indirect indication of its special quality and significance.

Kreamer maintained that, salvation is found only through the grace of God revealed in Christ. He insisted that the biblical faith based on God’s encounter with humankind is thus radically distinct from all other forms of religious faith.

This approach adopts an either or model of truth. There is no room for mutual enrichment between Christianity and other religions in their perspective. This position counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all other religions are to be evaluated and judged. Thus the Barth-Kreamer negative theological approach put a stop to all attempts at discovering “points of contact” between the Christian message and the other religious traditions of Asia. The Biblical realism of Kreamer rejects any contact between gospel and religions, emphasizing the sui generis character of the Word made flesh. Their approach of exclusive claims is only in the realm of monologue. Their theological interpretations do not open way for dialogue or mutual enrichment among religions. It will only create animosity and hatred among religions.
2. INCLUSIVISTIC STANDPOINT

The inclusivist position tries to reconcile and hold together the axioms of 'the Universal Salvific will of God' and 'salvation comes through God in Christ alone.' In this approach there is an openness in acknowledging elements of truth in other religions, although fully revealed in Christ or Christianity. Concerning the approach Gavin D'costa notes that:

This approach affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.

It accepts and rejects other faiths, i.e., accepts divine presence in other religions, but rejects them as not sufficient for salvation apart from Christ. It struggles to hold together two equally binding convictions. They are firstly, the grace of God is operating for salvation in great religions of the world and secondly, the uniqueness of the grace of God in Christ makes universal claim as the final way of Salvation. All the truth in other religions belongs ultimately to Christ, who is their fulfilment.

(a) The Fulfilment Theory

J.N. Farquhar may be taken as representative of this theory. J.N. Farquhar cited from Christ's words. "I have come not to destroy but to fulfil" (Mt. 5:17). With the publication of his book 'The Crown of Hinduism' he advocated the fulfilment theory. He writes:

By stating that Christianity is the Crown of Hinduism we do not mean Christianity as it is lived in any nation, nor Christianity as it is defined and elaborated in detail in the creed, preaching, ritual, liturgy and discipline of any single Church, but Christianity, as it springs living and creative from Christ himself.
Thus for him not only Christianity fulfils the aspirations of Hinduism, it radically displaces Hinduism. Farquhar’s fulfilment theory could not survive long as a viable paradigm. It may be partly due to the increased awareness of other religions after the publication of his book.

(b) **Anonymous Christians**

Karl Rahner promulgated the theory of ‘Anonymous Christians’. Paul Knitter rightly observes that if Vatican II was a watershed in Christian attitudes (especially Catholic) towards other religions, then Karl Rahner was its Chief Engineer. Rahner attempted to keep the two axioms together. They are ‘the Universal Salvific will of God’ and salvation comes through Christ alone through faith. He was of the opinion that, Christianity should ‘think optimistically about the possibilities of salvation outside Christianity, no matter how much error and evil they seem to find in the world. To think ‘pessimistically of men’ is to underestimate God’s love and grace.

He considered non-Christian religions as lawful religions because it also contains supernatural elements arising out of grace, which is given on account of Christ. He was willing to accept non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation because of God’s grace operating in that religion.

Karl Rahner writes:

Therefore no matter what a man states is his conceptual, theoretical and religious reflection, anyone who does not say in his heart, ‘there is no God’ (like the fool in the Psalm) but testifies to line by radical acceptance of his being is a believer. But if in this way he believes indeed and in truth in the holy Mystery of God, if he does not suppose this truth but leaves it free play, then the grace of this truth by which he allows himself to be led is always already the grace of the Father in his Son. And any one who has let himself
be taken hold of this grace can be called with every right an “anonymous Christian.”

Thus Rahner made an attempt to treat other religions as lawful religions. He was able to see the mediating grace of God working in other religions. By being ‘anonymous Christians’ the people of other faiths are appropriating what Christ has done exclusively in Christian tradition. Here also the spirit of exclusivism is inherent in his thesis. Nevertheless this paradigm offers a far more open and Catholic viewpoint with regard to relationship between Christianity and other religions. The above inclusivist paradigm unlike the exclusivist who argue for discontinuity and newness, emphasis on continuity and fulfilment.

The inclusivist paradigm extends God’s Salvation to all human beings. The Universal Salvific will of God is upheld along with the finality of Christ’s redemptive work. The acceptance of elements of truth in other traditions allows space for exploring the possibility of divine encounter in other religious traditions. But this openness vanishes when it comes to Soteriological considerations. For the adherents of this approach, Christ is definitive and normative because the aspirations in other traditions are fulfilled in Christ. The element of truth and goodness in other religious traditions ultimately belong to Christ.

Even though this approach avoids the absoluteness of Christ, it sees Christ as Supreme of fulfilling other religious aspirations. Thus it seems to exhibit a subtle and indirect form of exclusivism.

John Hick found the usage of ‘anonymous Christian’ as offensive to non-Christians. He found it creating barrier in genuine dialogue. He thinks that “it
is an honorary status granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it’. He also contends that, it is easy to label devout Christians as ‘anonymous Muslims’ or Hindus as they are labeled as anonymous Christians.29

So as the Christians maintain that Christianity fulfils all other religions, the people of other faiths too can claim that their religion fulfils Christian tradition (for example, the Advaitic tradition of Hinduism by Vivekananda). Thus for developing a genuine dialogical relationship the inclusivist paradigm seems to fall short in expectation. Because this paradigm pre-judges the issue of religious truth, it seems difficult to construct a viable theology of religions from this perspective.

The above theological standpoints based on exclusive and inclusive truth claims motivated the Christian churches to send out Christian missionaries to almost all continents to involve in humanitarian service and make disciples of all nations by proclaiming the “goodness” of salvation to all peoples, converting them, they also ‘planted’ churches in almost every nation. India was one of them. The Colonial expansion of Western Europe brought Christian missionaries to India, and the missionaries thought of British colonialism as a god-given opportunity for the evangelization of India. They had laboured and ‘planted’ churches through ‘personal’ and ‘mass conversions’. But the exclusive claims of the churches and their ‘Policy of conversions’ were vehemently criticized and objected by the Hindu revivalist.
B. CHRISTIANITY AND CONVERSION

The debate on conversion has been going on for more than a century. Only the contours have changed. In the present political context of India the issue of conversion has become very important for Christians as well as Hindu organizations. The Prime Minister Shri. Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for a national debate on the issue of conversion after the Orissa episode in which the Christian missionary, Graham Stewart Staines and his two sons were brutally killed.\textsuperscript{30} The reason for this call can be seen as the reflection of an attempt to define and limit the role of Christian missionaries in India by the Hindu organizations.

Conversion is indeed a sensitive issue in a country like India in its present context not withstanding its secular nature. The religious fanatics are very intolerant when it comes to the issue of conversion. Hindu revivalists like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswathi, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi and others, wrote against the missionary policy of conversion\textsuperscript{31} and their attitude of denunciation of Indian society and culture. As Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi showed repeatedly in their writings that ‘the denunciations were based on gross exaggeration, often on, wholesale distortion on complete fabrication’.\textsuperscript{32} They also strongly condemned the excessive missionary policy of vilification of the native religions.\textsuperscript{33}

In this section an attempt has been made to analyse and answer some of the pertinent questions regarding the controversy on conversion. Why conversion is peremptory to Christian missionaries? Why do people desire conversion? What are the motives, desires and needs which are explicit or
implicit? What should be the position of Christians towards the issue of conversion as living in a secular India with a constitutional provision on religious freedom? How does the apologetic attitude of Hindu revivalist leaders on conversion and re-conversion affect the Pluralistic context of India?

1. **CONVERSION AS PEREMPTORINESS**

The controversy over Christian conversion has become a vibrant national issue in the Indian sub-continent especially the demand for an apology from the Pope John Paul II for Inquisition atrocities centuries ago for forced conversion in Goa and destruction of temples, by the Sangh Parivar while his visit in India in November 1999. Already in Gujarat where the B.J.P is solely in power, a bill has been circulated to punish conversion through "allurement" by a minimum of three years in Jail. The horrendous killing of Australian missionary with his two sons in Orissa was exclaimed by the President K.R. Narayanan as a savage act. K.R. Narayanan states:

> Indeed, the savage act can in no way be seen as a mere law and order problem. It certainly belongs to the world’s inventory of black deeds.

The Sangh Parivar blames all these on Christian missionaries and their forcible conversion. Hence the controversy on conversion between Christians and Hindus has become an irritable issue.

There seems to be no unity among Christians with regards to its fundamental aspect in Christian experience. There seems to be a wide spectrum of opinions that are representatives of the different Christian denominations. There are representatives of the churches that have come up with the suggestion that Christians should stop all attempts to convert non-Christians. Some others who passionately argue that without conversion
Christianity is a dead religion. There are also Christians taking indifferent attitude towards the issue of conversion.

An obvious area of difficulty is the missionary activity, which occurs when the superimposition of one's own criterion upon the other is followed by efforts to convert the other. It seems it is part of their nature as Christians that they want to share their most treasured convictions with others. Often this tendency is reinforced by the teachings of the Bible and tradition.

2. CONVERSION AND THE BIBLE

Proselytizing, that is trying to increase the number of the followers of a religion, is a common practice among the followers of many religions. The legitimization of this practice will be found either in the injunctions of the religion's founder or in some text that is canonical or normative by the religious communities. They interpreted it mostly in a fundamentalistic fashion.

(a) Concept of Conversion in Old Testament.

The idea of 'conversion' is found among the Old Testament Prophets mainly of the pre-exilic period like Hosea, first Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as to a lesser extent in those of the post-exilic prophets like Joel. There is no teaching on 'conversion' as such among any of them. In fact the abstract words shuba or t'shuba are quite rare in the Old Testament. Surprisingly the abstract word m'shuba which is its opposite and is translated as 'back sliding' 'faithlessness' or 'apostasy' is more common. But the root shub occurs in various verbal forms in the O.T. and is "basically a verb of motion—with the meanings return, turn back, go back, come back, often in reference to physical
motion of returning to a point of departure.” So the verb has been given the theological meaning both of turning away from evil and a turning to or returning to God. W.L. Holladay uses the term as a “covenantal usage.” In other words, when the covenantal relationship with God is broken by sin, ‘Conversion’ is a returning, in the sense of reconciliation with the covenantal partner.

In the book of Amos the verb *shub* is used in the sense of a returning to God. What is implied in this passage is that God had been urging Israel to return to him, but each time Israel refused. In the book of Isaiah also the same concept is referred:

“For thus said the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel: In returning (*Shuba*) and rest (*nahat*) you shall be saved, in quietness and trust shall be your strength. But you refused...”

In the book of Hosea, true ‘conversion’ implies a change of life style, that is, “a holding fast to love and justice.” In the book of Jeremiah, he not only exhorts Israel as a nation to return to Yahweh, as the prophets before him had done, but he also urges every Israelite to do so. Here the verb “to return” he gives both the meanings that of “turning away from evil” and of “turning to God.” In the Book Ezekiel it becomes clear that conversion is not a one-time decision but an ever-recurring phenomenon in the life of a believer. Thus there will be a recurring abandonment of Yahweh followed by a return to him and vice-versa.

In the post-biblical times Greek speaking Jews coined a new term *proselytos*, which means a ‘*proselyte*’ or ‘one who has come over’, that is a convert from another religion to Judaism. It appears for the first time in the
Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Ezekiel (44:9) already shows that Israel was open to receive non-Israelites into its fold. The full conversion of a Gentile to Judaism involved three steps. (1) the so-called proselyte to baptism (2) circumcision (3) a sacrifice to be offered by the candidate in the Temple.

3. CONVERSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The normal translation of the Hebrew *šâb* in the New Testament is not *epistrepho* or *apostrepho*, but *metanoeo*. According to Kittel:

The linguistic material leads to the conclusion that for the Jewish Hellenistic world of the 2nd cent. A.D. *Metanoeo* was a common and even preferred equivalent of *epistrephomai* = *šâb*, 'to turn', 'to convert'.

In the New Testament both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed 'conversion' as *metanoeo*, is addressed to all human beings, Jesus affirmed 'conversion' as a gift of God to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus addressed his message to each individual irrespective of denomination. Never was there a question of one individual trying to convert another, for all human beings, irrespective of their nationality and creed, are in need of God's grace. And the infant Church continued this proclamation of her founder. Preach the gospel to the whole creation is the command of Jesus, who is the founder of the Church. Hence proclaim the gospel, baptize those who turn to God and save the people is imperative to the Church, for it is the injunction of its founder. The greatest teacher of the infant Church, Paul, puts it in his address to the nations of the world:

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ Jesus. Therefore, be reconciled to one another.
In other words since God has turned to human beings in Christ Jesus, human beings must turn to one another, and together return to the one common God.

Hence the Biblical understanding of ‘conversion’ is ‘to turn’ or ‘to convert’ to God from the evil way of life. We have seen that it is covenantal relationship with God for leading a righteous life in the society. New Testament emphasizes a ‘metanoeo’ or ‘repentance’ as ‘conversion’ to enter into the kingdom of God as a partner with God to establish God’s kingdom on this earth. In the New Testament we have noticed a command from the Jesus to preach this gospel of repentance and to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and the son and the Holy Spirit. Hence there is a mission command we see in the Bible especially in the New Testament teachings.

4. CONVERSION IN MISSION HISTORY

There seems to be no unanimity of opinion among Christians with regards to its fundamental aspects of conversion. Christians as well as non-Christians used to speak of ‘conversion’ with an ease that gives the impression that the idea of conversion that have practiced today was always true in the history of the Church. We normally use conversion to indicate that a person has left on religion for an exclusive attachment to Jesus Christ in the Church. We want to examine the varied history which the idea of conversion went through, whether the mission of the Church today has been deviated form the original vision and the command of the founder.
(a) **Apostolic Period**

Conversion in the early Church was not a change of religion at all. The earliest Christians were Jews and it is as Jews that they listened to the Gospel and accepted it. They did not consider themselves as followers of another religion. They continued to keep the Sabbath and attend the Jewish temple though they broke bread at home in memory of the Lord on the first day of the week.\(^{56}\)

The great architect and the builder of the Church, St. Paul, himself never mentions that he is preaching a new religion, but Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. He began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue by addressing a Jewish community. The early Christians of Jewish origins were Jews even after their baptism. The very intention of the baptism was to make them better Jews.\(^{57}\) The first case of non-Jewish Christian Community is that of Cornelius and his household.\(^{58}\) As in the case of Jews, so also the earliest Gentiles were not invited to accept a new religion. However faith in Jesus Christ and repentance for the sins were pre-requisite for Baptism.\(^{59}\) Christianity was not a new religion but a heretical sect, which the parental body (Jews) tries to eliminate by persecution. Crossan is of the opinion that Christianity is not a new religion, rather the biblical Judaism of the second temple developed into two streams, that of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.\(^{60}\) Crossan characterizes the early Christianity as the Kingdom of God movement, a Christ movement rather than a religion separated from Judaism.\(^{61}\) By the time of Paul there was a transition from Jesus of Nazareth and the kingdom movement to the Christ event, which atoned for the world's sin and achieved salvation.\(^{62}\) In the light of the Pauline theology, for the early Church
conversion became a matter of salvation. Baptism was the physical sign and seal of the turning to Christ in repentance and the sign of the entry into the Christian Community. 63

Deliverance from guilt and the power of evil has always been a major impetus to conversion. According to St. Ignatius of Antioch conversion brought the newness of eternal life, and the deliverance from the forces of magic, ignorance sin and death which Christ brought to us. 64 Similarly St. Cyprian described the effects of Baptism on him:

The water of regeneration washed away the stains of my past life. A light from above entered and permeated my heart, now cleansed from its defilement. The spirit came from heaven, and changed me into a new man by the second birth. 65

It is said that some of the great minds of the early times like Justin, Augustine etc., accepted Christianity because it satisfied them by its intellectual credibility and respectability. 66 The Christian concern for the poor and the marginalized also attracted many to the Christian community. It was Churches care for the poor, for its own poor and for outsiders, which impressed even emperor Julian. 67

(b) Middle Ages.

From Middle Ages onwards, especially from Origen, there seems an emphasize to the grace that was operative in the Church and was made available through baptism for salvation. 68 St. Augustine’s teaching that the Church as the glorious city for all ages and for every region is associated also with St. Cyprian who held that outside the Church there is no salvation. 69 Hence, Jacob Kavumkal says:
Cyprian and Augustine together laid the foundation for the exclusive theology, which became the corner stone of the mission theology for ages to come.\textsuperscript{70}

This exclusive theology with the militant attitude of the chauvinistic leadership of the Church paved the way to Crusades and Inquisitions.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{(c) Colonial Period}

In the Colonial Period Christian Mission was a geographical going out to convert other people to procure their salvation. Hence European Churches sent their missionaries to Asian and African continents to rescue millions of people who knew nothing about salvation and hence were heading to the eternal fires, as they were not baptized. Hence the mission is to aim at the conversion of people to the Christian faith, with a view to the 'expansion' or extension of the Church.\textsuperscript{72} Expansionism was the guiding principle of the conversion movement.\textsuperscript{73} To quote Justo Gonzales:

"The west in general considered that God had placed the benefits of Western civilization and the Christian faith in the hands of the white people-both Europeans and North Americans, so that they could share them with the rest of the world. That responsibility was "the white man's burden": to take to the rest of the world the benefits of industrialization, capitalism, democracy and Christianity"\textsuperscript{74}

This was due to the 'separational model' of gospel-culture encounter emphasized during the colonial era.\textsuperscript{75}

Again from nineteenth century onwards there was a shift from ecclesia centrism to Christo-centrism, i.e., to preach the message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.\textsuperscript{76} Salvation is offered freely to everyone and should be accepted with repentance, faith, thanks giving and holiness of life.
Education and other activities were used as means to conversion. The South India Missionary Conference of 1858 set the goals of English education in India:

The object of all missionary labour should not be primarily the civilization, but the evangelization of the heathens... schools may be regarded as converting agencies and their value estimated by the number who are led to renounce idolatry and make an open profession of Christianity.\(^\text{77}\)

Another aspect of conversion in the 19\(^{th}\) and the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century was the mass movement, which led many groups voluntarily into Christianity, especially from the marginalized sections. The social elevation of the out castes and the destruction of caste system were the chief concerns of the missionaries.\(^\text{78}\) With the beginning of the Twentieth Century there is again a shift in the perspectives and nuances in the understanding and approach to conversion. Until upto 19\(^{th}\) century, Christianity considered other religions as false and their followers were heathens. But after the publication of *The Sacred Books of the East* by Max Muller, the perspectives had changed. Christians were increasingly perceived other religions as preparation for Christianity and Jesus Christ. J.N. Farquhar’s published a book *Crown of Hinduism* in 1913 prepared the way for the fulfilment theory according to which other religions are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.\(^\text{79}\) According to this theological position, ‘Conversion’ to Jesus Christ from other religions is not a radical break or discontinuity but is a fulfilment of the religions search in Jesus Christ.\(^\text{80}\) Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the fulfilment of all creation, of all history, and of all human yearning for fullness of life.... In Him, “authentic values of all religious and cultural traditions, such as mercy and submission to
the will of God, compassion and rectitude, non-violence and righteousness, filial, piety and harmony with creation find their fulness and realization.\textsuperscript{81}

(d) Post Vatican II Theology

Apart from the new understanding of other religions, Vatican II ushered in also a fresh outlook on the history of the Christian mission. The relation between the mission of the Church and this world and its cultures is the main theme of the Council document \textit{Gaudim et Spes}. The Council had made an evaluation of the theology of the Christian mission since the very inception of Christianity. In the words of Paul VI, “as an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a Kingdom, the Kingdom of God; and this is so important, ...”\textsuperscript{82} If so the purpose of the mission is not primarily planting churches, as it was understood earlier. Pope Paul was against such attitude. Further he goes on to say “for the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”\textsuperscript{83} Jacob Kavumkal affirms, “While evangelization is the mission of the Church, inculturation as the very expression of mission. Inculturation is a community’s constant search for relevancy and meaningfulness of the Gospel as well as it response to the Gospel in its particular context. Inculturation is to be seen from the impact of it on the context, especially in transforming the dehumanizing elements of the context.”\textsuperscript{84} Now we see a shift from Christocentrism to theocentrism, i.e., God centred Christology or Kingdom centred Christology. This is a new paradigm shift in understanding of salvation as conversion to the Kingdom of God.
(e) Kingdom of God as Jesus Announced

In the context of the Kingdom Jesus announced which was Good News primarily to the poor. When we look into the gospels, Jesus’ mission was to transform the Jewish culture by questioning the dehumanising elements in it. Jewish culture, through its laws, ritual purity and pollution, marginalized people in terms of race, profession, bodily situation, sin etc. In fact he relativised God in terms of the neighbour. While he identified himself with the poor and the out castes, he at the same time challenged whatever was dehumanising in the society of his times. This total transformation of the society through the acceptance of God as the intimate parent and all human beings as brothers and sisters. This state of affairs he described as Kingdom of God. This message of the Kingdom is accompanied by the formation of a community of disciples whom Jesus sent after his death and resurrection to continue his mission, in all cultures.

The main theme of Jesus’ mission and therefore of all Christian missionary activity is not forcible conversion through coercion, allurements and inducements, of person or community, but relate the gospel to the given community or culture, through love, compassion, reconciliation, service and fellowship. Hence Robert Webber says “The power of the Gospel will change no only the life of an individual, but also transform culture.” Arch Bishop Samineni Arulappa says, “Real conversion is conversion to God.” He continues, ‘Every religion is part of God’s Kingdom’. Hence conversion to God means conversion to the God’s Kingdom. From the fruits of action, we can determine whether we are building God’s Kingdom or Satan’s Kingdom. Real conversion produces the fruits of God’s Kingdom, that are love, joy,
peace, kindness, gentleness, patience and self control. The fruits of Satan's Kingdom are hatred, violence, immorality, division, envy, quarrelsomeness etc. Hence the ultimate aim of conversion is total transformation of society from its inhuman practices such as caste and ideology.

4. CASTE SYSTEM AND CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

The gospel invitation is not only a call to personal conversion, but is also a call to social change. It is a struggle against the mamman of structures of injustice, enslavement and marginalization. It seems most missionaries considered the Indian caste system as a dehumanising structure, which deny social equality, brotherhood and social unity. Hence gospel invitation is also a call to the liberation of those people from the clutches of the bondage of caste hierarchy and its age-old stigma. Norman Maclead, the Convenor of the Church of Scotland's India Mission, says:

... that Hindu casteism is a frightful social scourge no one can deny. It has completely and hopelessly wrecked social unity, harmony and happiness, and for centuries it has opposed all social progress. But few seem to think that it is not so much as a social but as a religious institution that it has become the great scourge it really is. As a system of absurd social distinctions it is certainly pernicious. But when we view it on moral grounds it appears as a scandal to conscience, and all our moral ideas and sentiments rise to execrate it and to demand its immediate extermination. Caste is the bulwark of Hindu idolatry and the safeguard of Brahmanic priesthood. It is an audacious and sacrilegious violation of God's law of human brotherhood. It makes civil distinctions inviolable divine institutions, and in the name of the Holy God sows perpetual discard and enmity among His children.
5. **HINDU RESPONSE TO CONVERSION AND CASTE**

The greatest Indian Prophetic figures like Vivekananda tried to defend castes with dual attitude. On the one hand he gives a justification for the principle of caste as a functional division within an organic society, claiming that it is one of the greatest insights, which India has to offer to the world. On the other hand, he believes that this inherently good system has become petrified and oppressive and must be reformed. Duncan B. Forrester says:

"Certainly he does not write the contemporary realities of the caste system or of the tradition. He is quite silent about the hereditary principle, about endogamy, about rules governing social intercourse. Indeed it would appear that what he defends as caste it is simply a division of labour or as a functional grouping within society...."  

Ronald W. Scott says:

Vivekananda does make it clear that he is unhappy with caste as he finds it around him because it is rigid, makes man 'a slave society' and obstruct any kind of social progress.  

Gokhale comments on the caste rigidity as follows:

The condition of 'the low castes' is so deeply deplorable, that it constitutes a grave blot on our social arrangements. We may touch cat, we may touch dog, we may touch any other animal, but the touch of these human beings is pollution. And so complete is the mental degradation of these people that they themselves see nothing in such treatment to resent, that they acquiesce in it as though nothing better than that was their due.  

Dayananda Saraswati and his Ārya Samāj also found the existing caste system is not according to the ordering of the *Vedas*. He wanted to replace the innumerable castes or jāthis of contemporary Indian society with the four *Varṇas*, according to the *guna* invested in each person.
Mahatma Gandhi's position seems to start from a kind of conflation of Vivekananda's and Saraswati's views; He affirms Varna, seeks to reform caste and assails untouchability as an excrescence on Hindu society. Duncan B. Forrester says, Gandhi's moral passion is never more intense than when he speaks of the evils of untouchability. He quotes from Gandhi:

The curse of Hinduism and therefore India... the root cause of our down fall and of Hindu-Muslim discord.

Gandhi saw a large group of Harijans took conversions by Christian Missionaries because of the treatment they received from the high caste Hindus through the problem of untouchability. Gandhi was against any kind of conversion from one religion to another. He was severely critical of Harijans who spoke of conversion to another faith as a possible ways to escape from untouchability and even more caustic in his attacks on those who sought to make converts among Harijans.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's earlier writings on caste represent a remarkably vigorous defense of both of Varna and of the present realities of caste against Christian and secular attacks. He argues that a caste society is superior to the fluid, competitive, insecure, materialist society of the Christian West.

Radhakrishnsnan writes:

Caste may have some defects, but these are not fundamental; in its essence caste represents what is best in the Hindu ethos: 'the institution of caste'... illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its face in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures... the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust. Though it has now degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of
exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system.\textsuperscript{101}

Although he has praised caste as a characteristic product of the Hindu mind, he also affirms that caste on its social side is a product of human organization and not a mystery of divine appointment.\textsuperscript{102}

Again in Eastern Religions and Western Thought (1939) Radhakrishnan says:

> The caste system is a degeneration of class idea. It does not admit that the individual has the right to determine his future and pursue his interests...The right of every human soul to enter into the full spiritual heritage of the race must be recognized. Caste is a source of discord and mischief, and if it persists in its present form, it will affect with weakness and false hood the people that cling to it.\textsuperscript{103}

Jawaharlal Nehru also upheld the old caste system, but he doubted whether the caste system would endure, because of the vast changes taking place in Indian society.\textsuperscript{104} He is of opinion that:

> The destruction of caste, which is virtually inevitable, might will lead to a chaotic disruption of social life unless something in the way of a new social structure, adapted both to the demands of modern times and to the genius of the Indian people, were to be put in its place. The old caste system, to be sure, had much that was good in it. It never fell victim to the morbid individualism of the west. It tolerated diversity. It produced a society, which was non-competitive and non-acquisitive. Democracy was allowed within each caste, and although the system as a whole was hierarchical, the internal structure of each caste was egalitarian... the ultimate weakness and failing of the caste system and the Indian social structure were that they degraded a mass of human beings and gave them no opportunities to get out of that condition, educationally, culturally or economically.... In the context of society today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive and barriers to progress. There can be
no equality in status and opportunity within its frame work, nor can there be political democracy and much less economic democracy...  

Modern Historian K.M. Panikkar was against the rigid nature of caste system. According to K.M. Panikkar:

Caste is quite clearly separable from the Hindu religion....And it needs to be reformed, indeed to be destroyed for caste is totally incompatible with democracy... it condemns millions to degradation, it obstructs education and progress....Since caste is not a religious institution... a religious attack on caste is irrelevant, whether it takes the Gandhian or Christian form.  

Both Nehru and Panikkar are more interested in the future of Hindu society, and they are one in declaring that caste must go, and that the instruments which will speed it on its way will be legislation, industrialization and education rather than the religious techniques of Gandhi or the missionaries.

6. EVALUATION

From the above analysis, it is clear that most of the Hindu revivalists and Indian leaders are against the petrified and oppressive nature of caste system and they unanimously demand needs to be reformed. But they are against the missionary policy of ‘Conversion’ and their tactics to transform the society by leading people from one religion to another by blaming the Hindu caste hierarchical system is barrier to social progress. Swami Vivekananda said, “It is not true that I am against any religion.... It is equally untrue that I am hostile to the Christian Missionaries in India. But I am protest against certain of their methods...”

M. Gandhi said:

“Conversion is the deadliest poison that ever sapped the fountain of truth...”
The speeches and writings of the above Hindu leaders influenced the Hindu masses to the growing opposition to conversion. But recently there has been violent opposition to conversion, especially in Gujarat and Orissa. The V.H.P. "wants law to ban conversion." In an open letter to Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of his recent visit to India, Swami Dayananda Saraswati wrote:

On behalf of the non-aggressive religions of the world, the Hindu, the Parsi, the Jewish and other native religions in different countries, I request you to put a freeze on conversion and create conditions in which all religious cultures can live and let live.

M.V. Kamath too is of opinion that "total stop must be ordered (by the Pope) of conversion activities." During the past one year several writers have put forward arguments against the missionary effort to convert people to Christianity. They are against "planned conversions." According to M. Rame Jois, a former Chief justice of the Punjab and Hariyana High Court, planned conversion goes against the spirit of secularism enshrined in the constitution. He says "In the constitution secularism implies respect for all religions without discrimination" But the desire to convert is rooted in intolerance towards other religions. This leads to the discussion of Religious freedom envisaged in the Indian Constitution and the Questions of conversion.

C. RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE QUESTION OF CONVERSION

The constitution of India in its Preamble has pledged to give to the people of India, a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic committed to secure to all its citizens, social, economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity and dignity of the individual, fraternity of the people and integrity
of the Nation. The words ‘socialist’ and ‘secular’ were inserted into the Preamble later in 1976 through the forty second Amendment to the constitutions. Some commentators point out that the concept of secularism is firmly embedded in the guarantees of freedom of Religion in Part III, fundamental Rights, of the Constitution. The Supreme Court had held that secularism is one of the basic structures of the constitution.

The constitution of India does not define secularism. The basic features of secularism were identified by the Supreme Court of India to mean that, “The state shall have no religion of its own, and all persons shall be equally entitled to the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.” In a landmark decision in 1994, The Supreme Court of India, in a Full Bench decision spelt out the ingredients of secularism as follows:

i) The constitution of India Prohibits the establishment of a theocratic state in the country.

ii) The state is prohibited from establishing a religion of its own, it is further prohibited from identifying with or favouring any religion of its own, the state is enjoined to accord equal treatment to all religions, sects and denominations.

iii) Secularism in India also does not mean that the society is anti-God or atheistic. It only means equal status for all religions without any preference or favour or discrimination.

iv) Under the secular state in India the existence of a legal right or public duty does not depend on the profession or practice of any particular religion. The state attempts to secure the good of all citizens irrespective of their religion and practice.
v) Secularism is a basic feature of the Constitution and therefore beyond the place of the amendment process. Any State Government, which violates the mandates of the constitution, as given above renders itself liable to action to supercede it under Art 356 of the constitution.

vi) For the same reason, every political party in order to participate in the election to public offices must abide by the principles of secularism. Communalization of Politics is anti secular.

The Indian state cannot therefore be theocratic. It is neither anti-religion, nor does it create a wall of separation between the state and religion. It has equal respect for all religions. It embodies the age-old Indian precept of respect for all religions ‘Sarva-Dharma-Samabhava’.

1. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

In the Constitution the specific provisions are given Articles 25 to 28 and Articles 29 and 30.

Right to Freedom of Religion:

Article, 25. Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.

26. Freedom to Manage religious Affairs

27. Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion.

28. Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions

Cultural and Educational Rights.

Articles. 29. Protection of interest of minorities.

30. Rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
Freedom of conscience and religion under Art 25, guarantees every person, not only citizens, the freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and propagate religion. These rights are subject only to public order, morality and health and other provisions of the Constitution. Since the freedom belongs to every person, the freedom of one cannot encroach upon a similar freedom of another. ‘Freedom of Profession’ means the right of the believer to state his creed in public. ‘Freedom of Practice’ means his right to give it expression in forms of private and public worship. Freedom to propagate one’s religion means the right to communicate a person’s belief to another or to expose the tenets of that faith. As has been pointed out earlier, these freedoms and rights are subject only to the restraints imposed by public order, morality and health.

2. RIGHT TO ‘PROPAGATE’ AND ‘CONVERSION’

The right to propagate religion has come under very severe, critical debate in recent times. There are incidents of religious discrimination and violation of religious liberty. Violent attack on Christians and Christian missions, Churches schools etc. reported from various parts of the country, give room to suspect the violation of religious liberty. Alexander says such actions are planned on a national and wider basis so as to intimidate and terrorise the miniscule Christian population.\textsuperscript{121} Re-conversions were also being organized by Hindu organizations.\textsuperscript{122}

As Justice K.K. Mathew, a former judge of the Supreme Court, points out, “In the context of Art. 25(1), Propagate means that every person has the right to disseminate or spread from person to person and place to place the religion he professes.”\textsuperscript{123} This certainly involves conversion that is renouncing one religion
and adopting another one. This is a fundamental right of an individual. As Art.18 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adapted by the U.N.O in 1948 puts it.

Every one has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Conversion is a matter of free choice based on personal conviction. Denying a person the right of conversion when he wants it, and compelling him for it against his will and conviction, both are equally infringement of his freedom. The freedom of Religion Acts, passed by the Governments of Madhya Pradesh (1968), Orissa (1968 and 1978) and Arunachal Pradesh (1978), prohibiting conversion from one religious faith to any other faith by use of "force or inducement or by fraudulent means" have caused much debate. These acts are explicitly directed against the works of the Christians and Muslims. For example, what Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Acts Prohibits is conversion of "any person from indigenous faith" (Art.3), that is religions of Indian origin. This means, though not stated explicitly, that there is no prohibition for conversion from Christianity or Islam to an indigenous faith. It may be said that what is prohibited is conversion by illegitimate means certainly such proselytization is not justifiable and those who involved in it should be punished. But under the cover of such Acts, in some parts of the country Christians are persecuted and even denied of their primary right to practice their faith. The legislative history of Art.25 is revealing Shiva Rao, the author of 'The framing of Indian Constitution – A Study' observes:
In the Constituent Assembly when the matter was taken up, there was considerable discussion on the word 'propagate'... But the speech of K.M. Munshi gave the historical background of Art.25(1)... in which he pointed out the insertion of the word "propagate" was the result of a compromise to re-assure that minority communities particularly the Christian community... and I know it was on this word that the Indian Christian community laid the greatest emphasis, not because they wanted to convert people aggressively, but because the word 'Propagate' was a fundamental part of their tenet... so long as religion is religion, conversion by free exercise of the conscience has to be recognized. The word propagate in this clause is nothing very much out of the way, as some people think, not is it fraught with dangerous consequences.\(^{126}\)

Hence the constitution clearly exhibit 'propagation, involves 'conversion' by free exercise of the conscience. Hence prohibition of conversion is clearly a violation of the freedom of conscience, which is fundamental feature of secularism. Though the state claims to be secular, it takes the interests of the majority as the norm and thereby denies religious freedom to minorities is the real issue perceived today. Such discriminative treatment created a sense of insecurity and frustration among religious minorities, which will encourage communalism that is in no way conducive to the wider interests of the nation. There must be a 'truly open situation in which all have the right to persuade all and in which we respect in each other the seriousness and sincerity with which convictions are held and expressed.' \(^{127}\)

Religious freedom should not be an absolute and unconditioned one. The freedom to profess, practice and propagate should be as Indian Constitution puts it, subject to the condition of 'public order, morality and health'. Practices and norms which violate human dignity and public morality should not be allowed in the name of religious freedom and secularism.
There is another side to this picture. As noted earlier, it also manifests on the part of Hindus a mood of insecurity. According to Hindu point of view, it has social and political consequences. Conversion means ‘accepting an entirely different way of life...It means cutting oneself off from the root of one’s family, society and culture. It means a break in age-old relationship.’ Politically, conversion disturbs the power-relationship. Conversion means losing of power for the majority community and granting itself to be over-dominated by others. This is why conversion is strongly opposed by Hindus, and they are engaged in Śuddhi movement to reconvert those who left Hinduism. Theologically ‘conversion’ is not conducive to Hinduism.

3. THEOLOGICAL INCOMPATIBILITY

We have seen that the Christian Theological stand believed the ‘conversion’ is that “Jesus is the one and only Saviour.” This “exclusive” or the “inclusive” approach could not satisfy the Hindu revivalist. In India they are taught to believe that God is everywhere, that he is manifested Himself in many forms, and that, therefore they follow the path of Sarva dharma samabhāv. There are many ways to reach the goal (the truth). The Christian exclusivism, and inclusivism do not recognize the Indian dictum “All religions are different ways to reach the goal.” Here Christians maintain that only their own religion is true and all others are false or partially true, and they are not sufficient for salvation to its adherents. This approach does not affirm the integrity and identity of other faiths. Hence it creates tension and conflict in the society.

In the light of the account given above, the Church has begun to recognize that the efficacious salvific will of God is present in all religions, and that
every religion worth the name is a valid means of salvation in its own right. Christian theologians are aware of the fact that the Church is only a Pilgrim, journeying alongside other Pilgrims, moving toward the full realization of Truth, to be revealed in the eschatological event. Thus they are fully aware of the fact that as pilgrims all religions are equal and as such they feel to establish a new standpoint in the religiously plural context. This paradigm shift, the pluralistic standpoint is a revolution in the theological realm, which seems to provide a theological compatibility in the theology of religions.

D. PLURALISTIC STANDPOINT

The pluralist paradigm result from a ‘Copernican Revolution’ or crossing of the Theological Rubicon’ in Christian approaches to other faiths. It makes a paradigm shift - a ‘Copernican Revolution’ for Christian presence in the midst of a plurality of religious faith. By pluralist paradigm we mean, the position that all religions embody truth and are valid means of salvation.

The pluralist approach accepts that all religions are different ways towards salvation, authentic within its own respects. It rejects ‘exclusivism’ and fosters a more positive approach to the question of religious diversity and truth claims. It rejects ‘inclusivism’ where Christ is still the locus of the religious truth. It attempts to overcome the claims of the uniqueness of Christ without rejecting the mediation of Christ in the Christian revelation. All religions are considered on an equal footing with regard to their validity and legitimacy in providing salvation.

Christ is as much unique as is Allah, Krisna or Buddha for their respective adherents. Pluralism forfeits all forms of ‘exclusivism’ and also the spirit of
condescending and paternalist ‘inclusivism’. It thereby acknowledges the integrity of every religion as a way of salvation.\textsuperscript{130}

The pluralistic paradigm accommodates a plurality of religious claims and divine revelations. Another related expression of this approach is ‘the pluralist view of religions.’ There are number of variants of this approach like John Hick and Stanley J. Samartha

1. **THE COPERNICAN REVOLUTION IN THEOLOGY**

John Hick’s primary theological articulation is based on the axiom: God’s universal salvific will. He says God is the God of universal love. As God is the creator and father of all humankind, God wills the ultimate good and salvation of all humans.\textsuperscript{131} He advocated a Copernican Revolution in theological articulation with regard to other faiths. Copernicus replaced the Ptolomic Cosmology by placing Sun, rather than the Earth at the center of the universe. Hick used this metaphor to argue that Christianity should replace God instead of Christ at the center of salvific faith. Thus replacing Christo-centric approach, he advocated a Theo-centric approach to people of other faiths.\textsuperscript{132}

This Copernican shift radically challenges the Christological suggestions. It means that the major world religions can now be seen as encounters from different historical and cultural standpoints with the same infinite divine reality. The meaning of salvation undergoes change in Hick’s thought. It is moving from self-centredness to reality centredness. He argues that salvation is taking place not only within Christian tradition but also within the other
great traditions, it would seem arbitrary and unrealistic to go on insisting that
the Christ event is the sole and exclusive source of human salvation.\textsuperscript{133}

John Hick is held to be a representative of philosophical pluralists. He holds that all religions are paths to the 'Real' (a neutral term compared to God). The pluralist hypothesis is thus a philosophical interpretation of the global religious situation. It postulates an ultimate transcendent reality behind the different religio-cultural totalities, which is variously conceived, experienced and responded to in life from within these different religions.\textsuperscript{134}

Hick is indebted to Kantian epistemology to elaborate his Theocentric Pluralism. He makes use of Kant's distinction between noumenon and phenomenon in his conception of religion as a human response to the transcendent Reality. This transcendent Reality is not the Reality itself but the Reality as humanly experienced. He considers that the conceptual scheme that religion uses to respond to his transcendent is culture dependent.

For him:

Because the different ways of being human have produced a variety of such conceptual systems with their associated spiritual practices, the transcendent Reality... postulated by a religious understanding of religion is experienced in a variety of ways which have become enshrined in the different religious traditions.\textsuperscript{135}

The Real Phenomenal is beyond; he would claim conceptions such as Allah, God the father, Nirvana etc. The noumenal is beyond all descriptions and the differing images within the religions are like phenomenal representations of the noumenal. The universalistic tendency is visible in Hick because he believes that all religions are equally correct by virtue of being
particular affirmations of the generic truth there is transcendent Reality and that salvation/liberation comes by centering on it.\textsuperscript{136} Hick provides a pluralistic stand moving away from an intolerant exclusivism and a benevolent inclusivism. This approach necessarily entails the abandonment of any claim concerning the absolute uniqueness of Christ.

2. THE RELATIVITY OF ALL REVELATIONS

S.J. Samartha provides a significant contribution for a pluralist paradigm. He argues that Christians should move from ‘normative exclusiveness to relational distinctiveness’. Relational because Christ does not remain unrelated to neighbours of other faiths. Distinctive because, no mutual enrichment is possible without recognizing the distinctiveness of the great religious traditions.\textsuperscript{137} For Christians, to be in Christ is the only way to be in God. There is not other way. But in a religiously plural world, Samartha notes that, to be in Christ is not the only way to be in God.\textsuperscript{138} In a religiously pluralistic society, Christianity cannot claim absoluteness for itself. He assumes that Christians have no monopoly of truth. No single religion can claim to know and to communicate the fullness of the revelation of God, so neither can Christianity. He strongly advocates inter-religious dialogue as an imperative for our times.\textsuperscript{139}

By affirming a mystery centred Christianity he rejected both exclusivism and inclusivism. For him to say Jesus is God runs the risk, of an impoverished ‘Jesuology’ and limiting Christ to Jesus of Nezareth becomes a narrow “Christo-monism.”\textsuperscript{140} He argued that a theo-centric Christology provides a basis for retaining the mystery of God, while acknowledging the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ.
He was of the opinion that truth is a relative concept. It cannot be absolutized by Christians. He states:

To absolutise the relative by suggesting that only one among the many is true is to imprison Truth with in history. Where the absoluteness of the Absolute is acknowledged and the relativity of the relatives accepted, Truth is cherished, because then it does not become the possession of any one particular community. Plurality does not relativise Truth, it relativizes different responses to Truth.141

He believed that, the Mystery centred Reality can narrow down differences between religions.

3. EVALUATION

Pluralistic standpoint holds all great religious traditions on an equal footing. It considers the differences among religions to be due to linguistic, cultural and social conditioning of the religions. It seeks to build bridges between religions by accepting the truth claims of each religion as valid response to the ‘Ultimate concern.’ It holds that all absolutisations have marks of superiority and hence should be condemned. This approach does not renounce the uniqueness of Christ, but makes it relative. So the other saviours in other religions too can claim uniqueness of themselves. They seek the diversified mutual enrichment.

Lindbeck has labeled this view as “experiential expressivism.” It is not “indifferentism but the acknowledgement that each path is the best for its adherents in the given social and cultural milieu.142 Those like John Hick can be dubbed as phenomenal pluralist because they claim that religions refer to the same noumenal and transcendent reality which is related to us in profoundly different ways.143 Raimundo Panikkar and Joseph Runzo are called radical
argues that, we have a situation of pluralism only when we are confronted with mutually exclusive and respectively contradictory ultimate systems.\(^{144}\)

Runzo adds:

The different worldviews must be considered irreducibly plural.\(^{145}\)

Panikkar argues that it is not just enough to hold that truth is ‘perspectival’ but that “truth itself is pluralistic... neither one, nor many.\(^{146}\)

But such a model is not exclusive to Christianity alone. The Advaitic stand of Hinduism attempts to bridge the gap between the One and Many. The same line of philosophy one can see in the concept of Anekāntavāda in Jainism also. These two stands, i.e., Advaita of Hinduism and Anekāntavāda of Jainism, are taken by Gandhi to respond the fleeting problem of One and Many relationship which is the root cause of contemporary communalism in India.

**Notes and References:**


5. See *Deepika* (Malayalam Daily), 19 July 2000


7. Gavin D’Costa, op.cit., pp.52-79. On the view of exclusivism, salvation and truth, liberation and wisdom, redemption and enlightenment are only available through explicit faith in Jesus Christ or consider Jesus Christ as ‘Lord and Saviour.’


9. T.V. Philip, op.cit., p.52

10. Gavin D’Costa, op.cit., p.52


12. Ibid., p. 298

13. Ibid

14. Bratten, op.cit., p. 32


22. Ibid., p. 80
23. Alan Race, op.cit., p. 38
24. K.P. Aliaz, op.cit., p. 56
33. Ibid., p. 46
34. Walter Fernades, “A Conversion Debate” The Hindu, 10 November 1999
35. Ibid
36. The Hindu, 26 January 1999

Amos (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11) “Yet you did not return to me.”

Isa. 30:15

Hos. 5:6

For ‘turning away from’ the Greek uses *apostrepho*, and for ‘turning to’ it has ‘*epistrepho*’, where as the Hebrew ‘*shub*’ could mean both things see also Rui de Menezes, op. cit., p. 98

Ezek:18: 21-32

Rui de Menezes, op. cit., p. 93


Isa. 56: 3-7

Rui de Menezes, op. cit., pp.94—95

Ibid., p. 95


Mt. 18:3; Act. 11:18

MK: 15—16. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not will be condemned.”

2 cor. 5: 17—19

Mt: 28:19

Act. 2:43; 3: if.


Acts. 10
59. Act. 8:13; 2:38

60. J.D. Crossan, The Birth of Christianity (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), P. XXXIII

61. Ibid

62. 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal2:20

63. Jacob Kavumkal, op.cit., p.103


65. Ibid., p. 165

66. Jacob Kavumkal, op.cit., p.103


68. R. Clause, “Flowering: The Western Church”, in Tim Dowely, op.cit., p. 282


70. Jacob Kavumkal, op.cit., p.105.

71. Ibid., p. 106


73. Jacob Kavumkal, op.cit., p.108.


75. T.M. Philip, op.cit., p. 36


77. G.S Hinge, Hindutva Reawakened (Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1999)

78. Jacob Kavumkal, op.cit., p.110.

79. J.N. Farquhar, op.cit., p.58.

80. This is the line of thought followed by Pope John Paul II. in his mission Encyclical Redemptories Missio, as well as in his recent
Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, see also Jacob Kavumkal., op.cit., p.110.


82. Jacob Kavumkal, op.cit., p.111, *E.N.8*

83. Ibid


85. Mt. 11:4-5; Lk. 4:16-19; 7:22-23

86. Jacob Kavumkal, “Mission as Inculturation”, op.cit., p. 863

87. Ibid., pp. 863-864


89. Arch Bishop Samineni Arulappa, “Real Conversion is Conversion to God”, *Manthan*, Vol. XX, No.2 April-June, 1999, pp. 90-93

90. Ibid., p. 93


92. Ibid., p. 159

93. Ibid., pp. 159-160


97. Duncon B. Forrester, op.cit., p. 161

98. Harijan, 25 May, 1940
99. Duncan B. Forrester, op.cit., p. 162


101. Ibid., p. 67

102. Ibid., p. 76


105. Ibid., p.253


107. Ibid


109. See the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol.64, pp. 202-204

110. The Hindu, 4 November 1999


112. M.V. Kamath, “Mission Impossible” in *The Times of India* (Mumbai, 13 October 199)


114. Ibid


116. Ibid., p. 200

117. Ibid

119. Bommai Vs. Union of India A 1994, Supreme Court, 1918

120. P.J. Alexander, op.cit., pp. 202-203

121. An independent fact finding team with retired Justice H. Suresh of the Mumbai High Court, Prof. Kamal Chinoy of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Ruth Manorama, President of the National Alliance of Women and a galaxy of eminent persons have found that the attack on Christians and the community’s institutions at Dangs in Gujarat in December 1999 was conceived and planned as far back as in 1990. The team, which had visited Dangs district in January and in March went around the demolished areas and spoke to a cross section of Christian and Hindu leaders and workers, has compiled the evidence through photographs, Pamphlets and official and unofficial circulars to reveal the various nexus between some Hindu bodies and government apathy towards Christians. See Indian Express (9 April, 1999) and Sunday (25 April – 1 May 1999), p. 9

122. The New Indian Express (14 February, 1999), says force and fraud are employed in re-conversion.


125. Ibid


130. Ibid


132. Ibid., 126f.


143. Ibid


146. R. Panikkar, op.cit., p. 127
CHAPTER – IV

ISLAMIC APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM