Conversion in the pluralistic religious context of India: a Missiological study

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Abstract

Conversion to Christianity has become a very controversial issue in the current religious and political debate in India. This is due to the foreign image of the church and to its past colonial nexus. In addition, the evangelistic effort of different church traditions based on particular view of conversion, which is the product of its different historical periods shaped by peculiar constellation of events and creeds and therefore not absolute- has become a stumbling block to the church’s mission as one view of conversion is argued against the another view of conversion in an attempt to show what constitutes real conversion. This results in competitions, cultural obliteration and kaum (closed) mentality of the church. Therefore, the purpose of the dissertation is to show a common biblical understanding of conversion which could serve as a basis for the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society, as well as the renewal of church life in contemporary India by taking into consideration the missiological challenges (religious pluralism, contextualization, syncretism and cultural challenges) that the church in India is facing in the context of conversion.

The dissertation arrives at a theological understanding of conversion in the Indian context and its discussion includes: the multiple religious belonging of Hindu Christians; the dual identity of Hindu Christians; the meaning of baptism and the issue of church membership in Indian context. This study points out that any form of church or movement cannot be an absolute model to other contexts rather different forms of church has to emerge according to different contexts without compromising faith in Christ.

Key words

Conversion, evangelism, pluralism, India, colonialism, foreignness, traditions, dual identity, church, baptism, cultural, Indian nationalism, Hinduism, syncretism, contextualization, dialogue and Khrist Bhakta
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CHAPTER ONE

THESIS PROPOSAL

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The issue of Christian conversion has recently become a bone of contention in India. Even though India is a pluralistic religious society, the change from one religion to another has always been a cause of friction. Many states such as Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Orissa have passed anti conversion bills, even though Article 25(1) of the Indian Constitution gives freedom to profess, propagate and practise religion: “Subject to public order, morality, and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion” (quoted in Rao, 1968:149).

During the last seventy years of the constitution’s history, Article 25(1) has been “challenged, criticized and reinterpreted many times” (Pachuau, 2001:189). The debate tended to centre on the following points:

1. Freedom to practice one’s religion
2. Freedom to propagate one’s religion

The government of Madhya Pradesh appointed a Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee “to enquire into the activities of Christian missionaries in Madhya Pradesh and other matters” (Saldanha, 1990:76). The committee in its finding made negative criticism against Christian converts and missions by stating that “Conversions are mostly brought about by undue influence, misrepresentation, etc., or in other words not by convictions but by various inducements” (Pachuau, 2001:181).

The neighbouring state of Orissa also followed the footsteps of Madhya Pradesh and set up their own enquiry committee. Even though the committee’s findings were similar to the enquiry committee of Madhya Pradesh, it went further and charged that the missionary had no loyalty to their country or state. Therefore, anti-conversion bills were passed, such as the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, which states: “No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion” (Pachuau, 2001:183).
Many other states like Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat also enacted anti-conversion bill similar to the Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. In addition to prohibiting conversion by the use of force, allurement and fraudulent means, it also requires anyone who baptizes a convert to notify the district authorities and get permission for the same.

Under the pretext of these acts, many atrocities were committed against Christian missionaries and converts. For instance, in comparison to 38 cases of violence reported against Christians in a span of 32 years (1964-1996), 135 cases of atrocities against Christian were reported in 1998 alone when Bharatiya Janata Party (an advocate of Hindu nationalism) came to power (Lourdayyan, 1999: 67). This does not include the act of burning alive the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons on 22 January 1999 (Narula, 1999:14).

Rabindra Kumar Pal (known as Dar Singh) when questioned about his role in the burning alive of the Australian missionary and his two sons stated that, “it is true that I spearheaded the movement against the missionaries. Yes I did not like Graham Staines; I never liked any missionaries. There is enough reason to hate them. Missionaries have been targeting our religion. They have been converting Hindus by deceits and inducements” (Raj 2001: 48).

Soon after this incidents Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, former Prime Minister of India, called for a national debate on religious conversion. But at the same time fundamentalist groups- like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sanghand (RSS), Visva Hindu Pariṣad (VHP) also called for Ghar Wapsi movement (home coming; return home) under the leadership of Dilip Singh Judeo (a forest minister under Vajpayee government) – aimed at reconverting the tribal and Dalit Christian back to Hinduism coercively and violently which led to lot of violence and to the death of many Dalit especially in Orissa and Gujarat (Jonathan, 2001:111). According to Dayal “At its peak, the GharWapsi movement consisted of armed men, many of them from outside the state, and most of them non-tribal upper caste activists, who forcibly rounded up tribal villagers into camps where Dilip Singh Judeo and others would wash their feet, while gunmen and bowmen watched, telling them they were now Hindus”.¹

¹ Dayal, John. RSS defence set defence army prepare village cadre for conversion of tribals to Hinduism. 
1.1 A Fresh Look at Conversion

In the above scenario, Indian churches and theologians started to ask pertinent questions, among them the question: “What is conversion in the Indian context?” Many conferences at local and national levels were held to discuss this question. The outcome of these meetings was that many books and articles with regard to conversion in the Indian context were published. A brief overview of these is given in the following paragraphs.

Saldanha, Julian’s “Conversion and Indian civil law” (1990) deals with the constituent assembly and its committee debate on freedom to practice and propagate one’s religion as well as the restrictions on conversions. In addition, the book also shows how in Article 25(1) of Indian constitution the phrase “to profess and propagate religion” was included with much difficulty and exertion.

Ebe Sundar Raj, in “The confusion called conversion” (1998) and “National Debate on Conversion” (2001), explores the reason behind the Prime Minister’s call for a national debate on Christian conversion. In doing so the book takes various critiques of Christian mission and the church in India and answers these critique with illustration of what has been and what is currently going on among Christians. He also mentions the general allegation against the missionaries, stating, “Missionaries are proselytizing in India by their power of money and mechanisms alluring the ignorant and weaker sections of Hindus taking unlawful advantage of Article 25 of our Constitution and thereby spoiling with a foreign faith, the Indian culture and endangering communal harmony and national security” (Raj, 1998: 98).

Dhyanchand Carr, in “A biblical theological reflection on the theme of conversion” (2000), explores the importance of biblical and theological reflection on conversion amidst conversion issues in India and Srilanka. Carr says that in dealing with the subject of conversion one should not feel as though this is a fringe phenomenon and therefore leave it aside. But as Christian it is the duty of all Christians to share with their friends, colleagues and neighbours about the hope of God’s just reign, peace, justice as revealed in Jesus. As Christians having shared and tasted the love and friendship of Christ, one cannot leave it aside but desire to share these with those who have not known him. The only way they consider this possible is to call others also to become like them.
Plamthodathil Jacob, in “conversion in a pluralistic context: perspectives and perceptions” (2000), looks into various aspects of conversion in a pluralistic context. He looks into the biblical concepts of conversion, especially in the pluralistic context of the early church, and then goes on to explain how to facilitate genuine conversion in the Indian context.

Sebastian Kim’s “In search of Identity -debates on religious conversion in India” (2003) studies why religious conversion is so controversial in India. In answering this question Kim points out that the root of the problem is the “mismatch in perception of Hindu and Christian view of conversion” (Kim, 2003:32). In Hinduism all religion are equal and valid, and offer the possibility of salvation and therefore, “any attempt to convert people from one religion to another are taken as signs of aggression and intolerance”.2 However, the Christian understanding is based on the “right to freedom of religion and conscience, which explicitly and inseparably includes the right to convert”.3 Therefore, “right to convert is part of Christianity itself and if this right is not conceded, it amounts to intolerance”.4 In such a context, both positions of Hindu and Christians are irreconcilable therefore the author concludes “that the debate will continue without either side yielding to the other” (Kim, 2003:210).

Robinson and Clarke’s “Religious conversion in India: modes, motivations, and meanings” (2003), explores the idea of conversion from diverse contexts (by leading scholars of religion, history, and society). In doing so, the contributing authors, question the notion of authoritative understandings of conversion that is only rooted in “European connotations of the category” and that conversion “is, of course, a Western idea” (Dube & Dube 2003: 222-3; Brekke 2003: 182). However, it is discussed that “‘not only is the concept of conversion which we understand today a category which emerges out of the Semitic religious traditions but it is also a product of modernity” (Fenech 2003: 149). Thus, the editors of the same volume discuss “the many meanings of religious conversion” on the Indian subcontinent (Robinson & Clarke 2003: 10):

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Our understanding of the processes of conversion should be broad enough to capture...variations across time and complexities across denomination and region. There does not seem to be a good enough reason to abandon the term conversion, for there is few others to replace it without difficulty... It appears much more exciting and relevant to speak of a range of situations and meanings that are a part of the field of conversion, with conversion requiring a proper initiation ritual, exclusive adherence to a set of dogmas and abandonment of all other beliefs and practices being only one possibility and, perhaps, lying at one extreme.

The diversity and complexity of the viewpoints referred to above emphasize the necessity to redefine conversion from an Indian point of view by raising question such as:

1. Whether or not conversion to Christianity should mean ceasing to be a member of one social community and joining other?

2. What aspects of his/her social life the convert should be encouraged to preserve and in what ways s/he could be helped to make those aspects the media for expression of Christian faith and love?

3. The implications of being a Hindu Christian or a Hindu disciple of Christ.

4. Whether or not Christianity should try convert people from other religions?

All of the above raise the critically important point of contextualization in the multi-religious Indian context. Are there limits to contextualization? Where does contextualization stop en syncretism begin?

1.2 Conversion and Christian Traditions

In answering these questions, the main Christian traditions in India - namely the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, all show conflicting understandings, both within and between themselves, of what constitutes Christian conversion. “Disputes among various branches of the Christian family have erupted as one view of conversion has been used to argue against the legitimacy of all competing views” (Peace, 2004:8). According to Scot (2002:1-2) “Evangelicals worry about Roman Catholic conversion, Roman Catholics are uneasy with evangelical and Pentecostal conversion; mainline denominations are uncomfortable with all of them….These group’s squabble and feud with one another, usually politely but sometime polemically.”

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5 The Evangelicals and Pentecostals are called fringe group by the Roman Catholics and main line Protestants (Hollwnweger, 1966:313).
1.2.1 The Roman Catholic Understanding of Conversion

The Catholic understanding of conversion varies between experiential and sacramental approaches. On the one hand, the experiential approach is best illustrated in Augustine’s conversion which happened in the moment when he heard a voice that told him to pick up the New Testament and read. As he did, “there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom and doubt vanished away” (quoted in Hudson, 1992:109). On the other hand, the sacramental approach regards infant baptism as the true conversion. Therefore, the question is whether conversion in the Roman Catholic Church is a personal experience or grace mediated by the church? Generally Catholic Church stresses the sacramental aspect where through the prescribed rite of initiation a person becomes part of the visible institution, the body of Christ. In other words a person becomes Christian through baptism. To quote bishop Neill (1950: 352):

Christian life begins at baptism, when by the grace of God operating through the church, original sin is taken away and the divine life is sown as a seed in the heart of man. Through Christian teaching, through life in church and through the grace of sacraments this seed can grow. Through growth may be hindered by resistance on the part of the individual, nevertheless it is a continuous process. To demand any other decisive new beginning is to deny the reality of the grace of God. What the individual is called to do is to recognize the reality of what God has already done in him and to take that seriously.

Moreover, it is for this reason that when a child is baptized the word conversion is not used but it is used in the context of baptism of a person who is a heretic or pagan (Newbigin, 1966: 312).

Post Vatican II council, the Catholic Church has moved away from the concept of mission as conversion. This lies on the fact that the Vatican II was a “council of the church about the church” (Rahner, 1974:38), where the main objective was to update the church. Rahner pointed out that “conversion cannot be isolated and reduced to a self-conscious moment” and “the administration of the sacraments in the average parish often masked the experience of conversion behind baptism, confirmation, and first communion” (quoted in Hudson, 1992:110; 115). Therefore, Rahner calls for a redefinition of conversion that should give rise to a new missiology. Hence, inculturation and dialogue have a special significance as a means to foster the relationship with other religions (Neuner, 2000:537). On one hand, inculturation means to “bring together various aspects of indigenous culture into the Christian context”, without compromising
the basic values and principles of either so as “to construct a more authentic Christian life” (Magesa, 2004:6-7). On the other hand, dialogue means “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment”. The Roman Catholic Church (Hall, 2005:6) encourages local churches to foster the *four-fold dialogue* recommended by the Church:

1. The dialogue of life, where people share their joy and sorrows and live in an open and neighbourly spirit.
2. The dialogue of action, where people from all religions work for the liberation of people.
3. The dialogue of experience/testimony, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches.
4. The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists appreciate each other’s spiritual values and deepen their own religious heritage.

The contemporary theologian Knitter has stated that conversion should not be a top priority for missionaries. Missionaries should help people to become members of the kingdom rather than to make members of the church. For him, the foremost intent of the power of the word is to fashion human life and society in accordance with the pattern of God’s reign – not to fill the pews for Sunday Mass. Thus, Knitter (1985:121) writes: “A missionary who has no Baptism to report, but who has helped Hindus, Buddhists and Christians to live together lovingly and justly is a successful disciple of Christ; a missionary who has filled the church with converts without seeking to change a society that condones dowry deaths or bonded labor is a failure.”

1.2.2 *A Protestant Understanding of Conversion*

When it comes to conversion just like in Roman Catholicism the Protestant circles have both conservative and liberal views (McKim, 1992: 131). It can be said that the conversion of Martin Luther inaugurated the Protestant reformation of the 16th Century. With new teaching and experience, conversion also became a point of “theological reflection, discussion and disagreement” (McKim, 1992: 34). For Luther the main element in conversion was faith: “faith is renewal”, and “faith is the disposition which God works in the believer’s heart, a sure trust and confidence that his sins are forgiven through the merits of Christ and that he is reconciled to the

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favour of God” (Citron, 1951:85). However, in the Calvinist tradition, (reformed) conversion, from a subjective perspective, was identified with repentance and the main emphasis was given to the election based on the sovereignty of God (Citron, 1951:102).

In the 17th and 18th Centuries as evident in the Evangelical Revival and the Great Awakening, the thought and practice of Protestantism were influenced by Pietism which adopted a negative attitude towards the world and emphasised on pious living. Therefore, conversion was understood as a pious decision in favour of God whereby “a brand is plucked from the burning fire” (cf. Zech 3:2; Amos 4:11) (Pierson, 2000:756). The modern missionary movement which was greatly influenced by the Evangelical Revival also gave importance to “save souls”. As Warneck rightly asserts, “the task of mission was to make believers of the individual heathen that they might be saved through faith and together those heathens who had become believers into Ecclesiolaev which had formed entirely out of the pietistic or Methodist fashion” (quoted in Clements, 1999: 59-60).

Mission understanding of conversion was inspired by “evolutionary theory” and “ethnocentrism” which viewed the western culture as a superior culture to the native cultures of the converts, whereby the latter were demonized and uncultured. Therefore, “the missionaries were sent not only to save the “heathen” people’s souls from damnation, but also to civilize them and to elevate the “uncultured” people to be like the “cultured” western Christians, thus dismantling the culture and context of the gospel” (Pachuau, 2000:112). In other words, Samarth (1980:97) states the aim of protestant mission in India “was the extension of the church and the extinction of other faiths.”

A shift in the above mentioned mission understanding of conversion from a horizontal movement (from one religion to another) to a vertical movement (towards God) became evident soon after India’s independence, when national consciousness emerged among Indian churches. It took a rapid leap after the World Council of Churches meeting at New Delhi in 1961, the first such meeting in a pluralistic context (Levison, 1991:232).

The emerging national consciousness gave rise to the view that the Indian Church remains a “potted plant” or “transplanted church” without any deep roots in Indian culture. The alienation of Indian Christianity from Indian culture is a serious stumbling block for the mission of the
church, which is considered foreign, a threat to nationality and cohesive with colonial powers (Philip, 1976:174). This alienation from the culture, according to Ariarajah (2000:233) was due to “the fear of syncretism, the fear of compromising the uniqueness of Christ and fear of losing the urgency of mission”. In such a context the theologians and churches looked at the necessity of redefining the traditional understanding of conversion according to the context, keeping in mind that the term conversion is understood differently in different contexts. For instance, Samartha (1999:168) states, “Conversion, instead of being a vertical movement toward God, a genuine renewal of life, has become a horizontal movement of groups of people from one community to another, denoting statistical expansion, very often backed by economic affluence, organizational strength and technological power.”

1.2.3 Evangelical and Pentecostal Understanding of Conversion

Even though Evangelicals and Pentecostals have differences in practice and in certain theological positions yet they both have a common understanding of conversion. Peace (2004:8) states, “In both traditions conversion plays a central role. One cannot be considered a Christian unless one has been converted- and the more one’s conversion resembles Paul’s Damascus experience, the better. This kind of conversion is sudden, happens on a certain day at a specific time, and is triggered by an encounter of some sort (with truth, with Jesus, with conviction of sin, with the plan of salvation, etc.) that marks the beginning point of the Christian life.”

This conversion experience [instant] becomes an entry way to Christian life for both Evangelical and Pentecostals. However for the Pentecostals this individual conversion experiences should be coupled with the unique Pentecostal experience of “baptism in the Holy Spirit”.

1.3 Conflicting Views and its Impact on the Mission of Church

These different views of conversion and the resulting disputes among different Christian traditions have a negative impact on the mission of the church. “One’s view of conversion is significant, as it shapes and determines one’s view of evangelism” (Peace, 2004:8). This matter therefore has “deep missiological significance” and tremendous repercussions in a pluralistic society like India (Peace, 2004: 8). For example, in the states of Orissa, Kandhamal and Tamil Nadu, atrocities were committed against Christians by Hindu activists who accused Christians of aggressive evangelism and intolerant towards Hinduism. For them conversion was a
unacceptable as it was “violence against humanity” and “an attack on Hindu nationhood” (Kim, 2003: 167). Instead of condemning these attacks and accusations, mainstream churches – the Catholic Church and the Church of South India (CSI) distanced themselves from these accusations by stating that those responsible were fringe group churches “who claim that Jesus is the only savior and use derogatory language about Hindu deities” (Arun, 2008: 15). However, the main line churches are engaged in bearing witness and are not interested in conversion – make people change their religion but is devoted to the ministry of compassion and love (Kremmer, 1999:60).

These conflicting views and accusation amongst Christian denominations have not benefited the main line churches because in the Indian context the Hindu fundamentalists do not understand the difference between conversion and proselytism, as distinguished by Christian writers. This disunity among the Christian churches provided an opportunity for Hindu fundamentalist groups like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (eight months subsequent to the above incident, i.e. August 23 2008), to blame Christians for the murder of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his disciples in the Kandhamal district of the eastern state of Orissa. Although Maoists (extreme Marxists) claimed responsibility for the murder, Hindu extremist groups blamed local Christians for it. In the violence that ensued 58 Christians were killed – Thousands of houses and churches were burned or destroyed, and around 50,000 people were rendered homeless (Anon., 2008:3).

These different views among Christians are often taken over by Hindu fundamentalists to prove their point that “if Christians themselves are divided on the issue of conversion, then how can they claim that the bible has explicitly commanded them to convert the other?” (Shourie, 2001: 212-13).

Furthermore, in an article entitled, “Missionary position”, which has been displayed for two years on the website of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the author, David Frawley, an American Catholic, stated (quoted in Stanley, 2003:315):

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9 Arun Shourie was the former minister of Disinvestment, Communication and Information Technology in the Bharatiya Janata party government.
Missionary activity always upholds an implicit psychological violence, however discretely it is conducted. It is aimed at turning the minds and hearts of the people away from their native religion to one that is generally unsympathetic and hostile to it. Missionary activity and conversion, therefore, is not about freedom of religion. It is about the attempt of one religion to exterminate the other. Such an exclusive attitude cannot promote tolerance, understanding or resolve communal tensions. The missionary is like a salesman targeting people in their homes or like an invader seeking to conquer. Such disruptive activity cannot promote social harmony. Conversion is inherently an unethical practice and inevitably breeds unethical results.

The Sang parivar (Ramachandran, 2011:68), quoting the World Council of Churches (W.C.C) document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World” stated that conversion should not be the motive of churches in India rather to abide by the guidelines laid out by WCC, namely that “the mission of the church is not to be found in seeking converts, but in converting our world to become a world where justice reigns and human dignity is a commandment” (quoted in Bonk, 2011:195). They prefer talking about Missio Dei, the mission of God, which provides a new lens for looking at the world and humanity, in contrast to the traditional understanding of the world as a “desolate place abandoned by God the redemption of which missionaries were sent to proclaim, the world came to be identified as locus for God’s mission” (Scherer, 1987:107). Here mission is not understood in the plural but in singular where all Christian churches along with people of other religious traditions are called to participate in God’s mission. Therefore, instead of converting the other the Missio Dei concept calls for the conversion of church in her life style and mission in four areas:-

1. a turn of Activism to Contemplation
2. a turn of Individualism to Collaboration and Teamwork
3. a turn of an Attitude of Conquest to another of Dialogue
4. a turn of being the Evangelizer to accept being Evangelized

In such an anti conversion environment, it is important to have a clear biblical view of conversion, based on a clear view of contextualization, especially in the pluralistic context of India which could serve as a basis for the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society, as well as the renewal of church life in contemporary India.

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1.4 **Problem Statement**

Strong differing views on mission, contextualization and conversion among different Christian traditions seem to have a negative impact on evangelism in the context of religious pluralism in India. What seems to be missing is a common biblical understanding of conversion, which could serve as a basis for the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society, as well as the renewal of church life in contemporary India.

The specific research questions that will be considered are the following:

1. How are the concepts of mission, contextualization and conversion defined in the Bible, and how do they relate to each other? Can there be mission without conversion?

2. How do perspectives on mission and conversion differ among Christian traditions?

3. What are some of the missiological challenges faced in relation to conflicting ideas of contextualization and conversion?

4. How does the theme of conversion contribute to the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society?

5. How does the theme of conversion contribute to the renewal of the life of the church in India today?

1.5 **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

1.5.1 **Aims**

Strong differing views on mission, contextualization and conversion among different Christian traditions have a negative impact on evangelism in the context of religious pluralism in India. In this thesis, the researcher will seek a biblical redefinition of conversion and contextualization in order to contribute in a meaningful way to the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society and the renewal of church life in contemporary India.
1.5.2 **Objectives**

In order to realise the aim mentioned above, the following objectives will serve to guide the research:

1. To arrive at a biblical definition of mission, contextualization and conversion and their relation to each other
2. To explore the different views on conversion and contextualization in various Christian traditions
3. To explore the missiological challenges faced in relation to conflicting understandings of conversion and contextualization
4. To explore the significance of differing views on conversion and contextualization for the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society
5. To explore the contribution that a biblical view on conversion and contextualization could make to the renewal of the life of the church in India.

1.6 **CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

In the Indian context, where widely differing views on mission, contextualization and conversion among Christian traditions have made effective evangelism very difficult, a biblically — defined common understanding of mission, contextualization and conversion will contribute significantly to the discourse on the place of the church in the Indian society and to the renewal of the Indian church.

1.7 **METHODOLOGY**

A multi-disciplinary approach will be used in this study:

1. Exegetical and hermeneutical methods will be used to define a biblical understanding of mission and conversion. More specifically the “Syntactical — Theological Method” will be used as described by Walter C. Kaiser (2000).
2. An analysis of literature referring to the theological, anthropological and cultural aspects of conversion — in order to explore the different views on conversion and contextualization among various Christian traditions in India.
3. A historical and literary analysis of the teaching and practice of conversion in mission work in India — in order to explore the missiological challenges faced in relation to conflicting understandings of conversion and contextualization.

4. A critical synthesis of the results of the above — in order to explore the significance of differing views of conversion and contextualization for the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society.

5. A critical synthesis of the results of the above — in order to explore the contribution that a biblical view of conversion and contextualization could make to the renewal of the life of the church in India.

1.8 A Schematic Representation of the Correlation Between Points 2, 3 & 5

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM STATEMENT</th>
<th>AIM &amp; OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>METHODOLOGY</th>
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<td>Strong differing views on Mission, contextualization and conversion among different Christian traditions seem to have a negative impact on evangelism in the context of religious pluralism in India. What seems to be missing, is a common biblical understanding of conversion, which could serve as a basis for the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society, as well as the renewal of church life in contemporary India.</td>
<td>In this thesis, the researcher will seek a biblical redefinition of conversion and contextualization in order to contribute in a meaningful way to the discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society and for the renewal of church life in contemporary India.</td>
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<td>Exegetical and hermeneutical methods will be used to define a biblical understanding of mission, contextualization and conversion.</td>
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CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONVERSION

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In today’s society conversion is understood differently. For some it is a change of religion but for others a divine encounter in life or a psychological experience, which has resulted in radical change in one’s behaviour. In Christian traditions the experience of conversion unites all Christians but, at the same time, it divides them into myriads of groups. As Scott (2002:1) rightly pointed out, “There are ample stories of conversion to tell, sadly, telling of those stories fragment the church into groups of listeners that prefer one way of telling the story over all the other telling of the same story of God’s grace.” This underlines the importance and need for a study of the biblical concept of conversion, the basis that the Christian faith is established in Bible. Moreover, although, there is no single word that in the Old and New Testaments that covers the whole concept (Walsh & Middleton, 2008:196) yet the call to conversion resounds throughout the Bible (Fleming, 1990:74). Therefore, we begin with the understanding of conversion in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament.

2.1 Old Testament and Conversion

There are two different schools of thought among the Christian scholars with regard to mission as conversion in the Old Testament. Scholars like Achard (1962:482) point that there was a limited centrifugal mission of Israelite in the Old Testament even though this was not deliberate attempt on the part of Israel. Hubbard (1988:120) also states that “the Old Testament has no fully developed idea of conversion” and for Bock (1996:118) “the concept of conversion is authentically very rare in the Old Testament.” Accordingly, David Bosch (1991:17), in his magisterial survey Transforming Mission, highlights the Old Testament mission in just a few pages and gives an entire chapter entitled “Reflections on the New Testament as a Missionary Document”.11 However, Kaiser (2000) and Wright (2010) argue that in the Old Testament there

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11 David Bosch (1991:16-20) in his 500 pages of book “Transforming Mission” only devoted four pages to mission in the Old Testament. One of the reasons for such response would be due to Bosch understanding of mission as crossing frontiers for the sake of the gospel and therefore in this sense mission was limited in Old Testament. Similarly, Gerald Anderson (ed) “theology of the Christian mission” (1961) consiting of 313 pages only devotes 20 pages to survey the Old Testament mission.
is clear evidence of mission in the sense of converting and saving the world through Israel. Therefore, the important question one needs to ask is whether these schools present an accurate description of the understanding of conversion in the Old Testament. In such a climate the following study goes deeper than a lexical study - such study will be insufficient taking into account that the whole the Old Testament notion of conversion is “embedded in the covenantal makeup of the Old Testament” (Lunde, 2000:726). However, we will look into the words that are used to denote conversion in the Old Testament and then will delve into the convenental usage of conversion.

2.1.1 The Term שׁוּב (shuv)

The verb שׁוּב is the most common term used to describe conversion in the Old Testament. It denotes “the personal aspect of turning away from former direction, from sin, and turning to a forgiving God” (Eichrodt, 1961:465-467). It is usually translated into English as turn or return and in this sense the word shuv is translated as repentance\(^\text{12}\) in most of the English translations\(^\text{13}\) (Kavunkal, 2005:230).

The word shuv according to Thompson and Elmer (1997:55) always concurs with two synonyms: “swr” (turn aside or depart) and “pnh” (to turn or face in one of several directions). Whereas the term “swr” denotes change in allegiance, exclusively in most of the case referring to religious apostasy (Exod. 32:8) (cf. Soggin, 1999:1312-17); “Pnh” describes, though not so frequently, a shift in one’s spiritual position (e.g. Deut. 31:18; Jer. 2:27) (Thompson, 1997:56). However, שׁוּב derives a different meaning based on the context yet interrelated to each other. For instance, when the person becomes the subject of action then שׁוּב denotes change of mind, repent or turning of an individual. But when the person becomes the object of action then the שׁוּב denotes the person involved leads or brings back the other to repentance. Although in both these

\(^{12}\) Even though Nacham is an important word to denote repentance in the Old Testament I will not engage due to its limited occurrence in relation to repentance of human being. For instance, of the 108 occurrences in the Old Testament, only three (Jer 8:6; 31:19; Jb 42:6) of those usages refer to the repentance of human beings and rest of the time it refers to God cf. Freedmon (1998:638-679)

\(^{13}\) Three times the term shuv is translated as conversion in Kings James Version (KJV) (Ps. 19:7; 51:13; Isa. 6:10) (Ross, 2000:1).
cases the word carries positive connotation yet it can also be used in negative sense- for example an “act of faithlessness, rebellion and back sliding” (Van Gemeren, 1997:44).

2.1.2 **Covenantal Usage of שׁוּב**

Holladay (1958) who did a study of 1064 occurrences of שׁוּב in the Old Testament reveals that the word שׁוּב has different meanings but, at the same time, he indicates that שׁוּב commonly refers to “movement in an opposite direction in which one was going with the assumption that one will arrive again at the initial point of departure” (Holladay, 1958:54). Thus, the basic meaning of שׁוּב was “to return”. But this word שׁוּב was employed in a unique way when it was used in the context of Israel. This uniqueness according Holladay (1958:116-57) is in relationship to covenant -“covenantal usage” of שׁוּב. “Covenantal usage” means, a change of loyalty on the part of both Israel and God for each other. But most of the case it was Israel that turned towards Yahweh by forsaking the evil and showing wholehearted commitment to covenant loyalty through obedience (Duane, 2002:738). McConville (2002:426) notes, “The repenting is at the same time a returning, that is, to an obedience required in the Horeb covenant itself. It is primarily a spiritual act. However, in so far as this returning cannot be reduced to strict pre-condition, and is both command and promise, it can also prefigure the physical returning to land”. This repenting and returning based on the Sinai covenant is what was proclaimed by the prophets to Israel which are surveyed below.

2.1.3 **The Usage of שׁוּב in the Prophets**

The call to turn and return to God is a sturdy subject of prophetic tradition in the Old Testament addressed either to the individual or to the nation in general (Isa. 55:1; Ezek. 33:11). In this sense one of the focal topics of the prophecy was conversion (Baylis, 1990:23-25). That is, Israel’s conversion from the sin of idolatry and ritualism of the early fervour of exodus days, and a return

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14 Of Course there is a disagreement about the number of occurrences of the word shuv. Brown counts 1050 occurrences of shuv whereas Laubach notes 1056 occurrences in the Old Testament.
15 Of the 164 usage of שׁוּב which clearly refers to the covenant relationship between Israel and God, 123 times Israel is the subject of return or being called upon to return to God. Only 6 of the 164 occurrences refer to God returning to Israel. Yet 5 of these 6 references are conditional return of God to Israel in accordance with what Israel did in reference to her relationship with God (Holladay, 1958:119-20).
to faithfulness of Yahweh who is consistent with his promises. What follows is the conversion motif in the message of the prophets dealt under two subheadings: conversion by means of chastisement, and conversion by means of restitution.

2.1.3.1 Conversion by Means of Chastisement

When God administers divine punishment to the one who has broken the convenetal treaty, the individual goes through a penitential process as witnessed in some of the prophetic books. This process is termed as “retributive desert” (Smilansky, 2006:516). The important presupposition of “retributive desert” model is that the individual who commits an offense knew at the time of offense that he was morally responsible for his/ her action and was ready to comprehend the association between the wrongdoing and the consequent punishment. Therefore, if one tenaciously acknowledged the idea that punishment serves as a retribution for one’s wrongdoing, then punishment serves as an atoning function in and by itself (Sterba, 1977:349-362). This model is used by the prophets Amos, Joel, and Zechariah who reminded Israel about their wrong doing and explicitly showed how the profundity of Israel’s degeneracy justified exile, starvation and so forth. The prophets trusted that Israel’s acknowledgment of God’s reaction as just could be an open method for recognizing sin and making good reparation for it.

2.1.3.1.1 The Usage of מִשְׁבַּת in Amos

In Amos chapter 4: 6-12,16 we read:

6. I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned(שְׁבַת · וְלֹא) to me, declares the L ORD.

7. I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up.

8. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned (שְׁבַת · וְלֹа) to me, declares the L ORD.

9. Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned (שְׁבַת · וְלֹא) to me, declares the L ORD.

16 All biblical quotation in this research is taken from Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) (2011).
10. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned (שַׁבְת וְלֹא) to me, declares the LORD.

11. I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned (שַׁבְת וְלֹא) to me, declares the LORD.

12. Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God.

In this section the expression “yet you didn’t come back to me, says the LORD” (Amos, 4:6, 8-11) is repeated five times – it clearly points out that Amos no longer calls Israel to repent, but rather, he thinks back on a past filled with the inability to return. Over the years Yahweh has attempted to impugn Israel for her wrongdoings by natural perils (famine, drought, agricultural blight, locusts, pestilence, sword and a Sodom and Gomorrah-like earthquake) and national defeats. As a father reprimands his child to discipline and bring things in order God also has acted against Israel in the same manner (cf. Deut. 8:5). But none of these calamities have brought back Israel to God - “Yet you didn’t return to me says the Lord”. All has been futile (v.9) (cf. Hosea 7:10; Is. 9:13; Jer. 2:30). Therefore, he states that now Israel cannot escape from the impending judgement that awaits her which is more severe than the seven plagues, as she has missed her last opportunity to repent. This time it is God himself who will judge Israel and thus Amos calls Israel to face a dreadful experience with the God of Israel (Amos 4:12-13). However, through this herald of impending judgement it seems that Amos makes the last attempts to restore the people back to Yahweh by recapitulating the divine lesson of history, seeking covenant renewal17 and then pleading and interceding for Israel to save them from judgement. Amos demands Israel to repent from societal sin (2:6-7; 5:4-5) than cultic sin which is radical in itself.

17 Although Amos makes no direct reference to the covenant yet it is argued that Amos 4:4-13 is a call to repentance through a type of covenant renewal where vs. 6-12 can be vividly understood in the context of cultic renewal covenant (cf. Exod. 19:2; Jer. 61:12) (Jeremias,1998:69).
2.1.3.1.2 **The Usage of בֹּשׁ in Joel**

12. Even now, declares the LORD, return (בֹּשֵׁב) to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

13. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return (בֹּשֵׁב) to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

14. Who knows? He may turn (בֹּשֵׁב) for the LORD your God. (2:12-14).  

In the context of the plague of locust that destroyed the land, Joel calls Israel to return to YHWH, as seen in the above passage, so that a greater punishment that God has planned for those who will not return (1:4; 2:15) would be averted.

In the book of Joel, there are no examples of how the people has lost its relationship or turned away from Yahweh. Rather, the call to return presupposes that the addressees know why they should return and from what they should return. Here Joel calls forth people to repentance based on the theological truth that he is “your God”, the God of the covenant (Allen, 1976:80). The phrase “Your God” resonate the traditional covenant formula that Yahweh established with Israel at Mt. Sinai after the Golden Calf episode (Exod. 34:6, 7). This has become a creedal statement and was imbibed in the writings of Old Testament writers. It is this creedal statement that Joel uses as a catalyst to invite Israel to repentance (2:12) after depicting Yahweh as the awful enemy of His people (2:1-11). He quotes the second part of the covenantal formula and fuses it with more affable phrase “relents of evil” and leaves out the phrase “visiting the guilt of the fathers”, to appeal to the people to repent based on God’s character (Dentan, 1963:36).

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18 Dentan (1963:35) regards this passage as a liturgy for repentance. Joel 2:12-14 picks exactly the wordings of Hosea 14:2-4 with Joel using the the preposition *ad* (“up to”) instead of *el* (“towards) along with *sub* (Schart, 2007:142).

19 This style is normally referred to as *leerstelle* which means “information gap”, a term coined by Wolfgang Iser. This point to the fact that some information that is required in order to have a coherent meaning of the text is missing – this gap is filled up by other writings (among the twelve). In this way, each writing supports the other to become on complete prophetic word to God’s people (Rudiger, 2012:290).

20 Dentan (1963:36) calls this phrase “your God” an example of “propositional theology” where the character of God is dealt out without expounding to the mighty acts of God on Israel’s behalf.

21 Num.14:18;Neh.9:17;Ps.:86:15; 103:8;145:8; Joel 2:13;Jon.4:2;Nah.1:3
2.1.3.1.3 The Usage of שׁב in Zechariah

3. Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: Return (שׁוּב) to me, declares the LORD Almighty, and I will return (וְאָשׁׁ֣וּב) to you, says the LORD Almighty.

4. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: Turn (שׁוּב) from your evil ways and your evil practices. But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.

5. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever?

6. But did not my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, Overtake your forefathers? Then they repented (וּוַיָשׁׁ֣וּב) and said, the Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do just as he determined to do (1:3-6).

The prophet Zechariah, who is considered as one of the latest prophets, loads his message with the word שׁב (“return, turn back”), pointing to both God’s promise to return to Jerusalem and a warning for his people to turn back to God. Zechariah reminds them about their forefather’s apathy to repent and aftermath as mentioned in the above verses.

Zechariah reminder of the forefathers non-repentance and its aftermath – aims to advise the present generation of returnees to Zion to return to a covenantal relationship with Yahweh (1:1-6). He enquires about their forefathers- “where are they now?” His response is that the forefathers perished because they “did not obey or give heed”. Thus with a provocative tone Zechariah reminds the present generation that if they did not return to the Lord with “a thorough conversion of the heart” they also faced the same fate as their forefathers (Hartle, 1992:147). Although the prophets who preached repentance to their forefathers have died yet the law of God remains forever. This fact was confessed in the end by their fathers who ignored the truth of

22 With regard to the division of the book of Zechariah there are differences of opinion. For some the book has two distinct units, chapters 1-8 as proto Zechariah and chapters 9-14 as Deutero Zechariah (Soggin, 1976:347). For others within the Deutero Zechariah there are two distinctions 9-11 and 12-14 coming from different authors (Eissfeldt, 1974: 437-440). This is due to the difference in literary style and content (apocalyptic style of the chapter) and non-mentioning of the name Zechariah in chapter 9-14 as seen in chapters 1-8. But conservative scholars argue for the unity of the book (Feinberg, 1979:9).

23 Despite the fact that it is hard to give a precise date to the book yet it is commonly agreed that the last five chapters are of later date than the initial eight chapters and therefore, Zechariah dates from the Persian period (Soggin, 1976:326).

24 1:3, 4, 6, 16; 4: 1; 5: 1; 6: 1; 7: 14; 8 :3, 15; 9 :8, 12; 10: 6, 9, 10; 13: 7
prophecy at their peril (Peterson, 1984:130-35). Therefore he calls them to return and in Chapter 8:14-17 the nature of this return is also spelled out where one can find two characteristics of this invitation to return which is very prominent in Zechariah and other parts of the Old Testament in the context of punishment (Baldwin, 1972:90).

1. The initiative for return is taken by God. In normal sense it is God who is credited with repentance not the people even though God retracts from his avenging judgment because of people’s repentance. But sometimes this takes a reversal order where God nullification of judgment leads people to repentance (Heschel, 1962:285) as seen in Zechariah.

2. The conditional renewal of the covenant is based on whole hearted conversion and not just return of the exile to Jerusalem and rebuidng of the temple.

3. The return was based on on personal relationship with the covenantal God and not to law or some cultic practice (Baldwin, 1972:90).

2.1.3.2 Conversion by Means of Restitution

Even though the above section explored the prophetic perspective that punishment alone entails repentance, yet Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Deuteronomic historian approach is that Punishment facilitates repentance but does not lead by itself to repentance. Rather, the impact of punishment has to be undone for genuine repentance to take place. Along these lines Israel needs to be saved from extreme devastation, and replanted in the land of Israel. Therefore, conversion is an ongoing process. That is, although Israel has trespassed, yet God repents from His previous discipline and at the same time involves himself in the restoration of Israel as the special “people of God”.

2.1.3.2.1 The Usage of שָׁוָּא in Hosea

The book of Hosea is generally considered to have two different sections: Chapters 1-3 are mainly autobiographical narrative (Ch. 1-3) and are regarded a prose narrative; chapters’s 4-14 deal with prophecies (4-14) and are regarded as poetry (Anderson and Freedman, 1980: 60). The message of the book reflects an intricate nature where on the one extreme Hosea emphatically states that Israel cannot repent, but on the other extreme he himself accepts a lady named
Gomer, who bears him children name Lo-Ruchama (unaccepted) and Lo-Ammi (not my people), which reflect God’s acceptance of his people who have abandoned God in favour of an idol due to the lack of knowledge in the land (4:1) – a knowledge of God as healer (11:3) and God desires faithfulness, justice and mercy more than cultic practice (6:6). Hosea employs the word יָדַׁע (yada) to show that Israel never lacked information about God and his laws but to denote Israel’s willful ignorance to be loyal to God’s covenantal relationship. It is such rebellious attitude on the part of Israel that led to God’s rejection of Israel’s previous attempts to repent as stated in chapter 6:3 – “let us know, let us press on to know the Lord” (Smothers, 1993:242). Therefore, for Hosea knowledge of God is “parallel to loyalty, repentance, service and love” (Smith, 1928:354). But Israel’s refusal to repent did not keep Hosea from calling people to repentance nor detered him to point to God’s continuing love and willingness to restore the people as stated in Hosea 14:2-9.

2. Take words with you and return (וּוְשׁׁ֖וּב) to the LORD say to him: Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.

3. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount warhorses. We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what out own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion.

4. I will heal their waywardness and love them freely for my anger has turned (שׁ ָׁ֥ב) away from them.

5. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; His young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an Olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.

There are various opinions with regards to the marriage of the prophet Hosea with Gomer :- 1) Some believe that this was a real depiction of what happened to Hosea, who married a whore (Smith, [s.a.]: 237). But the objection to this interpretation is: how can God command to do something unethical or morally evil (Hyatt, 1947:42) ? 2) Hosea’ marriage to Gomer reflects a parabolic or metaphorical expression – it was common in prophetic tradition to perform a symbolic deed but actually did not take place (James, 1951:233). The objection to this argument is: it is not a parable but a narrative. 3) Some scholars believe that the lady mentioned was not Gomer, rather a different lady who was actually an adulterous lady whom Hosea purchased and in the process separated from her lover to show how God will separate Israel from her sin as mentioned in Hosea 3:1 (Pfeiffer, 1941:568-69). Although, “go again love a woman” can point to another woman but it also can mean “keep on loving a woman” (Anderson, 1957:242). Therefore it refers to the woman already mentioned.

26 Throughout the book of Hosea, the prophet shows different ways in which Israel have drifted away from God. For instance, Israel had הָלַׁך (halak) “gone” after lovers (Hosea 2:5); they have חָשָׂה (shakah) “forgotten” God: “you have forgotten the law of your God” (Hosea 4:6); “Israel has forgotten his Maker” (Hosea 8:14). Israel had עָזַׁב (azab) “forsaken” God, had פָשַׁׁע (pasha) “transgressed” the law andשָׁב ר (sheber) “broken” the covenant (Hosea 8:1), had נזָר (nazar) “consecrated” themselves to a thing of shame (Hosea 9:10) (quoted in full from Smothers, 1993:240-41).
6. People will dwell again in his shade; they will flourish like the grain, they will blossom like the vine—Israel’s fame will be like the wine of Lebanon.

7. Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a flourishing juniper; your fruitfulness comes from me.”

8. Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them (Hosea14:2-8)

Although there are different important passages that deals with repentance (Hosea 2:1-23; 6:1-6) yet, the afore-mentioned passage is of great importance in comparison to the others due to its message of repentance based on restoration. The above passage can be divided into two parts, verses 2-4 and verses 5-9. Verses 2-4 deal with the exhortation to return to Yahweh and verses 5-9 deal with the promise of restoration of Israel (Emmerson, 1984: 46). The call to return was based on the covenant traditions (Brueggemann, 1968:26) of blessing and curse formula (Stuart, 1987:7-8) as reflected in the book of Hosea. It is to this covenant that of promise and obligation that Hosea is calling Israel to return. Hosea employs two terms, "to turn," and "to seek" (baqash) “to seek” to express return to Yahweh (Smother, 1993:242). יָשָׁב refers to the idea of “return” or “turn way” and שָׁבַק “to seek,” expresses the notion of seeking the favor of God. However, שָׁבַק (baqash) meaning varies as per context. For instance, שָׁבַק (baqash) can mean Israel’s turning toward Yahweh (e.g. 2:7, 3:5, 5:4, 6:1, 7:10, 11:5) and sometimes it can mean turning from Yahweh toward Egypt and Assyria for security and wealth (8:13, 9:3, 11:5) or towards false gods (e.g. 3:1, 7:16); both figuratively denotes apostasy and idolatry (Smother, 1993: 242-243).

Before the restoration Israel has to acknowledge and confess their guilt of idolatry and apostasy in three areas, which were representative of the wider aspects of backsliding- i.e. Israel’s false alliance with foreign nation (Egypt and Assyria) that led to syncretism, Israel’s false trust to gain military power and security by having a treaty with these nations that led to forsaking Yahweh, and the ultimate sin of idolatry. This confession culminates with complete trust in Yahweh who alone can provide mercy as he is the Lord of mercy and compassion.

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27 This passage is commonly read in the Sabbath during *Teshuva* period and is commonly referred to as “Sabbath of Shuva” and “Sabbath of Teshuva”. Teshuva is a time when people fast and renounce their wrong doing and return to God and commit them to walk in the ways of God. Teshuva is more than repentance it is a return not only to the past but also to the Yahweh the source of all being (Samuel, 2000:1677-1693)
This confession is accompanied by a message of forgiveness where God will turn his wrath away (שׁוּב) and heal their rejection (שׁוּב), and love them persistently (14:4-7). This healing is compared to verdant nature (as seen in the eight similes used by Hosea 14:5-7) which was affected due to the unfaithfulness on the part of Israel. Now as they have returned and sought the face of God, God will also restore them to their previous glory due to his unchanging love.

2.1.3.2.2 The Usage of שׁוּב in Jeremiah

Although the term שׁוּב and its synonyms can be commonly seen in the eight century prophetic writings, yet the term became more common in the post-exilic books as evident from the number of occurrences of שׁוּב in these books.28 However, it is generally considered that it was Jeremiah who was the first among the ancient writers to develop the idea of שׁוּב, in relation to the covenant (Holladay, 1958:145). It is believed that the theology of repentance in Jeremiah has undergone three different stages of development (quoted in Diamond, 1989:332-34).29 In the first stage, during the reign of Josiah, Jeremiah’s message to the Northern Kingdom echoed that repentance was conditional for restoration (3:6-13; 19; 4:2; 31:2-9, 15-22). Jeremiah saw “apostasy and repentance as correlative…he saw them as aspects of the same act; a changeable people must change: it has changed enough, it must change” (Holladay, 1958: 157).30 This is evident in chapter 3, for example we read:

6. During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there.

7. I thought that after she had done all this she would return (שׁוּב) to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it.

28 The term שׁוּב and its variant occur 27 times in Jeremiah, 23 times in Ezekiel and 28 times in post-exilic books (Sperling, 2004:7755).
29 This study was Unterman’s dissertation on Jeremiah entitled, “From redemption to repentance in Jeremiah: Jeremiah’s thought in transition”. According to Unterman the six passages which are the focal point of his study represent a development in the prophet’s idea on repentance/redemption. He examines these texts according to three ancient classifications: “prophecies of redemption to Ephraim for the period of the reign of Josiah” (Jer 3:6-13, 19-4:2; 31:2-9, 15-22); “prophecies of redemption to the Judeans exiled with Jehoiachin” (Jer 24:4-7; 29:10-14); and “prophecies of redemption to Judah and Ephraim on the night time of destruction”(Jer 31:27-37; 32:36-34). A series of “miscellaneous prophecies of redemption” (Jer 3:14-18; 30:1-17; 33:1-26; 42:9-12; 50-51) are also examined (quoted in Sweeney, 1990:213-215).
30 See, for example, the phrase in Jer. 3:14 “Return, faithless people” (Holladay, 1986: 120).
8. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.

9. Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.

10. In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense, declares the LORD.

11. The LORD said to me, Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah.

12. Go, proclaim this message toward the north: Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD, I will frown on you no longer, for I am faithful,’ declares the LORD, I will not be angry forever.

13. Only acknowledge your guilt - you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me, declares the LORD (Verses 6-13).

In the second stage which corresponds with the exile of Jehoiachin, Jeremiah sees repentance impossible to happen due to the fact that the punishments declared on the people have begun to materialize. Here God forbearance becomes the basis of restoration rather than repentance as we see in second Isaiah where the people are favoured not because they repented but because they have suffered for their sin. Therefore, in Jeremiah we see a shift from repentance to divine mercy as the catalyst for national restoration, as we see within the following passage (3:14-18):

6. Return, faithless people, declares the LORD, for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion.

7. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

8. In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land, declares the LORD, people will no longer say, The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.

9. At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts.
In those days the people of Judah will join the people of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your ancestors as an inheritance.

The third stage of progression of repentance in Jeremiah corresponds with the destruction of Jerusalem in BCE 587. Here Jeremiah negates the demand for repentance and focuses mainly on the deeds of Yahweh, as the main foundation of redemption and restoration, where God would set up a new covenant with Israel (31:27-37; 32:36-44). The return was to have a spiritual dimension (Huey, 1993:277), enabled by God through the circumcision the heart (Merrill 1994:387), to “transform Israel’s life from curse to blessing to show that Yahweh was determined loyal and powerful to do such an act” (Brueggemann, 2001:267).

2.1.4 Conversion of Gentiles in the Old Testament

Even though there are different opinions among scholars as to whether there was a Gentile mission in the Old Testament31 yet many recognize the importance of God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 and its universal significance. In addition, we also find the conversion narrative of Rahab, Ruth and Naaman. In what follows, we will look into Abraham’s call and Naaman narrative, as this is significant in terms of inclusive mission and also confessing God in one’s own socio-cultural context.

2.1.4.1 The Call of Abraham

Abraham is a significant figure both in the Jewish and Christian traditions. According to (Nickelsburg, 1998:151) two elements of Abraham’s life tend to dominate the Jewish and Christian post history: - “For Jews, in particular, Abraham is seen as the patriarch par excellence, the father or the great grandfather of nation and the one who first staked out the territory of Eretz Israel.32 For Christians, Abraham is also a kind of patriarch, but his foundational status lies in the paradigmatic quality of his faith.”33

Abraham not only stands as the epitome of the two traditions but also his covenantal narratives are the “pivotal text” and “the heart of the gospel” (Wright, 2006:455). The call of Abraham is

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31 On the other hand, Lohr (quoted in Achard, 1962:5-6) stated that mission to the Gentile was peripheral and not central. On the other hand Rowley (1944) defended the concept of Israel mission to nations. Moreover, Okoye (2006:24) identifies the first hint of mission in Old Testament with Genesis 1 who calls the passage a blueprint for mission.
32 See e.g.,1 Enoch93:5; apocalypse of abraham20.; Rom 11:1; 2 Cor11:22.
presented unexpectedly without any previous actions or beliefs on the part of Abraham as in the case of Noah where Noah is mentioned as righteous (Gen 6:8-9), although such descriptions about Abraham is both explicitly and implicitly- in the subsequent chapters indicate that. Nevertheless, we do find in Joshua chapter 24 reference to Abraham’s father involved in idol worship :- “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river in old time- Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor-and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, and led him through the whole land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed” (Jos. 24:2-4). This refers to Abraham’s conversion from idolatry to a living God. As Knox (1935:55) asserts, “in Judaism the great convert is Abraham”, a genuine convert (Hamilton, 1990:371) and throughout the scripture he is regarded as “the epitome of saving faith” (cf. Rom 4:1-12; Gal 3:7-9).

The call of Abraham can be seen in two stages, first in Ur of Chaldees while his father was still alive (Gen.11:31; 15:7) and then in Haran after his father had died (Gen.11:32; 12:1). God’s revelation comes to Abraham to leave Ur (Gen. 12:1-3). This revelation of God is also explicitly stated in the speech of Stephen before the members of Sanhedrin (Acts7:2), -“while he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran”. Theologically it is believed that Stephen chose this tradition (Gen 15:7) rather than Genesis 11:31 and Genesis 12:5 because he wanted to show his hearers that “God’s call to a new land was at the very root of Abraham’s earliest migration” (Kilgallen, 1976:42). Abraham previous movement before Haran “was in response to [a] divine mandate, conversely any movement towards the new land was inspired by God not just capitalized somewhere along the journey” (Kilgallen, 1976:42). Here we even see a radical view in which God is seen working with Abraham even within his religio- socio cultural at Mesopotamia. After Abraham’s call from Haran, during his sojourn to Canaan we see God appearing to Abraham at the Canaanite’s holy places. As Talman (2013:50) stated,

It has been noted that the patriarchs worshipped at or near traditional Canaanite shrines, such as at Schechem (Gen 12:6), Bethel (Gen 12:8), Hebron (Gen 13:18) and Beersheba (Gen 21:33). In their early period, Israelites lived next to Canaanites in Schechem, even though the latter were Baal worshippers. Despite being immigrants from the desert, the Patriarchs and early Israelites assimilated into the agriculturalist cultures of the Canaanites adopting their languages, architecture, farming, and legal system.

This shows that Abraham was tolerant with Canaanite religious context and in many instances the pagan people of the land was assisting him to fulfil the mission that God had entrusted on him. As Kuschel (1995:228) asserts,
The Abraham of Genesis is not an apocalyptic fighter, fanatical exclusivist, a raging iconoclast. There is no record of Abraham storming through the foreign lands rooting out altars of other gods. It is also important to note that Abraham himself was assisted in fulfillment of his mission by a diverse cast of characters, including the Pharaoh of Egypt and Abimelech, who were generous with Abraham, a foreigner, even though Abraham’s duplicity created great suffering for both of them (Gen. 12:16-18;20).

Senior and Stuhlmueller (1983:18), state that Abraham was tolerant because he saw the “contribution of pagan religion on him as natural and necessary”. Moreover, “Despite this system’s [Canaanite] proclivity to sexual excess in the Baal worship, Abraham recognized a dignity and genuineness about it, and through its instrumentality he acquired his own religious language, style of worship, and system of moral values.... Only by first accepting the worth and authenticity of preexistent religions were biblical people able to purify, challenge and develop them.”

In Genesis 12, Abraham received the mandate to be a blessing (Carroll, 2000:24). Kaiser (2000:7) sees Genesis 12 as the Great Commission of the Old Testament, “The Bible actually begins with the theme of missions in the Book of Genesis and maintains that driving passion throughout the entire Old Testament and on into the New Testament. If an Old Testament Great Commission must be identified, then it will be Genesis 12:3.” The mission of Abraham was to be a blessing to all nations. There are four parallel passages that can be identified with Genesis 12 – the notion of blessing in each of these occurrences was translated by the same Greek word in Septuagint as illustrated in table below (Eavenson, 2011: 68):

**Occurrences of be a blessing in Genesis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verse</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Verb Tense</th>
<th>LXX</th>
<th>Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 12:3</td>
<td>וְנִבְרְכֶנָה</td>
<td>n3cp+vcs</td>
<td>ἐνευλογηθῆσονται</td>
<td>ifp3p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 18:18</td>
<td>וְנִבְרְכֶנָה</td>
<td>n3cp+vcs</td>
<td>ἐνευλογηθῆσονται</td>
<td>ifp3p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 22:18</td>
<td>וְהִתְבָרֲכֶנָה</td>
<td>ht3cp+vcs</td>
<td>ἐνευλογηθῆσονται</td>
<td>ifp3p</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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34 It is also true that some scholars do not see a command for Abram or his descendants to be blessing but rather just a statement about their identity. Cf. Gruneberg, (2003: 170-90).

35 This table is quoted in full from Eavenson (2011).

36 The abbreviation n3cp+vcs stands for niphal perfect 3rd common plural with vav consecutive. The abbreviation ht3cp+vcs stands for hithpael perfect 3rd person common plural with vav consecutive. The abbreviation ifp3p stands for indicative future passive 3rd person plural (quoted in full from Eavenson, 2011).
The debate does not center around what the word means or does not mean in a particular context (Gruneberg, 2003:34) but around the various forms of הָרָקָּךְ (barak) - whether barak should be taken “as passive, reflexive, reciprocal, middle, or some mixture” (Eavenson, 2011: 69). The usage of הָרָקָּךְ word, along with various forms, will affect the missional emphasis of the passage.

For instance, if used in a reflective or reciprocal sense, it would mean blessing secured by the nation through one’s own action (Eavenson, 2011:69). A passive or middle sense would reflect nation receiving the blessing which was initiated by others (Eavenson, 2011:69). However, the passive meaning is generally accepted. This is because the “the reflexive meaning will be in conflict with the New Testament citation and interpretation” (Allis, 1927:267) where Paul calls the Genesis’ declaration as “the gospel in advance” (Wright, 2011:11) to bless the nation through the Abrahamic promise (Gal. 3:8) - in spite of the fact that in the New Testament the Jews held an exclusivist approach of Abrahamic blessing (Jn 8:33) where they insisted the Gentile Christian should follow Mosaic law to inherit Abrahamic blessing. But Paul refuted such claims and widens it by arguing that “those who believe [faith in Jesus) are the descendant of Abraham” (Gal 3:7-9). This seems to be a radical inculcivist approach. This inclusivity has an apocalyptic perspective- where as a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise- “people from every nation, tribe, language, and people are gathered among the redeemed in the new creation” (Rev. 7:9) (Eavenson, 2011:70). In this context Goheen (2011:191) rightly states that, Bible clearly projects God’s intention to “bring about a renewed, restored heaven and earth - a mission that includes all nations and all peoples for all earth’s history”.

2.1.4.2 Conversion of Naaman

Among all the stories associated with the Prophet Elisha, the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-19a) is the “most highly developed plot and contains the largest number of character” (Hobbs, 1992:968). The story is excellent in “its representation of the international manners of the age and also in its fine sketching of the actors,” (James, 1951:373) “communicated in very few words” (Auld, 1986:187).
Naaman who is the commander of the army of Syria (a country north of northern kingdom of Israel) has a serious skin disease, but probably not leprosy as understood today (Austel, 1988:191). Naaman comes down to meet with the king of Israel with a letter from the Syrian king as a result of his wife’s Israelite maid witnessing about the prophet in Samaria. Naaman’s journey to Israel was made possible because the story takes place at “a certain relaxation of hostilities,” between Syria and the Northern Kingdom (Hobbs, 1992:68).

The zenith of the Naaman narrative is his confession of faith in YHWH after the miraculous healing of leprosy by dipping in Jordan seven times: “I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel…your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord” (2 Kings 5:15 &17). This confession indicates a major shift in his worldview that leads to a new religious commitment on the part of Naaman. Here “the restoration of Naaman’s flesh leads to a new religious commitment” where Naaman denies the existence of any other god except YHWH (Cohn, 2000:38). He declares that the Lord, who resides in Israel, is the true God. Although Naaman’s confession was on Israel’s ‘regional’ God yet the narrative as a whole points towards YHWH as “the true God of the earth and His power goes beyond the limits of ethnic, religious, and national boundaries” (Smith, 1994: 207 ). It is this awareness that convicts Naaman from making any sacrifices to other gods.

Although there is agreement among scholars regarding the confession of Naaman yet his petitions that follow confession leads to skepticism among scholars regarding his confession:“‘Was Naaman’s conversion partial or perfect?’ (Nwaoru, 2008: 35) ‘Was his faith faultless or bound to his old belief system?’ (Buttrick, 1962: 490) ‘Was his confession monotheistic, henotheistic, or monolatristic?’” (Kaiser, 2000: 46).  

37 Although none of the kings are stated by name yet it can be drawn from the context that Israelite king probably was Jehoram (852-841 B.C.E) and if so, Syrian king may have been Ben-Hadad II (870-842 B.C.) (Pitard, 1992:663).

38 The word used here in verse 2 Kings 5:14 is tabal (tabal) instead of rahas (rahas) as in verses 10, 12, 13. This show that result is more important than the act in the narrative. In such usage, the meaning of immersion has changed due to which Naaman’s dipping is not simply immersion (הַרָּהַע) but a baptism (בָּאָב) (Day, 1907:201)

Amidst such difference of opinions how will one view the conversion of Naaman? To answer this question one needs to evaluate the three petitions Naaman puts before Elisha, without which it is premature to accept Naaman’s subsequent petitions and “behavior as indicative of genuine conversion” (Baeq, 2010:200).

2.1.4.2.1 Naaman’s Requests

After being healed from the leprosy Naaman return to the Elisha along with his servants and address himself as אֲבֵדָךָ (Je abdeka), “Your servant”. This way of addressing himself as “Your servant” is a radical change from his previous response to Elijah, where he was annoyed with Elijah’s message: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times”. With the new found faith Naaman’s body and heart became like a new born child (2 Kings 5:14). Here the word השב [שב (wayyasab) and השב (wayyasab)] are used to indicate both his internal transformation more than his physical movement. Later on, he puts forth three requests before Elisha, namely, to accept his gifts; to take some dirt from Israel back to his country; to be pardoned of bowing down at the Rimmon temple.

2.1.4.2.1.1 First request: Please Accept this Gifts

In response to the healing, Naaman offers the gifts [before a payment but now an offering] to Elisha that was brought from his country as per “his religious and traditional customs of his country” (Brueggemann, 2007:269). However, Elisha rejected the gifts by saying, “As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing” (2 Kings 5:16). But why did Elisha refused Naaman’s gift? There are three possibilities as suggested by scholars. Firstly, Elisha wanted to show the difference between true prophets and heathen prophets who demanded money for their service. Secondly, the negation on the part of Elisha shows the “magnanimity of Yahweh and also the relative power of Elisha and Naaman” (Sweeney, 2007:300). Thirdly, if the gift was accepted it would have indicated that the miracle was done by Elisha and the glory would be taken away from YHWH. But here Elisha points Naaman towards YHWH (Ellul, 1972:32-34).

40 In this word Naaman’s commitment to Yahweh is also revealed.
41 This word sub (with preposition ’e l or min) is used in the Old Testament to indicate spiritual conversion. Cf. Hos 6:1; 7:10; 14:3; Jer. 3:7; 1 Kings 8:33, 48, etc. (Brown, 2001: 997).
2.1.4.2.1.2 Second Request - Dirt of the Land to Build Altar

When Elisha declines Naaman’s request of accepting his endowments, Naaman says, “If not,” which demonstrates a contingent explanation. The dismissal of the previous appeal provided a reason for the second request, to get “two mules load of earth” (2 Kings 5:17). Naaman’s request is for some dirt (adamah). Here one can see Naaman change of attitude towards the land of Israel - Naaman once rejected the water (2 Kings 5:12) now requested for some dirt of the land to be taken back to his country to build an altar on the soil taken from Israel in order to practice his new faith. (Cohn, 2008:178). This is because the Gentiles who lived in Ancient Near East believed that each countries with a chief deity (who lived supreme in their land) can be worshipped in another country if the worship took place on the soil of the deity’s orginal land/country (Maier, 1997:187).

42 But Keil and Delitzsch (2001:226) suggest that this shows “idolatrous superstition” rooted in Naaman’s belief in polytheistic territorial concept of divinity. Nwaoru (2008:37) however sees this petition as “monolaterous intention” to worship God exclusively rather than believing in the existence of only one God (Monotheism). But Gray (1970:507) suggests that as per the context Naaman’s reason “consented to monotheism but convention bound him practically to monolatry”. 43 In addition, Von Rad (2001:35) sees a “sacramental attachment” to the petition of soil to maintain his faith in YHWH in his own country. This “sacramental attachment” belief can also be seen among the exiled people who brought soil from Palestine to build an altar in foreign land (Rofe, 1988:130) as per the requirement stated in Exodus 20:24 that legislate that the altar be constructed of soil (adamah).

However, the above perspective is only a partial interpretation of the semiotic structure; however, a fuller view needs to be highlighted. Although Naaman confessed his exclusive faith in Yahweh (2 Kings 5:17b) (in his heart and mind, he had already replaced Rimmon with YHWH) yet in his theological frame, Naaman was unable to detach the meaning [faith] from the form [culture].

42 Cf. 1King 20:23; 2King 17:26.
43 Eissfeldt (1974:546) believes Naaman can easily accept monotheism because even in cult of Baal-shamaim in Syria there was a tendency towards monotheism.
44 It is generally believed that the synagogue of Nahardea in Persia was built on the stone and mud imported from Jerusalem (Montgomery, 1951:377).
45 Paul G. Hiebert(1989: 103) states that even though the cultural form and meaning are inseparable entity in scientific theory yet it need to be separated especially in intercultural approaches to impart a different meaning (biblical based) through the accustomed cultural form (Hiebert, 1989:110-115).
representation of the deity. When he realized that YHWH was the only true God, he immediately attaches YHWH to the dirt from Israel. In essence, he has taken a biblical meaning, YHWH, and attached it to a pagan framework of worshiping a deity”.

Although this can be considered a syncretistic approach, yet the origin of the material that made up the altar will enable Naaman to never forget that he is infact worshipping the God of Israel. That altar represents no other being but YHWH (Baeq, 2010: 201). Moreover, Naaman did not want to be a secret believer nor a participant in religious rites in Jerusalem anda worshipper of YHWH in the same way as the Israelites. Rather he wanted to confess YHWH in the most reverent way by remaining within his socio-religious and cultural community. Thus, Naaman’s inner intention behind the request for soil of the land to buld altar can be interpreted as Naaman’s desire to worship YHWH.

Here one needs to be aware that the forms used to express faith do not carry the same meaning as it crosses the cultural boundaries and therefore one should not be compelled to impose one’s cultural forms upon the new believers. Therefore the absolutization of the Christian tradition should be avoided, in other words it should be contextualized appropriately within the hearers cultural setting as in the case of Naaman and that of Khrist bhaktas (devotees of Jesus) in India’s context (see Chapter 6). This can only happen if one sees culture as friend to God rather than an enemy. As Kraft (1979:113-114) states “culture is not in and of itself either an enemy or a friend to God or humans,” and “God chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the arena of his interaction with people”.

2.1.4.2.1.3 Third Request- Permission to Worship in Rimmon’s Temple

The third request is considerably more controversial than the second. Naaman says, “When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down, and he leaning on my arm and I bow there also- when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this”(2 Kings 5: 18b). Naaman’s request of worshiping YHWH in the temple of Rimmon clearly raises different opinions among the scholars:

1. This request indicates Naaman’s concern for his new life within his old social and religious structure (Maier, 1992:13)

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{Rimmon is known as Hadad, or Baal, the ancient Semitic storm god.}
3. Smith (1994, 210) asserts that this petition is an excuse to get permission for “worshiping another god”.
4. Nwaoru (2008: 35) states because of the third petition Naaman experienced only a “partial conversion”.
5. Brueggemann (2007:269) regards Naaman’s petition as “only a social requirement and not a serious theological act”.

Of course all these opinions seem to be valid when one generally looks at the request but a “structural semiotic analysis” reveals a chiastic structure (Wolde, 1989:24-28). Cohn (1983:178-79) argues that in 2 Kings 5:18 shows how the narrative uses a chiastic framing to envelop the phrase “and he leans on my hand”:-

1 For this thing
2. May the Lord pardon your servant
   3. When my lord comes to the house of Rimmon to worship there
      C and he leans on my hand.
      3 and I worship in the house of Rimmon
   2 may the Lord pardon your servant
1 for this thing (v. 18).

In the chiastic structure all other parts are connected to “C”- “he leans on my hand” (Cohn, 1983: 179). What does this phrase indicate? Some scholars suggest it should be taken figuratively, where in all its probability refers to a close relationship between the king and his confidant (cf 2 King 7:2) (Crenshaw, 1986:149-150). In this context, Naaman – as the close confidant of the king- went to the Temple of Rimmon to accompany the king of Syria. In other words, Naaman is obligated to be a part of the ceremony of Syrian worship and bow in the temple - not with his heart but as an act of outer motion - as his duty demands. As Nelson (1987:179) notes, “because his loyalty is to his king and not to Rimmon, as his overfull speech tries to make clear, his request does not undercut his monotheism”. Since Naaman confessed to not to worship any of his former gods (2 King 5:15), it is more reasonable to interpret Naaman’s request in the context of his duties to the king. Naaman sees no way out of this dilemma.
Furthermore, the true intention of Naaman can be explored further by looking at the response of Elisha to Naaman’s third request of pardoning his bowing at the temple of Rimmon. Elisha briefly responds, “Go in peace” (*lek lesalom*) (v.19a). What does Elisha’s response mean—approval or disapproval?

When we do a semantic study Elisha’s response it is neither approval nor disapproval. “Go in peace” (לְשָׁלָ֑שׁוּ) or its equivalent “in peace” (לְשָׁלָ֑שׁ) is used elsewhere in the Bible “as the word of best possible response for granting welfare rather than approval” (Nell, 1997:130). This phrase used in a number of biblical passages means welfare rather than approval (see Gen. 44:17, Exod. 4:18; 1Sam. 29:7; 2Sam. 3:21). In the same manner according to Maier (1997:192) Elisha, the man of God, gives the best possible response, he speaks just the right words: “The prophet’s ‘Go in peace’ does not give approval to Naaman’s way of thinking and his plan of action, but neither does Elisha’s response voice his disapproval. Elisha does not say, that’s O.K. to Naaman. At the same time he refrains from telling the Syrian Don’t think or act that way! You’re wrong!” Moreover, we can glean from Naaman’s response that he feels quite uncomfortable going into the temple of Rimmon. Therefore he says, “May Yahweh forgive me for this” (2 King 5:18). Here Naaman perceives his future action as contrary to God’s will and wish for forgiveness. If Naaman judges his future action as contrary to God’s will, how can Elisha be approving, or making concession, to such action (Maier, 1997: 191)?

**Summary**

In summary of the foregoing, conversion in the Old Testament can be said to be the deliberate act of turning or returning to God (nationally or individually) in response to God’s offer of a new beginning. Thus far, numerous threads of the Old Testament tapestry of conversion have been laid out. It is time now to weave the Old Testament understanding of conversion together into a coherent picture.

The Hebrew root *וּשָּׁב* (to turn/return), with its various verb and noun forms, is the main word used to express the idea of conversion. It focuses not on a decisive change of religion, nor even on a personal transformation of religious experience through a once-only crisis, but rather on the maintenance of an existing covenant relationship through a continual turning from evil to God, a process in which both God and the individual (or more typically the community as a whole) have
a part. As used in the Old Testament, הָשׁוֹב has two connotations. It means a reversal from something and a returning to something else. It was a movement back to knowing God. In the Old Testament, especially in the prophets, the word הָשׁוֹב is used to denote conversion as the act of returning to knowing God after a national act of disobedience.

The Old Testament emphasizes that conversion takes place in the context of the covenant. The covenant is at the root of conversion, a relationship between God and human beings that exists because God desires it. This relationship comes with obligations. Any breach in fulfilling the obligations severs the relationship, until the unfaithful party is called back to the relationship and its terms. Covenantal understanding of conversion comprises of four unique elements:

1. Conversion in the Old Testament entirely depends on God’s initiative. God is the one who calls for conversion.
2. Conversion is the participation in a dynamic movement.
3. To return means to accept the possibility of having a future under God and not to return means the alienation of Israel from its true destiny and thus national disaster and destruction.
4. As part of the covenant, the Old Testament conversion has primarily a corporate connotation. הָשׁוֹב is not primarily a private experience or an individualistic decision but a matter for whole of Israel.

The covenantal view of conversion is used more for Israel, than for non-covenant nations. God seeks conversion of his own people who have turned away from him in apostasy rather than turning towards him in conversion of repentance and restoration. Therefore, any missiological reflection should emphasize the continuous need of radical conversion for God’s people (Church) rather than being seen as a vehicle of conversion of others. However, at the same time the paradigmatic nature of Israel in God’s plan should be taken into account. Israel was called to be the light to the nations. Israel was not chosen over against other nations, but for the sake of the nations. What God did, say and revealed for Israel were all ultimately aimed at the rest of the nations. One of the most important messages in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic books was that God holds the nations, kings and governments responsible for their actions and all of them need to repent from their immoral acts. Therefore, it seems right for Christians,
standing as spiritual heir of Israel’s prophet, to call nations and governments to account and where necessary to repentance.

The inclusive nature of God’s mission can be explicitly seen in the narrative of Abraham’s call and conversion, which has the following missional implications.

1. The call and conversion of Abraham denote the universal aspect of mission- the key imperative phrase is “I will bless you... Be a blessing! All the people on the earth will be blessed through you”. The Lord’s blessings cannot be taken selfishly, but Abraham needs to live for others.

2. Mission is not explicitly about sending or going somewhere with a purpose to convert, but rather about being- i.e. being a special people with special message that is modelled in real life as was in the case of Abraham.

3. The conversion of Abraham from his traditional religion did not mean a distinct break from his culture. In most of the cases, Abraham lived as per the customs of his people, erected shrines the same way as that of the Canaanites and established sacred places at Shechem, Bethel, etc.

Moreover, the implication of Naaman’s conversion narrative shows that God is at work not only in Israel but also among the Gentiles, through every situation prior to their conversion. Furthermore, the narrative goes against the traditional understanding of mission - where converts are extracted from their cultural context – such practices leads to isolation and diminishes the possibility of bringing others to Christ from within their community. It is very important to take the Elisha response, “go in peace” to Naaman’s appeal to worship in Rimmon’s Temple along with the King of Syria. As noted in earlier, Elisha is not approving and disapproving the request but rather a “theo- centered directionality” is respected in this matter as per the context. This approach is of great importance especially in Indian context, where due to the complex nature of conversion (see chapter three) there are lot of Khrist bhaktas who confess Christ within their cultural context but do not want to be associated with the church structure, which is foreign in nature (see chapter six).
Thus far we have seen that the understanding of conversion in the Old Testament is extensive and insightful. It provides essential background for exploring the New Testament concept of conversion.

2.2 **NEW TESTAMENT AND CONVERSION**

There is continuity with regard to the theme of conversion in the New Testament. The New Testament especially is saturated with conversion. This is explicable due to fact that, conversion is the only appropriate response to the coming of the Son of God into the world. As Underwood (1925:44) notes, the early church consisted of “converted men and women. They speak as converts, they write as converts, and they exult as converts.” In line with Underwood, Chamberlain (1943:17) also states, “This formula, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of God is at hand,” is not only a trumpet blast, but also the keynote of the New Testament message. Not only does it break the stillness of the Judean wilderness but its reverberations are heard throughout the New Testament, reaching their climax in the thunders of the Apocalypse.” If conversions constitute the keynote, then our study will take into account, firstly, a brief word study of the language of the New Testament. Secondly, we will look into the teaching of conversion in John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul to bring out the theology of Conversion in the New Testament and finally a comparison between the Old Testament and New Testament understandings of conversion.

2.2.1 **A Semantic Study**

Even though the Old Testament provides the necessary background to understand the meaning conveyed by the term ‘conversion’, yet it is in the New Testament that ‘conversion’ receives it distinctive Christian character. In the Old Testament the idea of conversion was chiefly expressed through one word פן and by its variants, in sense of turning to God. But in the New Testament, different words and phrases are used. Moreover, conversion is sometimes used in words which have a wider meaning than conversion itself. Therefore, a semantic study is required to examine the meaning of conversion, including words and phrases that contain directly or indirectly the notion of conversion. Here the study will avoid two pitfalls that
normally occur in purely linguistic approach (James, 2011:64).\footnote{http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4264/9/09_chapter%203.pdf Date of access: 12 Aug. 2013} Firstly, this study will avoid the tendency to circumvent words or phrases that are not translated by the terms such as ‘turn or conversions,’ but have the understanding of conversion. Secondly, the terms that connote the notion of conversion are only translated a limited number of times in the Bible and it appears in conventional ways. Therefore, what is required in a semantic study is simply to understand what these words conjure but in what context these words are used.

2.2.1.1 **Metanoeo (μετανοεω): - “To Repent”**

The verb μετανοεω (to repent) and its associated noun μετάνοια (metanoia) are the first words used in the Synoptics to denote ‘the turn’ of conversion. These words occur about sixteen and eight times respectively (James, 2011:65). It is not only important by the number of occurrences of these but also the occasions when they were uttered. In the public ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus, the first words recorded by Mathew were the command to repent.\footnote{Matthew 3:2, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 4:17, “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”} Even Markan and Lukan summary of John the Baptist, Jesus and the disciples’ message was “A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”.\footnote{Mark 1:4, “And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”} Even after the resurrection Luke records that Jesus reiterated to his disciples to proclaim the call for repentance.\footnote{Luke 24:47, “… and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”}

The term μετάνοια is not exclusively a biblical/ Christian term but the term μετάνοια was also used in the in Greco-Roman world. Here we are not trying to understand the origin of the biblical usage of μετάνοια within the Greco-Roman world but rather to explore the Greco-Roman usage of the term so to determine the exclusive characteristic of the Biblical usage. As Behm (1967: 980) rightly concludes, it is in vain to search the Greek world [“whether linguistically or materially”] for the origin of the New Testament usage of μετάνοια and μετανοεω. Even though in the classical and koine Greek, μετάνοια meant “change of one’s
mind,” “to adopt another view,” or “to change one’s feelings,” yet it did characterize a radical change in a person’s whole life (Behm, 1967:976-978). It was exclusively used in intellectual terms and had nothing to do with emotion and feelings. In other words repentance was never used in biblical sense - where there was regret for the past action and subsequently resulted in a changed attitude (Thompson, 1908:110). This is because (a working assumption among scholarship) the Greco- Roman world based its understanding on the etymological force of the term (Meta= after; noe/w= to think), which put together meant “to think after” or in other words to think differently after something has happened. This “to think after” does not imply a change of one’s action and ones emotions but a change of rational (Nordon, 1912:123).

In contrast to the traditional scholarship the Greco- Roman understanding of repentance, Nave (2002), in his classic book, “The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts” - after showing systematically every occurrence of μετάνοια and μετανοεῖο in ancient literature from 500 BCE to 100 CE 51 concludes four different usages of μετάνοια and μετανοεῖο in the Greco- Roman world rather than only one usage (intellectual exercise) as stated by the traditional scholarship. They are quoted in full below (quoted in Morian, 2013:65):-

1. To express a cognitive change of thinking.
2. To evoke strong feelings of regret.
3. To describe repentance in order to avoid judgment.
4. To aid in the reconciliation of individuals.

The New Testament writers gave a greater force and meticulousness in their use of the words μετάνοια and μετανοεῖο than the Greco- Roman world. In the New Testament μετάνοια and μετανοεῖο have “several connotation of conversion- a change of mind after reflection; a going beyond the present attitude, status, or outlook; or repentance, which is also its translation” (Gillespie, 1991:26). It focuses on “the inner, cognitive decision to make a break with the past” (Peace, 2004:8; cf. Gaventa, 1986:3). The decision to break with the past does not just indicate

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51 Interestingly, metanoia and metanoew were only used 95times between 700 BCE and 100 BCE, but it is used 1201 times in the first two centuries of the Common Era (Nave, 2002: 39).
regret for a past deed (as in the case of Judas) but a radical change in a person’s life as a whole “accompanied by volitional and emotional factor” (Colin, 1975:355).

2.2.1.2 Epistrephe (ἐπιστροφή): – To Turn

Only once in the New Testament the noun form of ἐπιστρέφω, ἐπιστροφή usually translated conversion, occurs.53 The primary meaning of ἐπιστρέφω is “a turning round, either in the physical or the mental or the spiritual sense” (Barclay, 1978: 20). In Septuagint (LXX) the word ἐπιστρέφω mostly is used to translate the Hebrew root בָּשָּׁׁפ where of the 579 occurrences of בָּשָׁפ in LXX the word ἐπιστρέφω is used 408 times for בָּשָׁפ (Bertram, 1971:723).

In the New Testament, especially in Luke the two verbs μετανοέω and ἐπιστροφή are so closely related that it is hard to distinguish them (Colin, 1975:355). Luke who had the knowledge of Old Testament and influenced by LXX language was able to give new meaning to the Greek term μετανοεῖν, to primary mean turning (Persson, 1973:104). Luke’s emphasis on the verb rather than the noun emphatically suggest that conversion is not an experience of some definite kind in the past (at a necessarily known moment in time) rather it is an active “U” turn of the whole person which is rooted in conviction and need (‘or why should I do it?’), and will subsequently be shown radically in life.54 “Therefore, my ‘turning’ and subsequently my ‘having converted’ is possibly a more scriptural and more dynamic way of seeing my becoming a Christian than simply to talk of ‘my conversion’ as a past event or experience”.55

The covenantal understanding depicted in the Old Testament is sometimes highlighted by the use of the term ἐπιστροφή. This can be seen in the way the Old Testament texts are quoted to explain the reason for the refusal of the gospel by the people in large and Jews in particular.56 Even

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52 Matthew 27:3 “When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned; he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.’
53 Acts 15:3, The church sent them on their way and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.”
54 Baker, Tony. What is conversion? http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/105-01_006.pdf Date of access: 12-08-2013
55 Baker, Tony. What is conversion? http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/105-01_006.pdf Date of access: 12-08-2013
56 Matthew 13:15, “For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and I would heal them.”
while depicting John the Baptist’s birth and ministry it is communicated by the Angel that John’s ministry will be to “bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God”- an echo of Old Testament view of conversion, where return should be accompanied by change in behaviour.\textsuperscript{57} Such Old Testament view of conversion as a return to God is imbibed even in reference to Apostle Peter’s denial and return to Christ\textsuperscript{58} and also in James exhortation\textsuperscript{59} for Christian, who have “wandered from the truth” to “return to their former faith”(James, 2011:74).\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, the positive and negative aspect of conversion is also depicted by the phrase “turning to” Jesus and “turning from”, which is frequently expressed as turning from “wandering” (1 Pet. 2:25), “foolishness” (Acts 14:15), “the dominion of Satan” (Acts 26:18) and “idols” (1 Thess.1:9) (James, 2011:74).\textsuperscript{61} These passages implicit that conversion consist of both “from” and “to” i.e a change from old way of life to a new way of life with allegiance to Christ and Christ alone (James, 2011:75).\textsuperscript{62} Therefore, in biblical understanding the term denotes “a turning away from way of sin to way of Jesus” (Walsh & Middleton, 2008:196).

The term μετάνοια, μετανοεω and ἐπιστρέφω do not appear quite frequently outside the Synoptic Gospels, Acts and Revelation.\textsuperscript{63} Because of the sparse use of the term one should not conclude that the concept of conversion is absent from rest of the New Testament (excluding the above books). But it will be noted that these book uses different terminology (πιστός) to describe the phenomenon of conversion (James, 2011:76).

\textsuperscript{57} Luke 1:16-17, “He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

\textsuperscript{58} Luke 22:31, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat.”

\textsuperscript{59} James 5:19-20, “19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

\textsuperscript{60} http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4264/9/09_chapter%203.pdf Date of access: 12 Aug. 2013

\textsuperscript{61} http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4264/9/09_chapter%203.pdf Date of access: 12 Aug. 2013

\textsuperscript{62} http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4264/9/09_chapter%203.pdf Date of access: 12 Aug. 2013

\textsuperscript{63} In rest of the New Testament it appears only 17 times ( Jn 21:20 - ἐπιστρέφω; 2Cor. 12:21; James 5:19, 20; 1 Peter 2:25; 2 Peter 2:22; μετανοεω; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10; 2 Timothy 2:25; Hebrews 6:1,4; 12:17; 2 Peter 3:9; μετάνοια; 2 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9- ἐπιστρέφω). Quoted from James (2011:76).
2.2.1.3 **Pistos (πιστός):- faith**

Jesus began his ministry by announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God and also demanded an response to the Kingdom call, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk.1:15). In this announcement formula one notices that Jesus emphazied the act of believing in equivalent to the “to turn to” dimension of repentance. As theologian R. T. France explains (1993: 295-296):

Conversion … can be seen as involving two elements, ‘from’ and ‘to’. Each of these elements has its own vocabulary in the NT, the key word groups being respectively metanoeo, ‘repent’ and pisteuo, ‘believe’. And each of these terms is far more common in the NT than epistrepho; sometimes the two are used together to denote the full ‘conversion process’ (e.g. Mk. 1:15; Acts 20:21). They are ‘opposite sides of the same coin’. A study of the NT teaching on conversion must necessarily include the use of these terms, and particularly the former.

Therefore, without looking at the biblical notion of faith (verb form πιστεύω; noun form πίστις) the study of the New Testament words for conversion would be incomplete. As stated earlier, the term ἐπιστρέφω appears frequently in the Gospels and Acts but in Pauline writings Paul prefers πίστις (faith as noun) while John and Mark prefer πιστεύω (faith as verb, to believe).

According to Paul, Faith is a significant element of Christian conversion. This can be seen throughout his letters where he stresses the importance of faith in all aspects of the Christian life. Morris (1993: 285) points out that Paul “uses the noun πίστις 142 times, whereas it occurs but 101 times in all the rest of the New Testament. He also has the verb πιστεύω (‘to believe’) 54 times and the adjective πίστος (‘faithful,’ ‘trustworthy’) 33 times”. The constant appearance of the word faith in Pauline writings poses an important question, what is the importance of faith in Paul? A study of these terms in his letters provides the answer which can be classified broadly under three headings:-

1. Faith as the key to accept the gospel message: - For Paul πίστις “is indissolubly bound with proclamation” (Michel, 1986:599) where πίστις is the key for receiving and accepting the Christian proclamation of the salvific work of Christ and the gift of new life. Paul calls this faith as “saving faith” called forth by the gospel (Rom. 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:8).

2. Faith resembles incorporation into the Body of Christ: - Paul identifies believers as being “in Christ”. This “in Christ” experience “is a distinctively Christian feature” where
Christians by resting their faith on Jesus is brought into union with Christ (Morris, 1993:285). Thus, Paul qualifies believers as “those who believe” (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:21 etc.) (France, 1993:296).

3. Believing is equivalent to conversion:— For Paul believing in Christ is the initial point of conversion and thus he refers to his church members’ conversion as “the time when you believed (1 Cor. 15:2, 11)” (France, 1993:296) and “their turning to God” is described as “believing” (πιστεύειν, I Cor. 15:2, 12) (Michel, 1986:601).

Accordingly, in the Johannine literature, the verb πιστεύω (“to believe”) holds a pivotal place. This is reflected by its usage (nearly 100 times) and by the purpose statement of the gospel—so that they [people] “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). According to R. T. France (1992:225), John uses the verb πιστεύω in three distinct ways in his Gospel:

1. Cognitive dimension:— John uses the “verb πιστεύω in connection with οτι (since, because) which then means to “believe that” (France:1992:225). Here the connection is with the content of the Gospel to which people are called to believe, in other words there is a connection between belief and knowledge. As Koester (2008:173) observes, “to know Jesus is to recognize that he has come from God, that he is the Holy One of God, and that he brings salvation” (4:42; 6:69; 17:8). This cognitive dimension to faith is of great importance for John (1:41, 45; 20:31).

2. Object of faith: The second distinct use of the “verb πιστεύω in John’s writing is when it occurs along εις (believe into), and once πιστεύω εν (believe in)” (France, 1992:225). Here the emphasis is on the object of believing – that is, the person Jesus himself.

3. To believe in Jesus:— The third distinct use of the verb πιστεύω occurs when it “is used absolutely, with no explicit indication of the object of belief,” but the context of these reference points clearly to believe in Jesus (France, 1992:225).

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64 In Paul the verb πιστεύω (‘to believe’) is often followed by the preposition ἐπί (‘on’) or εἰς (‘into’) (Morris, 1983:285).
65 In fact, the noun πιστις does not even occur in the Gospel of John.
2.2.2 **John the Baptist and the Preaching of Repentance**

The first prophet of the New Testament, John the Baptist, was actually the last of the Old Testament prophets (Mt. 11:7-11) who echoed the proclamation of the Old Testament view of conversion i.e. to return to a covenant relationship with God (Goppelt, 1981:34). Thus, in the New Testament the authentic call for repentance begins with John the Baptist (Mk 1:4; Mt 3:2, 8; Lk 1:16). John the Baptist began his ministry around Jordan region with the message of “baptism for repentance” (Mt. 3: 3) in akin to *teshubah*. John’s message “was a call for men to turn away from their sinful ways and to turn to the Lord with a wholehearted commitment to obedience” (Smother, 1933:8).

The interconnectedness of John’s baptism baptism with μετάνοια is of great significance where repentance should precede baptism and the mere ritual of baptism without repentance is meaningless. As Webb (1991:181) states, “for John baptism was not an option: the expression of repentance required baptism and the efficacy of the baptism required repentance”. In other words genuine conversion is exhibited by the fruit (Mt 3:8ff) (Pesch, 1965:27). The most interesting thing to note is that even within the covenant context of the Old Testament people of God, which overlaps with the gospels and with some of Paul’s letters - Jewish believers in YHWH “converted” to faith in Christ in a similar fashion as the Gentiles ‘turned to Christ’ (and thus to the God of the Bible) for the first time. Theologically speaking, by turning to Christ, Jewish believers are for the first time discovering the true centre and meaning of the faith they have been professing all along! In that sense, their “covenant repentance” echoes with the overtones of “Gentile conversion”.

2.2.3 **Jesus and Repentance**

Jesus like John the Baptist, preached about repentance (Mk. 1:15Matt 3:2; 4:17), yet there were notable differences between them in the sense “that Jesus did not, as did John, look for one to

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66 For a detailed analysis of the geographical location of John's ministry and his possible connections with the Essenes, see Taylor (1997:42-48). Moreover to understand the practice of baptism by John, its origin and significance See, Taylor (1997: 49-100); McKnight (1991: 82-5); Webb (1991 95-216); Dahl (1955: 36-42).

67 See, Scobie (1964:80-83); Dirksen (1965:1265).

68 Some scholars believe that the call for repentance did not come from historical Jesus but was *Gemeindetheologie* (theology of the community) (cf. Hoeck and Ruprecht [1975]; Sanders, [1985]). These scholars state that the call to repentance (metanoia) are not uttered frequently by Jesus in his ministry but these words are found in the summaries of his message (Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17) and in the narratives of apostolic ministries (Mk 6:12). In Luke it is found in the post- resurrected commission to his disciples (Lk 24:47) and in the ministry of the disciples after Easter and
follow him (cf. 3:11)”. In Jesus the “call to conversion becomes a call to discipleship” (Verlyn, 2000:819).

The purpose of Jesus’ coming to this world is to “call to repentance” (Lk. 5:32)” (Behm, 1967:1001). His mission statement “to seek and to save the lost” (Lk. 19:9-10) was modelled after Ezekiel’s vision about God’s concern for the lost sheep of Israel (Ezek. 34:1-16; cf. Matt 10:5f; 15:24). Here the call of Jesus is not for the hearers (Jewish people) to join a new religion rather restore and return to the relationship with God, which should have always been theirs. This conversion is “the inner turning of the heart and will to Christ” (Newbigin, 1971:147-148) that affects the whole man that includes thoughts, words and acts (Matt 12:33ff; 23:26; Mk 7:15) (Behm, 1967: 1002). In this sense Jesus calls for repentance was not obedience to the Law as the Pharisees of Jesus’ time thought, but it is a change towards a Person (Jesus the Messiah) - just as in the Old Testament it was a turn towards Yahweh and then towards his Law.

2.2.4 Paul and Conversion

Among other conversion narratives in the bible Paul’s conversion story has got more academic consideration⁶⁹ and has become a “determinant for the course of Christian history” (Bruce, 1977:75). This is due to the missionary successes of Paul that caused the birthing of the Gentile churches and his unique contribution to the New Testament. Moreover, Paul’s conversion is considered by many “to be central proof for the validity of Christianity to be a divine revelation” (Bruce, 1977:31).

What is startling about Paul’s conversion (Acts 9) is that in the narrative some unique elements of conversion, as seen in other conversion accounts in Acts are completely absent. In all other conversion narratives in Acts the converts where either seeking God or they were hearing God’s word. ⁷⁰ However, Paul was persecuting the church thus, indirectly persecuting God’s son (9:5), even though he acted out of his devotion to his God- an act of worship. Moreover, we also do not

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⁶⁹ For example see, Nock (1938); Stanley (1953); Prokulski (1957); Howard (1969); Fudge (1971); Hedrick (1981); Gaventa (1986); Segal (1990); Everts (1993); Franklin (1994); Longenecker (1997) & Schnelle (2000).

⁷⁰ In Acts 2 Jews in Jerusalem were worshipping God. In Acts 6 the Ethiopian is returning from worship. In Acts 16 Lydia was praying on the Sabbath. In Acts 17 the Athenians were worshipping (an unknown) God albeit incorrectly.
find a call to repentance as we see in other conversion accounts (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). It is for these and other reasons that some scholars have contended that Paul is not to be considered a real convert rather he was called (Stendahl, 1976:64). Nave (2002:208) asserts, “Paul is not depicted as experiencing a conversion; instead he is depicted as experiencing enlightenment and a “calling” – an assignment to a new task”. But in recent scholarship the dichotomy between conversion and calling is considered as a false division and has argued that just due to the eccentric nature of Paul’s conversion one cannot conclude Paul was not a convert. Rather, there are four clear Lukan signs that Paul was an actual convert:

1) Paul encounter with Christ was followed with baptism after three days which alludes to religious conversion (Acts 9:18) (Morlan, 2010:138).

2) The commonality between Lukān narrative of Paul’s conversion and other conversion accounts in Acts points towards the fact that Paul was a convert. In Paul’s and other conversion narratives there is a query after hearing God’s word or voice that eventually led to conversion. For instance, in Acts, 2:37 the people responded to Peter sermon by stating “what shall we do?” and also in Acts 17:20, the philosophers enquired “May we know what this new teaching is?” Similarly, Paul after the encounter with risen Lord responded “who are you Lord?”(Acts, 9:5) (Morlan, 2010:138)

3) It was his confrontation with the living Christ that turned Paul a persecutor of the Church to preacher of the gospel. As Gaventa (1986:28) states, this revelation of Jesus Christ precipitated “a radical disruption of his previous life; his previous cosmos had been crucified (cf. Galatians 6:14)”. This is an act of conversion.

71 Recent researches have shown on the one hand, that in the antiquity the “called” language was a common conversion language (Chester, 2003: 59-112), thus making Stendahl’s division between calling and conversion a false dichotomy. On the other hand, Segal (1990:6) has proposed a more balanced approach in which he argued that “from the viewpoint of mission Paul is commissioned, but from the viewpoint of religious experience Paul is a convert”. Moreover, in line with Segal, Brien (2004:391) also concluded that “Paul was converted and called to be the apostle to the Gentiles”.

72 B. R. Gaventa,(1986: 9-12, 148-8) distinguishes three types of conversion: ‘pendulum-like conversion’ (which ‘involves a negation of the past and a drastic change’), ‘transformation’ (which ‘does not require a rejection or negation of the past’, but ‘involves a new perception, a re-cognition, of the past’), and ‘alternation’ (a transfer to another religious group which, however, ‘does not involve a rejection of the past and, indeed, actually develops out of one’s past’).
4) Just like his Jewish brethren Paul also believed that he also was liable for divine judgment and the only way to avoid it was through conversion and repentance (Morlan, 2010:139). Based on the above argument one can say along with Barret (1994:442) that “if such radical changes do not amount to conversion it is hard to know what would do so”.

2.2.4.1 Is Paul’s Conversion Prototype for all Christians?

Throughout the history of Christianity and even in India today, Paul’s conversion is considered to be a “prototype of true conversion” (Gaventa, 1986:3; Paloutzian, 1999:1049) and thus paradigmatic for all Christians (Kraft, 2002:329). People like Corley (1997:1-7) goes even further to regard Paul’s conversion as “hero of introspective conscience as exhibited also in the conversion of Augustine and Luther”. In fact, even in the secular world any significant change of allegiance or life direction will sometimes be called a “Damascus Road experience”. This model is supported with biblical text from 2 Corinthians 5:17, “…if one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (Polutzian, 1999:1050)! However, Paul’s experience cannot be considered as a model or paradigmatic for all Christians due to the following reasons:-

1. Paul’s conversion experience was unique in the sense that he had an audible and vision blinding encounter with risen Lord. It is this unique experience that makes it clear that Paul’s conversion experience cannot be a standard to measure other conversion experiences (McKnight, 2002:16).

2. The premise on which Paul’s conversion is argued to be pragmatic for all is based on the dramatic or instantaneous understanding of Paul’s conversion. But this premise is false and questionable because the narrative of Paul’s conversion points not to dramatic or instantaneous conversion but to process conversion that took three days to complete (Dunn, 1970:77). As Gittin (1999:88) rightly asserts, Paul’s conversion is “far from instantaneous; it takes place over a period of time and is marked by several incidents.

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73 In the book of Acts we have three narrative of Paul’s conversion (9:1-19; 22:1-21; 26:12-23). Even though there are discrepancies in these narrations yet all the three narratives have Jesus’ questioning / affirming to Paul- “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me… I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (9:4-5; 22:7-8; 26:14-15). Why was it so essential for Luke to rehash this detail of Paul’s conversion three times? Does Luke assume that the core plight of non – Christian Jews is their rejection of The Way and therefore make them guilty of persecuting Jesus? It seems that in Lukes thinking, rejection of Jesus puts the non- Christian Jews in the same category as the decision makers who actually crucified Jesus (Morlan, 2010: 139).
(call, debilitation, and blindness, the laying on of hands, baptism, and recovery of strength).

3. Paul’s conversion should not be seen devoid of his call. Paul’s conversion and call to be a missionary to the Gentiles are intertwined together and is unique in itself. Although all Christian have the calling, yet not all Christian need not replicate what Paul did – a apostle, a missionary and church planter (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-30; Eph. 4:11-13). Therefore, Paul’s conversion is not to be understood as paradigmatic.

2.2.4.2 Paul’s Use of καλέω (kaleo)

Although in the Pauline writings we rarely find legitimate terms that can be translated into English as ‘conversion’ yet, Paul uses a variety of terms - such as πίστευω (42 times), δικαιοω (25 times), σωζω (20 times) and καλέω (27 times) to describe conversion as the receipt of a divine calling (Chester, 2003:54). These cognate terms are used to describe the past, present and future of Christian identity but are rarely used to define predominantly one of these phases (Chester, 2003:58). The frequent uses of these terms to denote Christian identity in general, suggests that these terms are more important to Paul than kalevw, but the fact remain the opposite. Among all the cognate terms καλέω is used 17 times (out of 27 appearance) to refer “directly to conversion that marks the beginning of the Christian life” (Chester, 2003: 54). Therefore, it is important to examine the verb καλέω by raising two questions:

(i) How is God described as the one who calls?
(ii) Is there a human response to God’s call?

By delineating these questions an overall picture of Paul’s usage of the concept of calling in relation to conversion will be explored, including the concept of calling in relation to a new relationship with God and its social ramifications in terms of disruption and formation of a new community (Chester, 2003: 66).

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74 Paul never uses μετάνοια to refer to anyone coming to Christ, but refers to ἐπιστροφή only twice (1 Thess. 1:9-10, 2 Cor. 3:15-16). See Gaventa (1986:40ff).
75 Other derivatives are, πιστεύω (86), πίστος (21) δικαιοσύνη (14), δικαιοζ (2) times.
76 Out of 42 appearance of πιστεύω 15 times it is used in aorist tense and 2 in perfect tense. Out of 25 appearance of δικαιοω 12 times it is used in aorist tense and σωζω (commonly used to refer to conversion) is used only twice in 20 appearances in aorist (Chester, 2003:54).
77 Rom. 8:30(2), Rom. 9:24, 1 Cor. 1:9, 1 Cor. 7:18, 1 Cor. 7:20, 1 Cor. 7:21, 1 Cor. 7:22(2), 1 Cor. 7:24, Gal. 1:6, Gal. 1:15, Gal. 5:13, 1 Thess. 4:7.
2.2.4.2.1  God’s Call and Conversion

Paul uses the metaphor of creation to explain the notion of individual conversion and the process of conversion itself (Morian, 2012:33). This is very much evident in Romans 4:17 where Paul commends Abraham who believed in “God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not”. Even though the “what” of the metaphorical allusion to creation is disputed yet it is agreed that the calling inference in this verse alludes to God’s act of creation, who calls into being things that do not exist.  

The understanding that “God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not” refers to *ex nihilo* is completely ruled out. The scope and context of Roman 4 describes God calling into existence a child for Abraham (Rom 4:16), which also points towards the calling of the Gentile’s into God’s people (Kruse, 2012:156). Here Paul quotes the promise made to Abraham, “For a father of nations have I made thee” (Gen 17:5), alluding to the fact that Abraham himself is the “father of all who have faith in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of the law free gospel for Gentile” (Chester, 2003:79). Even Calvin supports this view,

> He (Abraham) was, however, past procreation, and therefore it was necessary for him to raise his thoughts to the power of God who gives life to the dead. There is, therefore, no absurdity if the Gentiles, who are otherwise barren and dead, are brought into the fellowship ... We have here, moreover, the type and pattern of our general calling, by which our beginning is set before our eyes (not that which relates to our first birth, but which relates to the hope of the future life), namely, that when we are called of God we arise out of nothing (quoted in Chester, 2003:79).

The magnificence of the metaphor is that it embraces the whole of *heilsgeschichte* (salvation history) or in other words “it refers to the big picture process of conversion itself” (Morian, 2012:33). The width of the reference begins with Abraham’s wish for an heir and ends with the hope of resurrection life, coalesced with the foremost plan of God in bringing of the Gentiles into God’s people (Ziesler, 1989:132). Therefore, one can assert that the main focus of

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78 Scholars differ on the phrase “God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not”- Is it to the dead womb of Sarah (Rom 4: 16) (Fitzmyer, 1993:386)? Does it refer to Abraham’s faith in responding to Issac’s sacrifice (Rom 4:18) (Barrett, 1971:96-97)? Does it point to the resurrection of Jesus and the anticipation of the resurrection of the dead (Rom 4: 24) (Kasemann, 1980:123)? Does it refer to the notion of *ex nihilo* doctrine (Torrance, 1988:68-98)?

79 In the apocrypha books we find that creation is used in terms of calling. In Wisdom 11:25, creation is portrayed as been called into being by God. This notion is further supported by the fact that God is sometimes said to have called the stars by name, so displaying an intimate knowledge of what he has made. Even 2 Maccabees 7:28 mentions, “Look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make the of things that existed”.
the metaphor of creation used by Paul refers to conversion (the inclusion of the Gentiles). This similar idea is further reverberated in Paul when he writes to Corinth to “consider their calling” where “... God has chosen the things that are not-to nullify the things that are” (1 Cor 1:26). Here Paul is referring to the conversion process through God, the creator, where the act of calling signifies God’s character “of bringing into existence something that did not previously exist- an act of New Creation” (Morian, 2012:34).

2.2.4.2.2 Human Response in Conversion

It is very clear from the above that conversion is the response to the call of God. It is God who initiates. God draws people through Christ to the reality of His eternal covenant relationship. If this is true, what is then human response to God’s calling in Paul?

In the Pauline writings the term ἐπικαλομαί refers to calling on God or his name (Rom 10:12-14; 1Cor.1:2; 23)\(^{80}\). Romans 10:12-14, in particular, has soteriological implication when Paul quotes Joel 3:5 he could have drawn from his own personal experience at the road to Damascus when after receiving sight, God used Ananias to ask Paul to call on Jesus’ name while he was yet in the process of conversion (Acts 22:16). This mutual nature of God’s call and the calling of penitent for salvation is therefore an important aspect in the process of conversion. Schmidt (1965:483) rightly asserts that, “the fact that God is the καλὸν and that Christians are the καθιστομένοι with no qualifying addition, makes it clear that in the New Testament καλεῖν is a technical term for the process of salvation”.

The human response in conversion is further illustrated in Paul by the concept of hearing (ἀκοῦω, ἀκοῇ Rom.10: 14, 18; 11:8, 15:21; Gal. 3:2) obedience (ὑπακούω, ὑπακοη 6:16, 6:17, 10:16; Phil. 2:12) and confession (Rom 10:9, 10), as part of the conversion process. For Paul true conversion entails hearing and obeying the word, and the verbal confession of inner faith which leads to salvation: “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Rom 10:9).

\(^{80}\) In LXX it is used in the context of worship (Gen 4:26; 13:4) and deliverance (Ps 50:15) (Chester, 2003:84).
The word “confess” is an unavoidable aspect in one’s conversion because it is the antithesis of the word “deny” (Matt 10:32, 33). Confession in itself (i.e. the content of confession) will not save but the attitude of the heart constitutes true conversion (Grudem 1994:717) where a “decision based on the understanding to the way of Jesus with a resultant new way of living in the context of the kingdom of God” takes place (Richard, 2004:8).

2.2.4.3 Conversion in Light of the Pauline “Reminders of Baptism”

It could be argued, from Paul’s own statement - “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17) - that baptism was not an important aspect for Paul. Indeed, for Paul the *kerygma* of the gospel of Christ was the priority and not baptism. As Hartman (1997:5) rightly states “we cannot find a passage that could be titled ‘On Baptism’, and in which Paul explicitly presents a few fundamental features of his theology of baptism”. But this does not mean that the teaching on baptism is completely absent in Paul. Rather, In the Pauline letters we find Paul often alluding to baptism to show “the life that is lived through faith in Christ” (Schnelle, 1986:44).

In the epistle to the Romans (chapter 6:1-14), the prison epistles (Ephesians 4:22- 24 and Colossians 3:8-10) and in Galatians (3:27-28) Paul refers to their (the readers of the epistles) baptism, admonishes them to reflect on their experience at the point of baptism and what that implies to their lives here and now, and their future expectation and hope. The crux of Paul’s argument for ethical living is based on the event and experience of the believers’ baptism. Therefore for Paul it is the baptism that authenticates believers’ identity in the community of faith. In what follows we will discuss Paul’s “reminders of baptism” for Christian living and inner change as indicated in Romans 6:1-14; Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:8-10.

2.2.4.3.1 Romans 6:1-14

1. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?
2. By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?
3. Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
4. We are therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we to may live in new life.

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81 1 Cor 1:13-17; 6:11; 10:1-4; 12:12-13; 15:29; Rom 6:3-4 and Gal 3:27; Eph4:5
5. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be untied with him in his resurrection.

6. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

7. Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

8. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

9. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

10. The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11. Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

12. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

13. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

14. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

15. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

In the New Testament Romans 6:1-14 constitutes the most detailed discussion on baptism. While interpreting Paul’s use of βάπτισμα εἰς Χριστόν in this section, two things should be kept in mind: the overview of Romans (larger setting) and the particular purpose of this pericope. In the earlier chapters (1-5; especially chapter 4) Paul is discussing justification by faith through grace and in chapter six he focuses on the implication of being justified, i.e. practical Christian living. To serve this purpose Paul uses baptism in a didactic way. In other words, he exhorts the believers to live up to what they have professed in baptism.

The meaning of the word βαπτίζομαι is “to immerse,” (Friberg, 2000:47) and when it is accompanied by preposition εἰς it means “dipped into” something and in this chapter into someone (Schnelle, 1986:205). At the first instance the phrase εἰς Χριστόν ἁρμόνων (v.2) seems odd but when read along with v.3b (εἰς τὸν θάνατον) it becomes clearer “plunged into death” (Schnelle, 1986:205). The analogy of being dipped into water at baptism refers to the fact that the Roman believers’ baptism was “total identification with Christ,” (Hartman, 1997:70) who has not only conquered sin but also assured victory over sin (Fitzmyer, 1993:433). But this victory over sin is only possible when one [in this case Roman believers] comprehends the fact of being buried with Christ after “spiritual dying with Christ” (Rom. 6:4-5) and thereafter was raised for the newness of life (καὶ ἥμεις ἐν κανόνῃ ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν) with Christ (Theissen, 1999:334).

Although death, burial and resurrection are stated metaphorically yet the new life in Christ is not simply a metaphor but a reality – an actual life that has to be lived here and now (Zimmermann,
This is made clear by the term Περιπατέω which indicates figuratively the conduct and the walk of life and when used along preposition ἐν it connotes “the sphere in which one lives or ought to live” (Seaman, 2013:132). This life has to be live in contrasts with prior conduct” before their baptism (Blass, 1961: 337). Therefore, Paul is reminding the Roman believers that baptism should always serve as the reminder for ethical living (Hooker, 1997:9). This radical conversion should be reflected in everyday living.

2.2.4.2 Ephesians 4:17-24

17. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of mind.
18. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.
19. Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness
20. But ye have not so learned Christ;
21. If so be that ye have heard him and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus.
22. That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.
23. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.
24. And that ye put on the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness.

This type of text also appears elsewhere in the New Testament and there are similarities with the Old Testament, Jewish literature and in the paraenesis of Hellenistic philosophical literature and mystery religion. However, it is generally agreed by scholars that the epistle to Ephesians was written by Paul to encourage the believers to uphold the dignity of their calling by not conducting their lives as the pagan Gentiles (Bruce, 1984:245).

82 See. Rom.1:21-25; 1 Th4:3-8; Eph 5:3-20
83 See Lev. 18:1-5, 24-30; 20:23.
84 Jung Kim (1998:185) sees a connection between Pauline clothing imagery with disrobing/re-clothing of the Levitical priests in their daily cultic functions in the Old Testament tabernacle.
85 See 4 Macc. 1:26-27, 2:15
86 For Instance, Crates, Epist. 6-7, 18-21 and Epictetus 2.18.15.
87 The idea of “putting on” is also found in the Isis cult in which the initiate puts on the robe of Osiris at the end of the initiation rite, so that the initiate became like Osiris after putting on the robe and received the worship of the community (Apuleius, 1975:67). In ancient religions, the initiate was helped into a new garment by the priest when he or she was initiated (Apuleius, 1975:67).
The above pericope focuses on how and why the Gentile life is the mark of unsaved life. This is very much evident in the convergence of indicatives and imperatives used in this passage (Ridderbos, 1979:254). Paul’s purpose through exhibiting this indicative and imperative is to show how important it is to reconcile the one time transformation (i.e. have been transformed) with the continual process of transformation (are being transformed) (Eldredge, 2003:76). This is clearly depicted in the contrastive verse (δὲ) of the passage- “But ye have not so learned Christ” (v. 20). After depicting the nature of the unbelievers (4:17-19), Paul describes the nature of true believer’s in verses 20-24 (Beauchamp, 2007:35).\textsuperscript{87}

The aorist verb ἔμαθεν, which derives from μαθαίνω, meaning “to learn” is used throughout the New Testament, particularly in the context of Jesus’ teachings (Rengstorf, 1964:401). Even though the term is used in relation to a learned concept, here Paul uses it to the person of Christ. So what Paul has in mind is conversion (Best, 1998:426), but the action of “heard and taught (v21) can widen the meaning to their entire “early discipleship process” (Hoehner, 2002:594). To learn about Christ is not just to learn his teaching but also to learn His Person which is part and parcel of his teaching.\textsuperscript{88}

The effect of knowing Christ is stated in the beginning of verse 21 by the use of the three infinitives in the aorist tense ἀποκάθισεν, ἀνακάθισεν, ἐνθάρρυσεν which point to the baptism imagery (Beauchamp, 2007:35). The first infinitive ἀποκάθισεν, aorist middle infinitive, means “to put away”. \textsuperscript{89} The term is used according to Hoehner (2002:603) “in sense of putting someone in prison (Matt. 14:3), “to lay aside” or “get rid of” (Rom. 13:12; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1), or “to take off” (Acts 7:58). Here Paul’s emphasis is not to “lay aside” or “put off” particular vices but to “put off” the old man who is disobedient to God and leading a

\begin{itemize}
  \item [87] http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1178&context=sor_fac_pubs Date of access: 18 Jan. 2013
  \item [88] There are difference of opinion among scholars what does Paul refer by “learning”, “heard” and “taught” (v. 20-21). For Barth (1974:509) it is a reference to Messianic school; for Schnackenburg (2001:195) it refers to the link between pastor and teacher through whom the learning is mediated (4:11-16) but for Brien (1999:324) it refers to Christ and his teaching through whom lifes are being shaped. The researcher has taken Brien view as appropriate as it is akin to the context of the pericope.
  \item [89] In colossian 3:9 it is ἀπεκάθισαμενοι
  \item [90] Quoted in Beauchamp http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1178&context=sor_fac_pubs Date of access: 18 Jan. 2013
\end{itemize}
life dominated by sin (v.22) as the Gentiles do in the “futility of their mind”(v.17) and due to “hardened heart”(v.18) (Lincoln, 1990:284).91

The second infinitive ἀνανεοῦσθαι (to renew) is only used here in the New Testament.92 In comparison with the other infinitives it is in the present passive tense as opposed to the aorist tense and it makes up the content of ἔδωκα Χριστῷ (to teach) of verse 21. The conjunction δέ, is contrastive, “separating the negative actions of the old man with the positive actions of renewal and putting on the new man” (Wedderburn, 1993:55).93 This denotes conversion as a continuous process of renewal as opposed to a one-time event (Bruce, 1984:131). This renewal process takes place in “the spirit of the mind” (Behm, 1964:896). The thought expressed here is the constant rejuvenation of the believer through Christ work whereby the believer is freed from the old humanity and able to put on the new humanity.

The third infinitives is ἐνδοκαθαρίσθαι (to put on) in verse 24.94 In contrast to the decaying old humanity Paul urges that the believers are now undergoing renewal. The whole process is being reversed because they have put on the new humanity. The adjective καινός denotes qualitative newness initiated by God in contrast with the previous condition. In the parallel passage in Colossians 3:10 Paul uses νέος to refer to a temporal newness which was not yet present, in other words, the reality of newness in comparison with the former life. Moreover, this new humanity is described as τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα (created to be like God) (4:24; cf. Gal. 4:28; Heb. 8:5), which alludes to creation language in Genesis 1:26-27 and by use of the word ἐικόν. Therefore, the new humanity is created like God or after the likeness of God. Moreover, the

91 Quoted in Beauchamp http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1178&context=sor_fac_pubs Date of access: 18 Jan. 2013
92 Cf. in Col. 3:10 it is ἁνακαθαρισθείς and Rom. 12:2 it is ἁνακαθαρισμός.
93 Quoted in Beauchamp http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1178&context=sor_fac_pubs Date of access: 18 Jan 2013
94 Barnes, in his commentary on this passage, refers to the tradition in which Lucian describes “putting on Pythagoras” as a way of expressing his imitation and discipleship to the ideas of his philosopher master (1999-2001). Similarly, Bruce (1985:229) notes the use of the “put on” clause in Dionysius Halicarnassus’ Roman Antiquities 11.5 where “‘put on Tarquin’ means to ‘play the part of Tarquin’” in a drama or performance (1985:229).
aorist participle κτισθέντα already used in 2:10; 15 (the term is κτίζω) implies the creative act of God in Christ and the creative act of Christ.⁹⁵

The new humanity is created to be like God in righteousness and holiness of truth. Here both righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and holiness (σεβασμός) are mainly used in the ethical sense to refer to the person who has set things right with God and is set apart. It is in this ethical sense that Paul argues that the new humanity is created like God as these are the characteristics of God himself (cf. LXX. Deut 32:4; Ps. 144:17).

2.2.4.3 **Colossians 2:11-13; 20; 3:1-11**

11. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.
12. Buried with him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.
13. And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh hath he quickened together with him having forgiven you all trespasses.
20. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances.

3:1-11

1. If then be risen with Christ seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of the God.
2. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
3. For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.
4. When Christ who is our life shall appear when shall ye also appear with him in glory.
5. Mortify, therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness which is idolatry.
6. For which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.
7. In which ye also walked some time when ye lived in them.
8. But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth
9. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with deeds
10. And have put on new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him
11. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

The Colossian congregation was under attack of what scholars call the Colossian heresy.⁹⁶ In response to this heterodoxy, in light of baptismal imagery (raised with Christ 2:12; 3:1), Paul

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⁹⁵ Cf. the usage of κτισθέντα in reference to the first creation in Rom 1:20, 25; 8:19-22 and the new creation that began in Christ in 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 3:10; Eph 2:10.

⁹⁶ For a list of opinions on the nature of the heresy see Gunther (1973:3-4); Francis (1975). It is normally stated that the Colossian heresy revolved around syncretistic Jewish mysticism, which promoted “legal ordinances, circumcision, food regulations, the Sabbath, new moon, and other prescriptions of the Jewish calendar” (Nicholls, 1979:733).
reminds the believers at Colossae to live in accordance with which they had received (2:6). Thurston (1995:51) notes, “because of the believer’s participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and his victory over “the elements of the world,” he is to ‘keep seeking the things above’ (τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, 3:1). This continual, ongoing process of seeking, suggested by the present imperative, is to be the consequence of having ‘been raised up with Christ’”.

Paul states that it is imperative for those who are now raised with Christ to estrange themselves from the old self, i.e. things from the earth (3:2) and thus reflect the new life in Christ. Paul lists five things that those raised with Christ should “put to death”⁹⁷ – “fornication (πορνεία), impurity (ακαθαρσία), lust (πάθος), evil desire (επιθυμία κακῆ) and greed or covetousness (πλεονεξία) (3:5)” (Wayne, 1994:450).⁹⁸ Here Paul’s list demonstrates “the outward manifestations of sin to the inward cravings of the heart, the acts of immorality and uncleanness to their inner springs” (O’Brien, 1982:179). In Colossian 3:8 Paul commands the Colossians to “put aside” (ἀποθέσθη, “rid themselves”) of other vices, including wrath (ῥγή), anger (θυμόν), malice (κακία), slander (βλασφημία) and foul talk (ἀσχολογία) (Wayne, 1994:451).⁹⁹ The aorist imperative ἀποθέσθη emphasizes that “the process and repeated efforts which lead to a transformed daily walk are all incorporated into the imagery of ‘putting off the old life with its deeds’ and ‘putting on the new life’ of righteousness and Christ-likeness” (Fanning, 1990:363).

The apostle reminded the Colossian believers that these vices were part of their former life: “in them you also once walked” (v. 7). The words “but now” (νῦν δὲ) in verse 8 points to the “fact that the Christian life must contrast with the person’s former life (cf. 1:21-22) and only through the death in which the old self dies, can the way to new life be opened” (Loshe, 1971:137-40).

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⁹⁷ The aorist imperative νεκρώσατε should be interpreted in an ingressive sense. Moreover, the verb νεκρόω (to put to death) occurs only here in an active sense (Fanning, 1990:358).
⁹⁸ https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/ntsources/ntarticles/bsac-nt/house-colossianspt4-bs.pdf Date of access: 20 Jan. 2013
Such list was common among moralists to distinguish between faithful insiders from outsiders in Jewish literature. See Wis. 14:25-26; 4 Macc. 1:26-27; 2 Enoch 10:4-5 (Davies, 1980:123-29).
⁹⁹ Paul use of the aorist imperative ἀποθέσθη reflects a garment metaphor related to divestiture of clothing. It was common usage in an ethical sense (O’Brien, 1982:186).
¹⁰⁰ https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/ntsources/ntarticles/bsac-nt/house-colossianspt4-bs.pdf Date of access: 20 Jan. 2013
¹⁰¹ https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/ntsources/ntarticles/bsac-nt/house-colossianspt4-bs.pdf Date of access: 20 Jan. 2013
The new life is protected in Christ—“your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). O’Brien (1982:165) states, “The verb κρυφται (hidden) is a perfect tense, in contrast to the preceding aorist, απεθανετε (‘you died,’ drawing attention to the specific occasion of their death with Christ), and stresses the ongoing and permanent effects: your life has been hidden with Christ in God and it remains that way.”

In the light of this safe vouch in Christ (3:3) the believers have to put to death (νεκρωσατε) the members of the earthly body in pursuit of righteousness. Using the aorist imperative νεκρωσατε, Paul moved from the theological to the practical, into the realm where the believer is responsible for his action, viz. “put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth” (Bauer, 2000:501). That is the new life should correspond to the image of Christ in which one is created and therefore “Christ alone starts [is the] Christian’s paradigm” (Wayne, 1994:451).

2.2.5 Paul Speech at Athens- Conversion as “Migrating” to a Completely New Gospel-Shaped Worldview

In the book of Acts, Luke presents three speeches of Paul, namely, to a Jewish audience (13:16–41), to a Christian audience (20:17–35), and to a pagan audience (17:16–34). But of all the three speeches, the Areopagus speech at Athens has received mixed responses. However, Paul’s approach to bridge cultural gaps in the presentation of the gospel (which is referred as contextualization) to Athenians is appreciable and needs further delve to see how it can be a catalyst to develop missiological insight for Indian context amidst conversion controversy.

Paul’s speech at Areopagus reveals a rhetorical structure that had close resemblance to classical and Greco-Roman literature. Zweck (1989: 70 ff) notes,

The Greco-Roman literature speech consists firstly, of exordium (a brief introduction) designed to gain a hearing from the listeners. In the same manner Paul also stood amidst the Athenians like a Greek orator and with a conventional form addresses the Athenians as “Men of Athens” (17:22-23a), enabling the hearers to feel at home. Secondly, exordium is followed by propositio (thesis) in which the desired goal of the discourse is laid down. In Paul’s case it was to make the unknown God known to the Athenians. Thirdly, it is the probatio (the man proof) in which one’s argue the case (v 24-29) and finally perpratio (concluding exhortation) in which one tries to persuade the audience to take the right course of action, and in case of Paul it was “to repent” (17:30).  

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102 For Deissmann (1927:384) Paul’s Areopagus address was “the greatest missionary document in the New Testament”. Whereas Ramsay (1895:252) notes that Paul became “disillusioned” by his experience in Athens.

It was not only the structure of the Paul’s speech that was akin to Greco-Roman literature but also the content of the speech. The contents were quite adapted to the Hellenized culture in contrast to Paul’s synagogue sermon addressed to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch where we find extensive use of quotations from the Old Testament (13:16-41) (Witherington, 1998:156). Paul’s contextualization of the message was not only to create a common ground but also to transform the world view of the hearers. In order for that to happen it was important for Paul to migrate into the hearer’s world by familiarizing himself with their terminology (in this case supporting his argument by quotations from Epimenides and Aratus of Soli), and also to infuse these terminologies with new meanings in the light of biblical revelation and Christ event.\textsuperscript{104} Witherington (1998:528) states,

Paul re-signifies the words of the pagan poet in verse 28. We are God’s “offspring.” not in a Stoic pantheistic sense, but rather in a biblical sense of being created in the image of God. The quotation then becomes the platform for Paul to launch a critique of pagan idolatry: if the living God has made us in his image, we surely cannot create gods out of lifeless objects (17:29). Likewise, in verse 27, “seeking God” is not a philosophical quest through which God could be easily known from examining nature, as the Stoics believed. Rather, Paul views the religious seeking of the Greeks as a groping search, a fumbling in the darkness, which awaits fulfillment in the gospel of the risen One.\textsuperscript{105}

According to some scholars Paul’s contextualized approach (with regard to the content of the gospel) seems to be “foreign to the entire New Testament” (Dibelius, 1956:71) that leads to syncretism or overcontextualization, but for other scholars it is in line with the tone of Old Testament and Judaism (Bahnsen, 1980:34). But in reality neither of these views completely takes into consideration Paul’s contextual approach. While it is true that to some extent Paul contextualized approach is rooted in the Old Testament and Judaism yet Paul’s efficiently conveyed the gospel “in the language and categories of his Greek listeners without travelling

\textsuperscript{104} In Acts 17:28 states, “We are God’s offspring” is a quote from Aratus of Soli (in his work Phaenomena 1-5) stated: “Let us begin with Zeus, who we mortals never leave unspoken. For every street, every market place is filled with zeus. Even the sea and the harbors are full of his deity. Everywhere everyone is indebted to Zeus. For we are indeed his off springs.” “For in Him we live and move and have out being” (v.28a) is again a quote from Epimenides (in his work Cretica) who stated:-“They fashioned a tomb for thee. O holy and high one. But thou are not dead thou livest and abidest for ever. For in thee we live and move and have our being”. See. http://www.biblehistory.net/newsletter/the_unknown_God.htm Date of access: 13 Oct 2012

\textsuperscript{105}Quoted in Flemming Dean, Paul and athenians: articulating the gospel in a pluralistic world. http://didach e .nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-1/50-6-1-flemming/file Date of access: 15 Oct. 2012
down the slippery slope towards syncretism” (Wright, 1997:81).106 As Luke (1992:319) rightly points out, “Paul takes advantage of similarities between the Jewish Scriptures and Hellenistic thought in order to construct apologetic bridges to his listeners. Greek philosophy becomes a legitimate conversation partner in Paul’s attempt to contextualize the Jewish Christian gospel for his educated contemporaries.”

Paul’s contextualized speech at Athens was both constructive and corrective and it achieved two things.107 Firstly, Paul’s speech reveals the unknown God known through the Jesus, who will Judge the world (Hansen, 1998:317). Secondly, Paul appeals for right response from his hearers by repenting of their idolatry— an act that they have done in ignorance, and be in right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As Tannehill (1990: 218) rightly insists, that Paul speech “is basically a call to repentance, a call for the Greco-Roman world to break decisively with its religious past in response to the one God who now invites all to be part of the renewed world.”108

2.2.5.1 The Implication of the Athenian Message for Today

On the one hand, it is assumed by some scholars that Paul’s attempt to contextualize his message to the Athenian crowd was a sell-out of the simple gospel of the “Christ crucified” – a mistake which he later corrected in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-2). However, there is no proof to support this view in the text.109 On the other hand, the Aeropagus speech is not a misguided failure rather Acts 17:16–34 is a “model of Christian proclamation and the church’s relation to culture— specifically, to educated Gentile culture” (Marshal, 1991:281). If so, can Paul’s approach instruct Indian Christians for doing mission amidst religious plurality in the twenty first century?

Firstly, Paul departs from his conventional form (i.e. from what he normally does among the Jewish community) and engages with the hearer’s worldview and culture (language, literature

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107 The term constructive and corrective is used by Larkin (1995:85).
109 Most modern commentators have rejected this once popular interpretation. Paul’s statement that he decided to know nothing among the Corinthians but the crucified Christ (1 Cor 2:2) reflects an entirely different background. In this case, Paul is not reacting to his poor results in Athens, but rather drawing a contrast between his gospel and the worldly wisdom of the Corinthians.
et.al) to communicate the biblical truth in culturally relevant ways. As Charles (1995:55) rightly states, “the striking significance of Acts 17:16-34 is ability of Paul to clothe biblical revelation in a cultured and relevant argument to his pagan contemporaries”.

Secondly, Paul was sensitive to the cultural background of the hearers as he was aware of the cultural ethos of his hearers. The most important thing here is not form but the content that was communicated was credible, perceptive and with confrontation (with an attitude of love) (Larkin, 1995:319).

Thirdly, Paul’s contextualization approach never compromised the uniqueness of the gospel message nor it led to syncretism but to the transformation of the hearers. Von Ehrenkrook (1998:14) notes three non-negotiable teachings in Paul’s message that confronts the prevailing assumptions of his audience.

Firstly, Paul stress the sovereign lordship of the one true God (which requires there are no other gods or paths to ultimate reality). Secondly, the universal need for repentance (which presupposes sin and guilt) and the reality of a future judgment (which implies moral accountability), and thirdly, the ultimate revelation of God in Christ, validated by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (which flies in the face of Greek notions of death and immortality). Such core convictions continue to challenge worldviews that either deny the truth of the message of God in Christ (as in modernism) or question its ability to be true for everyone (as in postmodernism). The gospel is in some ways counter-cultural to every culture.

Taking these lessons from Paul, we should critically engage with a multi-religious context without diluting the gospel and at the same time offer the world an alternative vision of reality as that of the Khrist Bhakta movement (see Chapter six) as this study proposes.

**Summary**

In a summary of the foregoing, conversion in the New Testament can be summarized as follows:-

1. The New Testament authors used different terminologies to describe what it means to become a Christian - a single term cannot fully capture it. But most of the authors used repentance as a common theological term in the New Testament. In describing the process of repentance and conversion μετανοεῖν and ἐπιστροφή are used with it variants. ἐπιστροφή is the Greek word usually used in the LXX to translate ציון. Moreover, there is a difference in usage of the term repentance in the Old Testament and New Testament.
In the Old Testament the word וּשׁ is used in the covenantal context where it emphasizes the preservation of the existing covenant relationship by continuously turning from evil – this includes both the individual and community. Therefore וּשׁ does not refer to a change of religion by dramatic experience but is an ongoing process. In the New Testament repentance is used in an evangelistic context, for both Jews and Gentiles alike. With regard to the Jews it was a call to rediscover their relationship with God – and this meant not to join a new religion but to seek a radical change. With regard to the Gentiles it meant to turn away from idols to serve a living God and therefore a radical displacement from their religious affiliation but not from cultural change.

2. Conversion is not an end in itself: In the New Testament conversion is a call to a new life, a life of discipleship. Therefore, conversion not a one time event but a process where by one reorients one’s life continuously. This is evident in Paul’s baptismal where he encourages believers to “put on and put off”.

3. As part of repentance, baptism is an important sacrament that one needs to undergo in obedience to Jesus. Even though Paul does not present a detailed doctrinal on baptism yet the continuous reminder of the baptismal imagery in his writings emphasizes its importance. Paul’s reference to baptism reminds his reader of what they experienced at that point in time and what it implies for their lives here and now, as well as for their future expectation and hope.

4. Conversion is not only accepting a different creed, but also “migrating” into a completely new gospel-shaped worldview. Acts 17:16–34 clearly depicts how missionaries should understand the religo- cultural context of the hearers and try to contextualize the gospel based on it. It does not mean that one needs to dilute the gospel message but to change the form in which message is delivered while maintaining its content. Biblical conversion does not de- culturalise or de-nationalize one’s inherited culture so to step into new sub-culture. Rather, as Christians we need to discern wisely as to what must change in our culture when we come in contact with other cultures and world views. Therefore, there is not a standardized formula for sharing the gospel with all cultures; instead there should
be “continuous re-evaluation of the existing paradigms in the light of continuing experience”. Therefore, it is important to contextualize the gospel in words and deeds.

5. Conversion is both divine and human: We need to give proper consideration to divine as well as the human role in conversion. Even though, there is a homiletical goal every missionary proclamation - i.e. the listeners are challenged to react to the message and to take wilful decisions, yet one should not forget that we cannot assume responsibility for the result of our evangelistic efforts. In other words, we should not forget that it is God who saves, and our responsibly is to proclaim. In this sense conversion is a gift- the supernatural and instantaneous work of God. It is a mysterious moment within an indeterminate process. But the problem throughout history of missions, and especially in the Indian context, is that the church/ missionaries were so much intoxicated with results of the evangelistic work that they used different unbiblical approaches to win converts, they developed their own approach to suit their purposes, this issue will be dealt in the next chapter “Understanding conversion in the Christian traditions”.

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CHAPTER THREE
UNDERSTANDING CONVERSION IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Conversion in the Christian tradition began when the disciples found their new faith in Jesus (Der Veer, 1996:47). According to Peace (1999:12) the “act of joining Jesus apostolic band” is “equivalent to their conversion”. The disciples of Jesus continued the conversion activity “throughout the Roman world” (Mac Arthur, 1997:1) where conversion became the “normative requirement for sinners to receive salvation” (Stark, 1997:83). It is in this sense that it is stated “Christian are made not born”. Morrison (1992:189) comments,

Christianity as a living religion is not transmitted by means of biological transmission; neither is it received in the way that Roman citizenship was as an automatic right to children born of parents holding Roman citizenship. Neither was it possible to receive the full spiritual investiture of Christianity by means of being born into the Christian community to Christian parents as an automatic endowment. Rather, the prioritizing of the spiritual world over the natural, the knowledge of God as personal and immediate to the self, the tendency toward religious ecstasy, the predilection toward prayer and religious practice was vouchsafed by means of a personal encounter with God and a turning toward him in conversion.

The biblical understanding of conversion involves a personal encounter with God that leads to repentance and a turning towards God, as discussed in the Chapter two. However, when we move beyond the biblical definition of conversion into the ecclesiastical traditions we are surrounded by different understandings of what constitutes genuine Christian conversion. For instance, in the sacramental tradition (Roman Catholic, Lutheran) the conversion process entails participation in the sacraments, i.e. baptism (a dying and rising with Christ), Eucharist and confirmation. In addition, for the Roman Catholics, liturgy and the priest play an important role in the process of salvation whereas for the Lutheran church the role of the priest is unwarranted (Bryant & Lamb, 1999:18). In the Reformed tradition (Calvinist), conversion or regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit where regeneration precedes faith and repentance and repentance is the fruit of faith (Dayton, 1991:129). Within the Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, conversion is a personal decision [based on the conviction of sin that leads to repentance] where one surrenders his/her life to Jesus accompanied by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This experience is alluded to as being “born again” (Bryant & Lamb, 1999:18).
The purpose of this chapter is not to engage in a critical discussion (why they believe) on the understanding of conversion in the Christian traditions. Rather, this chapter simply attempts to present a succinct restatement of the core tenets on conversion in the soteriology of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. We attempt to show how they differ or agree with each other. This discussion attempts project that every single theology of conversion is the product of its time and built into Christianity as a systemic component. A (particular) theology of conversion it is not an absolute because it was determined by social forces of the time. Therefore, in the Indian context there is a need for a theology of conversion in dialogue with the social forces now at play in Indian society.

3.1 The **Roman Catholic Understanding of Conversion**

G.K. Chesterton (1950:30), a convert to the Roman Catholic Church, wrote: “The church is a house with a hundred gates; no two men enter at exactly the same angle”. This is true when one considers the Roman Catholic understanding of conversion. Although the traditional magisterial position shows that the Roman Catholic understanding of conversion is linear and uncomplicated yet in reality the Catholic’s approach to conversion is “inextricably entangled with social, cultural and political history” (Priest, 2007:1).110 Therefore, it is evident that “one cannot understand the shifts in one without understanding the shifts in the other” (Priest, 2007:1). The following is a journey through various teachings of the Catholic Church on conversion, where one can discern diverse paradigms and paths of mission and conversion in its journey of two millennia.

3.1.1 **Conversion in the Middle Ages till Vatican II**

It seems quite bewildering to begin the understanding of conversion in the Roman Catholic Church from the Middle Ages without making reference to the patristic period. Yet, we begin from Middle Ages due to the fact that in the Patristic writings there is complete no reference to conversion, in the sense of external conversion to the church. The absenteeism comes from the the general understanding among the early church fathers, that the church had already expanded throughout the world (Mediterranean basin) (Hoffmann, 1968:5).111


111 Such a notion can be derived in the writing of Tertullian, “Christian were only of yesterday but already have infiltrated into every class of society, even into the highest class” (quoted in Hoffman, 1968:5). Moreover, even in
However, Augustine standing at the zenith of the Patristic age, and anticipating the medieval age narrated the doctrine of conversion based on his personal history and political circumstances. Among his many achievements Augustine responded to the Donatist and the Pelagian controversy in the church. His reaction to these crises shaped the theology and understanding of the Roman Catholic mission in the subsequent years.

In his Confessions, Augustine depicts that he underwent several conversions, to philosophy, to Manichaeism and finally to Christ. This clearly shows that Augustine conversion was not instant but a process (Daly, 2003:68). Augustine believed that his conversion was not achieved by his own means but brought about by God Himself: “You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith” (Augustine, 1983:178). Augustine presented a monergistic view where “God is the sole active agent and energy, and humans both collectively and individually are tools and instruments of God’s grace or wrath” (quoted in Olson, 1999:255).

In his dispute with Pelagius, Augustine developed his understanding of freewill from his own conversion experience and from the original sin. In his conversion, Augustine was not in full control of his will; he “both willed and did not will to be become a Christian” (Gonzalez, 2010:249). The sinner could make choices that were good or bad, “but even the best choices still...”

The writings of John Chrysostom and a few others we do not find any exhortation for the early Christians to go out and seek conversion of others (see Fletcher, 1999:23). In the 1994 catechism of the Catholic Church, Augustine of Hippo is quoted more frequently than any other theologian (McGrath, 2011:253). Moreover, Pope Benedict XVI refers Augustine as the “Father of the church” (McGrath, 2011:254).

The Confessions is a spiritual autobiography that covers 35 years of Augustine life. It is divided into 13 books. Book 1-9 is about Augustine life story and especially book 8 deals with wavering Augustine who is in double mind to accept Christ after he hears a voice “Take and read,” he picks up the Epistles of St. Paul and reads a passage that convinces him to give up his worldly career and devote himself to God. Book 10-13 is a detailed analysis of Genesis chapters on creation. See Augustine (2006).

Although Augustine understood that human beings have a certain degree of freedom in cooperating with God [synergism] yet he stressed that this free will is affected by sin and therefore makes it powerless, thus, “people are free to sin but not free to not sin because all they want to do is sin” (Osln, 1999:273).

Pelagius believed in the free will where human beings are capable on their own to attain good without the need of divine grace. This is because Pelagius denied “the doctrines of tradux peccati (transmitted sin) and peccatum originis (original sin), consisting of both inherited guilt and corruption” (Collinge, 1992:8-9). For Pelagius it was blasphemous to even think about transmitting Adam’s guilt and corruption to his progeny. Rather Adam, is an isolated person, not a representative of all human beings. Adam’s action injured himself and set a bad example for all of those who follow. (Bonner, 1992:365-66). The corruption of the human race is due to imitating evil habits of those who have come before (Burns, 1981:5-6). Moreover, since there is no inherited sin the will is free and is not enslaved to sin; rather it is just as able after the fall as before the fall to choose that which is good(Kelly,1978:358). Pelagius believed free will “to be proved from Scripture, for God gives commands to all people and these commands would not be given if man was morally incapable of obeying them” (Evans, 1968:97).
fall within the category of sin” (Gonzalez, 2010:249). This is because of the depravity of humanity from birth; therefore the original sin of Adam had to be redeemed from evil. This redemption has happened through the death of Christ on the cross. It is the duty of all individuals to appropriate this redemption by receiving Christ. Augustine believed in the supremacy of God over all things as well as the human soul’s need of grace for salvation. Thus for Augustine the redemption is personal and spiritual. Salvation thus becomes a private affair.

Donatists,\(^{116}\) claimed the perfection of the church to such an extent that they only validated a particular sacrament depending upon the personal worthiness of the priest administering it. In response to this, Augustine stated that authority and holiness did not belong to the priest who administered the sacrament but to the Church. Augustine stated, “If the forgiveness of sin were not to be had in the church, there would be no hope for future life and eternal liberation. We thank God who gave his church such a gift. Here you are; you are going to come to the holy font, you will be washed in the saving baptism, you will be renewed in the bath of rebirth. (Titus 3:5), you will be without any sin at all as you come up from that bath. All the things that were plaguing you in the past will be blotted out (quoted in Hill, 2007:145).\(^{117}\)

Here Augustine (1956b:369) echoed Cyprian of Carthage’s dictum *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (“Outside the church there is no salvation”). Augustine emphasized the active role of the church in the salvation process using the metaphors of the “church as the mother of believers”, “church as a virgin” and “Christ’s bride” (Alexander, 2008:92-128). As a virgin the church is espoused unto one husband, Christ, yet the Church as a mother gives birth to believers (just as Mary gave birth to Christ) and nurtures the life of a believer unto eternal life (Augustine, 1956a:281). These metaphors gave an active role to the church for salvation. Moreover, the Church as Christ’s bride has received all the power from Christ to protect herself from all error- even the gospel is subject to the Church’s authority (Augustine, 1983:447). Thus Augustine urged the believers not to hear anyone who does not belong to the church as a clear warning against mingling with Donatists: “One thing only I urge you to take to heart, and that is by every means possible to turn your minds and your ears away from the person who is not a Catholic, so that you may be able to lay hold of

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\(^{116}\) For a detailed analysis of the Donatism, see Brown(1967) & Tilley (1997).

\(^{117}\) *sermones*.213.9.
the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the flesh and life everlasting through the one, true, and holy Catholic Church” (Augustine, 1993:165).

Moreover, Augustine, denied that all the members of the Church can be perfect, rather the Church was mixture of saints and sinners; regenerate and unregenerate. It is only in the eschaton that God will purify the church (Evan, 1994:169). But this limitation does not debar the church from emphasizing her power over all elements of the Christian faith (Portalie, 1960:231) and even compel (in reference to bringing back Donatists) people to convert. To justify this stand, Augustine referred to the “parable of the great supper” (Luke14:16-24), where the Lord asked the servants to compel the people in highways to come to his house (v.23):

Augustine argued from the New Testament passages: God used force to convert St. Paul; and the parable of the prepared banquet with no guests, the servants were sent out to compel people to come to the banquet (Lk. 14:16-24). The famous Latin phrase “Compelle intrare” became a mission approach of the Catholic Church in the middle ages. Augustine maintained that if the church can prevent people from killing themselves physically it can prevent them from killing themselves spiritually. Thus began the long history of the Catholic Church’s using force and violence against heretics in the name of the Gospel (Curran, 2003:47).

Even though Augustine was clearly aware that such coercion will not lead to genuine repentance, however, he supported the use of force for conversion due to his believe that at a later stage God’s grace will save them. As Harrison (2000:153) rightly stated, “Augustine came to believe that even if coercion did not result in repentance, and the Donatists, like so many pagans, merely feigned conversion in order to avoid penalties, he was aware that God’s grace was unfathomable and might well work in electing and bringing to faith.”

Augustine firmly believed that the Church has authority to call people into ministry, this is evident in a letter written to Eudoxius: “We exhort you in the Lord, brethren, to be steadfast in your purpose, and persevere to the end; and if the Church, your Mother, calls you to active service, guard against accepting it, on the one hand, with too eager elation of spirit, or declining it, on the other, under the solicitations of indolence; and obey God with a lowly heart, submitting yourselves in meekness to Him who governs you, who will guide the meek in judgment, and will teach them His way” (Augustine, 1956c:294)

Augustine in a letter to Alypius mentioned about a Chief physician, named Dioscorus, from court of Milan, who had to suffer physically as his conversion was incomplete due to his laxity to memorize the creed. Dioscorus had vowed to become Christian if his daughter was healed but when his daughter recovered he did not keep his vow and as a result he became blind. Having realized his mistake he confessed his fault but again did not keep his vow and therefore was paralyzed. Then through a dream he came to know that the suffering was due to not keeping his vow. Therefore, after all trials he learned the creed and held it in his memory. (Augustine, Letter 227, quoted in Teske, 2005:103).
This missionary paradigm of the use of force linked to the narrow interpretation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* continued in the medieval period with two stated goals: “saving souls” and “implanting the church” (Bosch, 1991:214-219). This is evident from the two key magisterial level statements from bull *Unam Sactum* of pope Boniface VIII (1302) and Council of Florence (1442) that spoke on the status of non Christian in the Middle Ages. Pope Boniface stated that, “we declare, state and define that for every human creature it is a matter of necessity for salvation to be subject to the Roman Pontiff” (quoted in Sullivan, 1992:65). This unqualified, absolute jurisdiction over temporal and spiritual orders of the entire world is further reiterated in the council of Florence decree,

[The holy Roman church] …firmly believes, professes and preaches that no one outside the Catholic church, neither pagans nor Jews nor heretics nor schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before the end of their life they are joined to it. For union with the body of the church is of so great importance that the sacraments of the church are of use toward salvation only for those remaining in it, and fasts, almsgiving, other works of piety and the exercises of a militant Christian life bear eternal rewards for them alone. And no one can be saved, no matter how much he has given in alms, even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Roman Catholic Church (quoted in Sullivan, 1992:66).

In the decree of the council of Florence’s we can see the incorporation and influence of Augustine’s teachings and of his loyal follower the North African bishop Fulgentius (468-533). In his *Reply to Faustus the Manichean* Augustine admitted that “the church admits and avows the Jewish people to be cursed, relegated to eternal damnation and punishment, because they would not accept Christ” (quoted in Teasdale, 2004:84). This is echoed by his friend African bishop Fulgentius (468-533) “most firmly hold and by no means doubt, that not only all pagans, but also all Jews, and all heretics and schismatic’s who die outside the Catholic church, will go to the eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels” (quoted in Sullivan, 1992:43). The statement of Fulgentius was exactly incorporated into the decree of the Council of Florence which once again stressed an ecclesio-centric, exclusivist theology i.e. the mystical body of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church and that outside of it there is no salvation.

In the span of fifty years after the council of Florence, the Roman Catholic church had to re-examine her position about the people “outside the church” due to the recognition that world was not coextensive with the Christendom. Sullivan (1992:69) put it thus: “Christian thinkers had to
ask themselves: How can we continue to judge all pagans guilty of sinful unbelief, when we
know that countless people have been living without the knowledge of the gospel, through no
fault of their own? And how can we reconcile our belief in the universality of God’s salvific will
with the fact that he apparently has left all those people without any possibility of becoming
members of the church, outside of which they could not be saved?”

The challenges of the new world led theologians to develop theories that addressed the issue of
universal salvation. Aquinas proposed the concept of “implicit faith” and “desire” based on
Hebrews 11:6, where he stated that belief and faith in God brings reward even if these two things
occur outside the Church: “Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that
he rewards those who seek him. It must be said that in every day and age and for everyone it has
always been necessary to believe explicitly in these two things.” 120

Aquinas further makes reference to Cornelius who even though was not baptized, was pleasing
God through his action, “At the time, Cornelius was not an unbeliever, else his works would not
have been acceptable to God, whom none can please without faith. However, he then had
implicit faith (in Christ) when the truth of the Gospel had not yet been manifested to him. Hence
Peter was sent to him, to give him full instruction in the faith.” 121

It is clear that Aquinas proposes the universality of God’s salvific will where “God will provide
the means for those who wish to draw close to God” (Dupius, 1998:115). This idea is further
developed in Summa Theologica in relation to those who have not received the sacrament of
baptism. Aquinas states that a person who had “accepted the gospel message died before
baptism, [s]he would be saved due to his/her desire to be baptized will be saved due to the
desire.” 122

120 Summa Theologica II-II, Q.2a.8. ad. 1.
121 Summa Theologica II-II, Q.10a. 4. ad. 3.
122 See Summa Theologica III, Q.69 a.4.ad. 2. This view was also held by Ambrose of Milan who in the context of
the death of Emperor Valentinian who had not received the sacrament of baptism before his death lamented and said:
“But I hear that you are in sorrow because he (Valentinian II) did not receive the baptismal mysteries. Tell me: what
else is there in us except will, except request? Now for some time he has had the wish to be baptized even before
coming to Italy, and recently he indicated that he wanted me to baptize him. It was primarily for this reason that he
decided to send for me. Does he not, therefore, have the grace that he desired, the grace that he requested? And
because he requested, he received. Thus it is: “Whatever death the just man experiences, his soul will be at rest”
The idea of implicit and explicit desire was further explored and developed by three main Spaniards thinkers Francisco de Vitoria (1493-1546 C.E.), Melchior Cano (1505-1560 C.E.) and Domingo Soto (1524-1560 C.E.). Their contributions are relevant as they came to influence official church teaching. Even though they upheld the official teaching that there is no salvation without explicit faith in Christ yet, they believed, with Aquinas that if one cooperated with God’s grace one would be given the means to be saved and thus God willed to save all people. For instance Francisco de Vitoria states,

When we postulate invincible ignorance on the subject of baptism or the Christian faith, it does not follow that a person can be saved without baptism or the Christian faith. For the aborigines to whom no preaching of the faith or Christian religion has come will be damned for the mortal sins of idolatry, but not for the sin of unbelief. As St. Thomas says, however, if they do what in them lies, accompanied by a good life according to the law of nature, it is consistent with God’s providence that he will illuminate them regarding the name of Christ (quoted in Sullivan 1992:70).

It is clear that de Vitoria is pushing for God’s universal salvific reaching for those who “do what in them lies, accompanied by a good life according to the law of nature the mercy of God” (Sullivan, 1992:71). Akin to this understanding several Jesuit scholars at the Roman College continued to develop theories allowing salvation for those who found themselves “outside the Church”. Most notable among them were Robert Bellarmine and J.De Lugo who taught in the Roman College. They believed that “faith in God would lead to an implicit desire for Christian faith and baptism” (quoted in Dupius, 1998:119). But Lugo went one step further and extended the possibility of salvation to those who were ignorant of the gospel. Thus sincere pagans, heretics, Jews, and Muslims could be saved through their faith in God:

A Jew or other non-Christian could be saved; for he could have supernatural faith in the one God and be invincibly ignorant about Christ. But such a person would not be a Christian, because one is called a Christian by reason of one’s knowledge of Christ... The possibility of salvation for such a person is not ruled out by the nature of the case; moreover, such a person should not be called a non-Christian, because, even though he has not been visibly-joined to the Church, still, interiorly he has the virtue of habitual and actual faith in common with the Church, and in the sight of God he will be reckoned with Christians (quoted in Dupius, 1998:119).

123 In the context of the colonization by Spain in parts of the Americas, Spanish Dominicans were faced with the challenge of assessing the need to preach the gospel to the un-evangelized territory (Fichter, 1940).
124 The Roman College, now known as the Gregorian University, was founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in 1551 who was also the founder of the Society of Jesus. The motive of the society, according to Jedin (1980:448) was “to fight for God under the standard of the cross and to serve only the Lord and the Roman Pontiff, his vicar on earth, by preaching, teaching, and works of caritas... for the salvation of souls and the spread of the faith.”
Even though this was a revolutionary thinking and a challenge to the statement of the Council of Florence at that point of time, yet later the church’s documents affirmed that those outside the church would be given grace to be saved. Even though the Council of Trent\textsuperscript{125} affirmed that it is impossible to please God without the Catholic faith yet it affirms the baptism of desire, “After the promulgation of the Gospel, the transition (from the state in which one is born a child of the first Adam to the state of grace and adoption as God’s children) cannot take place without the bath of regeneration or the desire for it \textit{(eius voto)}. As it is written, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God,” (Jn 3:5) (quoted in Tanner, 1990:677).

In the forthcoming years, the universal salvific will of God was challenged by the pessimism of the Jansenists - a group founded by Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638) who proposed that “pagans, Jews, heretics and others of that sort receive no influx of grace from Jesus Christ” (Hogan, 1965:588). But this was challenged by Pope Alexander VIII in 1690 who condemn the thirty-one propositions found in the writings of the Jansenist’s theologians. Also Clement XI in 1713 officially condemned a similar Jansenist position given by Paschasius Quesnel in the dogmatic constitution, \textit{Unigenitus Dei Filius}. Clement concluded that “outside the Church grace is given and that pagans, Jews, heretics, and others do receive from Christ the motions of grace by which they can be saved” (quoted in Marshall, 1983: 71).

In 1854 pope Pius IX in his allocution \textit{Singulari Quadam} found a way to bridge the gap between the necessity of explicit faith in Jesus through membership in the Church and the universal salvific will expressed in the notion of “invincible ignorance”:

\begin{quote}
It must, of course, be held as of faith that no one can be saved outside the Apostolic Roman Church, that the Church is the only ark of salvation, and that whoever does not enter it will perish in the flood. Yet, on the other hand, it must likewise be held as certain that those who are in ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not subject to any guilt in this matter before the eyes of the Lord. Now, who could presume for oneself the ability to set the boundaries to such ignorance, taking into consideration then natural differences between peoples, lands, talents and so many other factors? Only when we have been released from the bonds of this body and “shall see God as he is” (I Jn.3:2) shall we understand how closely and wonderfully the divine mercy and justice are linked. But, as long as we dwell on earth, encumbered by the mortal body that dulls our soul, let us tenaciously hold the Catholic doctrine that there is “one God, one faith, one baptism” (cf. Eph 4:5). To push our inquiry further is not right (quoted in J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, 1997:101).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{125} The Council opened in Trent, Italy on December 13 of 1545, and closed on December 4, 1563- held twenty five sessions (Jedin, 1980:20).
Once again it is clear that the document affirms the mercy of God - God alone knows “the minds and souls, the thoughts and habits of all people.” Accordingly, God wills to save all people and will not condemn the innocent. Consequently, in June 1868, Pius IX summoned the First Vatican Council (1869-70) with the purpose of condemning contemporary errors so as “to define the Catholic doctrine concerning the church of Christ” (Tanner, 1990: 801). This council affirms that no one can be saved outside the “true catholic faith”; however, the council’s documents do confirm the teaching that “God wills all people to be saved” (quoted in Tanner, 1990:803-805) Nevertheless, issues of membership remains a concern, especially for those who wilfully remain outside the Catholic Church.

In the following century the membership issue was further discussed. Pius XII even though stressed the axiom of “outside the Church there is no salvation”, yet in section 101 of encyclical Mystici Corporis (1943) confirmed the possibility of salvation for those who desire the truth: “From a heart overflowing with love we ask each and every one of them to be quick and ready to follow the interior movements of grace, and to seek earnestly to rescue themselves from a state in which they cannot be secure about their salvation. For even though, by a certain unconscious desire and longing, they are ordained to the mystical Body of the Redeemer, they lack so many great gifts and helps from God, which they can enjoy only in the Catholic Church” (quoted in Dupuis,1997:127).

The encyclical of Pope Pius IX Mystici Corporis (1943) was the most important papal statement concerning the salvation of those “outside the Church” (Sullivan (1990:132). However, this encyclical does not clarify how people who are outside the church have an unconscious desire to belong to the church? However, Rahner (1963:78) states that “unconscious desire” refers “to a person’s [both Catholic and members of other religions] sincere intention to do God’s will.” 126

The inclusiveness of Mystici Corporis and the idea that non-Catholics can be saved affirmed by Archbishop Richard Cushing of Boston was challenged by Father Leonard Feeney.127 As a result

126 While Pius XII’s encyclical saw both non-Catholic Christians and members of other religions as “ordained” to the Church, Vatican II affirmed that the non-Catholic Christians are “joined” in many ways to the Church (Lumen Gentium, L.G. 15) and use the term “orientation” to members of other religions (L.G. 16).
127 Fr. Feeney, a Jesuit and his followers St. Benedict Centre in Cambridge, Massachussetts questioned and criticized the inclusive nature of Pius XII Mystici Corporis regarding the validity of people saved outside Roman church. They strongly urged those who do not follow the Catholic teaching or die as a Catholic can be saved except in case
of this controversy the intervention of the Holy See was sought. In response the Holy See, explains the doctrine universal salvation in more technical terms:

The letter makes the distinction between the explicit desire of those who, in an act of faith, join the Church and those who, through an implicit act along with “supernatural” faith, are related to the Church through their longing and desire to do God’s will. While some people may “lack the many great gifts and helps from God,” the “infinite mercy” of God can bring about their salvation. Here it continues to be held that it is necessary to belong to the Church, but the means by which one belongs are two in kind. The Church then, calls all those who hear and accept the gospel to become members of the Church, and those who are invincibly ignorant are called to follow their consciences and to follow God’s will through desire and longing (Neuner & Dupius, 2001: 854-57).

Thus, the Holy See presented an official interpretation of the axiom. But the fact remains that from the patristic period to the middle of the twentieth-century, the official Catholic Magisterial position in relation to other religions was underscored by an ecclesio-centric, exclusivist theology.

3.1.2 Understanding of Mission and Conversion in Vatican II

The 20th century experienced several events128 and changed context129 that influenced the theological thinking of the Christian churches. Even the Roman Catholic Church did not remain unscathed from this. As a result, Pope John XXIII called for the need for aggiornamento130 or modernization of the Roman Catholic Church (Lane, 1989:351) and this call resulted in the second Vatican council (1962-65).131 This Council was mainly pastoral rather than doctrinal- it was different from the past Councils that set to condemn errors and define dogmas. Moreover,

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128 Some of the major events (two world wars, horrors of fascism, Nazism, Communistia and Capitalism, Russian and Chinese revolution) and various disciplines, the natural and social science, philosophy, history had a profound influence in theological thinking, cf. Macquarrie (1988).
129 The Vatican II council took place post World War II and the western world was aware of the atrocities committed world over and especially against Jews (Holocaust), which took place throughout Nazi-controlled Europe. All this called for the self understanding of the church in relation to world religions in the re-construction of a more peaceful world. Moreover, the after effect of the war led to poverty, fear and confusion. Amidst this what was the role of the church? Furthermore, the end of 1950’s and early 1960’s mark the birth of new countries in Africa and Asia through the process called decolonization, which ended the European empires dominance. Even the Catholic Church was affected due to decolonization as it had benefited from the old ties between colonization and mission. These changes in the world transformed the nature of the church in the catholic theology that inspired the effort to build ecumenical bridges to non-Catholic Churches and to other world religions.
130 In contrast to Pope Pius XI encyclical Mortalium Animus (1928) prohibiting Catholics to be involved with ecumenical movement, Pope John XXIII called for aggiornamento-literally, updating the Church – he issued a document Gaudium et Spes to uphold the Christian unity as one of the major goals of the Council.
131 Actually, Vatican Council II was a seven year event from 1959 to 1965. The pope consulted 2500 bishops, 156 superior generals of religious communities, and sixty-two theological faculties (Stransky, 1985:154).
This Council took three major shifts in the understanding of mission and conversion especially in relation to other religions which will be looked into.

3.1.2.1 The Trinitarian understanding of Mission

One of the most important developments in mission is the shift from a theological basis on the great commission to a Trinitarian basis. This could be the influence of the International missionary council meeting at Willingen (1952) where the term *missio Dei* was introduced. The document of the Council, “Decree on Missionary Activity in the Church” (Ad-Gentes AG) locates the origin of mission in the Trinity itself. Mission is an activity, which flows out of the very nature of God who desire salvation for all human kind. The son and the Holy Spirit are sent to carry out this divine mission (AG, 2-5). The implication of making Trinity the origin of mission, rather than the great commission is that “mission is no longer simply a duty incumbent upon Christians, but becomes part of the very nature of being a Christian” (Scheiter, 1994:116).

The church is also missionary by nature rather than having a mission. Mission is from God not from humans, to emphasize the unity of the mission of the Trinity, the term mission in singular is used rather than mission (s) in plural form. The ultimate ground of mission thus rests in the “Trinitarian mystery of the sending God, centered in Christ, the sent-one and the Spirit who carries the father’s saving plan: to build up the kingdom or reign of God” (Stransky, 1993:140).

With the shift of the theological basis, the whole tone of what constitutes mission changed from military language to love. The purpose of mission is no more conversion but bear witness to the Trinitarian life of God. Conversion itself is seen as the beginning of a long, process of growth away from sin into the full life of grace. As Stransky (1985:155) rightly asserts, “Whereas previously missionary activity was the specialized and clearly defined task of winning converts and establishing the church, it now became the general task of all believers, involving a more complex combination of proclamation, witness, dialogue and service.”

Moreover, conversion was called for, personal, collective, institutional and structural levels of life. This is very much evident by the use of the Latin noun *conversio* (12 times) and verb *convertere* (26 times) in the Vatican II documents. *Lumen Gentium* (LG) speaks of continual conversion in the life of the church: “Mother church exhorts her children to purification and renewal (*purificationem et renovationem*) so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face (*super faciem*) of the church” (LG.15). The purpose of such a conversion is to
reflect the “genuine face of God” (Gaudium et spes, GS. 19). In the past the church failed to repent from all forms of sin\textsuperscript{132} and has defaced the church and has become a stumbling block for others to believe in Jesus.

3.1.2.2 **New Self Understanding of the Church**

Vatican II was a “council of the church about the church” (Rahner, 1966:38). As stated earlier, the main priority of the council was to update the church and that is the reason why the council used the church as a vital centre for all adjustment. The church new self- understanding thus gave way for the development of missiology.

The Patristic dictum “Outside the Church there is no salvation” has been how Roman Catholic Church understood herself. With this understanding the missionary paradigm was to compel or use force for conversion (Bosch, 1991:236). With this claim there is a tendency to equate salvation with baptism and membership of the church (Motte, 1995:31).

A New understanding of the church in the Vatican II was the “pilgrim people of God”. This image was dominated by the story of exodus, whereby the people was liberated from their captivity and moving towards the promise land. The church is no longer equated with the kingdom of God, but pointing to the kingdom of God, a herald, an envoy of it (Bulter, 1966:65). Hence “the establishment of the church, although still important, no longer in and of itself was to be – all and end of all of mission” (Scherter, 1994:118). The main aim of the missionary was kingdom of God. This aspect of the mission of the church, which tends towards the fulfilment and realization of the kingdom, has been developed by many Catholic theologians thereafter.

The church as the pilgrim people of God is missionary by nature - the missionary vocation is a matter for the entire church, and not for a few individuals known as missionaries. This basic theological conviction has dominated all subsequent official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (Wilfred, 2002:240). In this understanding all the members of the church, lay people, priest, and bishops have their respective task in mission (Schrer, 1987:198).

\textsuperscript{132} Here the reference is to the structural and individual sin. Cf. Kerans (1974)
New Understanding of Salvation and Relations with non-Christian Religion

The Vatican II passed a “Declaration on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religion” (*Nostra Aetate*) in which the decree moved strongly in the direction of a soteriological universalism, even though the decree did not state explicitly that other religions are a valid way of salvation (Scherer, 1987:230). The council admonishes its members to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found in the other religions (Schlink, 1968:132). This was a radical move from the pre-conciliar Catholic conversion - concept of aversion of the religious context to which the convert belonged to and practiced (Nock, 1998:7). The theological discourse at that time believed that no denomination or religions could actively contribute to the salvation of individuals. This understanding was favoured by the rituals that the converts have to undergo to be received in the Catholic Church - they have to confess the Catholic faith and promise to adhere to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and distance themselves from previous backgrounds. Therefore conversion was impossible without aversion.

But the Vatican II theological reorientation has led to a new understanding of conversion, especially with regards to other Christian traditions and religions. The axiom “Outside the Church, no salvation” vanished from the official documents of the Catholic Church due to the fact that after Vatican II the church no longer considers the non-Christian religions as “heresy and superstition” (Kasper, 2000:325). This is clearly evident in the documents of this council - namely, *Lumen Gentium*, the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, and the decree *Ad Gentes*, affirm the possibility of salvation of people’s salvation outside the Church and the Church’s acknowledgement of the values and truth’s found in the religions of the world:

Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God since he gives to all men life and breath in all things (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and since the savior wills all men to be saved (cf. 1Tim.2:4). Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience- those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet

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133 The effect of the Vatican II with regards to the mission of the church can be reflected in the subsequent council document (see canon law 1983) where there is no mention of the word conversion as converting the other but it is used in the sense of turning towards God (see Catechismus,nos. 836-848, 1886–1889, 2561–2584 ). Moreover, these documents also stressed that other Christian denominations own a part of the truth and therefore may contribute to the redemption of mankind (Allit, 1997:309).

arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever truth or good is found amongst them is considered by the church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life (LG 16).

Hence “salvation is extended to other monotheistic religions as well as to people who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since the saving presence of God’s grace is close to them” (Stransky, 1985:156). The document sees a positive value in those who desire to seek truth and God and affirms the truth found in other religions as “preparation for the Gospel”:

For the Church is driven by the Holy Spirit to do her part for the full realization of the plan of God, who has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world. By her proclamation of the Gospel, she draws her hearers to receive and profess the faith... The effect of her work is that whatever good is found sown in the hearts and minds of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these are not only preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man (LG 17).

Therefore, the church’s role in Lumen gentium, is not only to acknowledge and affirm the goodness found in these religious traditions but also to bring these religions to fulfilment through the hearing of the Gospel. Moreover, it is the mission of the Church with the work of the Holy Spirit to purify, raise up and perfect the rites and customs of these religions. It is here according to Dupius (1998:138) that “we mark a shift away from what has been called the ‘replacement theory,’ with Christianity the ultimate replacement of all religions, to a ‘fulfillment theory’ where other religions are seen as ‘stepping stones’ to Christianity”.

This positive attitude to other faiths opens up a new avenue from confrontation that was practiced in Patristic and Middle Ages to dialogue. Before the Vatican II the church never entered into a dialogue with the other religions and cultures but had one intention - i.e., to convert them to Christ and make them members of the true Church. The missionaries as Justin (1983:162) states “saw themselves as engaged in a one-way traffic”. The other religions were seen as “cocktails of idolatry or superstition, and hence works of the devil” (Melchoir, 1988:134).

The Vatican II initiative to have dialogue with other world religions finds its theological rooting in encyclical Ecclesiam Suam (ES), referred as “magna carta of dialogue” by late Pope John Paul II.135 The Ecclesiam Suam states, “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which

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135 ES was published in 1964 just one year before Nostra Aetate.
it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make (ES. 65). It does not aim at effecting the immediate conversion of the interlocutor, inasmuch as it respects both his dignity and his freedom (ES. 64). Rather dialogue aims at promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, teaching and education, social welfare and civil order”(ES.108).

The discourse of dialogue was further fathomed by Redemptoris Missio( 1991) where it stressed that dialogue with world religions are “a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” but not to be used for “tactical concerns or self-interest”. It is “a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment” (RM 55).

The Roman Catholic Church has not only theorized the concept of dialogue but has also put into practice at various levels. Based on these practices, there is today a document on dialogue and proclamation (1991) issued by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. It states that, - dialogue is not a betrayal of mission of the church nor is a new method of conversion to Christianity. Rather, it is a constructive and positive relationship between various religious traditions in order to enhance mutual enrichment and understanding (Darmaatmadija, 1999:887). Moreover, it recommends a fourfold dialogue (Hall, 2005:6):

1. A dialogue of life, where people share their joy and sorrows and live in an open and neighbourly spirit.
2. A dialogue of action, where people from all religion work for the liberation of people.
3. A dialogue of experience/testimony, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches.
4. A dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists appreciate each other’s spiritual values.

Even though Vatican II exhorted the missionaries to acknowledge and appreciate the authentic human and spiritual values found in other religions through dialogue, yet it did not offer a theological evaluation of these religions. This could be because the concern of the council fathers was more pastoral than theological.
3.2 Protestant Understanding of Conversion

The word Protestantism comes from a verb *protestari* where the adjective protestant means “to protest in the sense of raising an objection” (Douglas, 1978:808). In the theological circle, the word Protestantism refers to a Christian movement of the 16th century raised in Germany as a reaction against the Roman Catholic Church teaching on salvation and justification. During the time of reformation, the word “protest” referred to the Lutheran princes’ letter of protest written in 1529 against the decision of Diet of Speyer that reaffirmed the edict of the Diet of Worms (1521). Later on, the word Protestantism is attributed to the followers of reformation in Germany and later to all of the western Church members who were outside the Roman Catholic Church.

However, it is by and large figured that Protestantism has started when on the 31 October 1517 Martin Luther nailed his “Ninety-Five Theses” to the door of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg (Latourette, 1945:13). Like a wild fire the movement suddenly gained adherents in the German states, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Scotland and parts of France.

Even though Martin Luther wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church from within (without leaving the church) yet when the hope of reforming the Roman church faded, the Protestants were forced to separate from Roman Catholicism. Today Protestant Christians are subdivided into thousands of different denominations, as well as “independent” or “non-denominational” groups. This study will mainly focus on the Lutheran, Reformed, Modern missionary movement, and the ecumenical movement views of conversion. The selection of these churches is not randomly done, but rather due to the following assertions:

1. Historically, Lutherans (Martin Luther) and Reformed or Calvinists traditions (John Calvin) are the earliest protestant groups that were founded in the 16th century.\(^{137}\)

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\(^{136}\) The Diet of Worms was conveyed to make Luther accept that the writings against the Catholic Church were his and he needs to admit that these writings were heretical. In response Luther stated: “Unless I am convinced by scriptures or clear reasoning that I am in error- for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves, I cannot recant for a subject to the scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one’s conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen” (Comfort, 2010:61).

\(^{137}\) The Anglicans, or “Church of England,” separated from the Roman Catholic Church for political, not theological reasons; thus, their teachings are similar to Roman Catholics except for not acknowledging pope. Therefore their views are not considered in this study.
2. In this study, the term Modern missionary movement will be used technically to mean protestant missions from Europe and North America during the period of 1792-1910.\textsuperscript{138} The movement had its roots in and was influenced by the 18\textsuperscript{th} century Evangelical Revival in Britain and its North American counterpart, The Evangelical Awakening, and also in the theological revolt against hyper-Calvinism led by William Carey.

3. By the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the rise of national identity among former colonized and mission field nations coupled with the resurgence of world religions questioned the notion of “rescue the perishing motive” (Pachau, 2001:185). Thus in mid-1960s the first ecumenical studies on conversion was made. The subject of conversion was first taken up prominently by regional ecumenical organs; India\textsuperscript{139} and the United States were the two regions where thorough studies of the issue were first done ecumenically (Löffler, 1967:252). Therefore this study will focus on the ecumenical understanding of conversion as seen in the World Council of Churches.

3.2.1 **Conversion in the Lutheran Church**

In the year 2017 the Lutheran church, the oldest Protestant denomination, will be celebrating the 500\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther’s thesis in Wittenberg. It was founded by Martin Luther, who posted 95 *Theses* against the practice of indulgences in 1517. Initially Luther hoped for reform not schism. But when proved impossible Luther continued to spread his teaching amidst threat and excommunication. Those adherents who followed Luther’s teaching were called “Lutherans” by their opponents. Therefore any study of conversion in the Lutheran church should begin with Luther because of his influence on the church’s teaching as a founder of Lutheran church. Moreover, we will also look into the post-Lutheran era on understanding of the conversion.

\textsuperscript{138} 1792 is significant because it was on May 12 of that year that William Carey’s famous Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathens was published in Leicester, England, and on October 2 of that same year the Baptist Missionary society was formed. A few months later William Carey and John Thomas and their families left England to become missionaries in India. 1910 is equally significant because of the world missionary conference held in Edinburgh that year. While the conference celebrated the world wide spread of Christianity, it also witnessed the emergence of the younger churches - and the beginning of the changes from the traditional mission theory and practice of the preceding missionary movement. (Pierson, 2000:409-411).

\textsuperscript{139} In India, the issue of conversion figured prominently in the Nasrapur consultation (March 1966) on “The mission of the church in Contemporary India” (Hoefer, 2001:189).
3.2.1.1 Martin Luther and Conversion

Luther did not begin his ecclesiastical life as a reformer but as Roman Catholic Church adherent. Therefore his earlier understanding of conversion was conceived through the church of his time. During his time conversion was conceived as a particular way of life expressed in the act of becoming a monk and joining a monastic community. Moreover, the idea of justification was unclear, particularly the amount of acts of faith and works of love were necessary to achieve the minimum criteria for justification (Stumme, 2006:61). This caused Luther anxiety because this understanding did not give Luther assurance of salvation: “My conscience wouldn’t give me certainty, but I always doubted and said, ‘you didn’t do that right. You weren’t contrite enough. You left that out of your confession’. The more I tried to remedy an uncertain, weak troubled conscience with human traditions, the more I daily found it more uncertain, weak and troubled” (quoted in McGrath, 1999:107).

During this inner struggle he developed a particular concept of conversion, which can be found in his Lectures on Psalms in August 1513 and a more maturity version his Lectures on Galatians in 1519. This struggle eventually led to his reformation breakthrough.

In his early lectures on Psalms Luther showed the influence of via moderna’s pactum theology\textsuperscript{140} that he adhered to while attending the University of Erfut.\textsuperscript{141} McGrath (1999:106) quotes, “It is for this reason that we are saved: God has made a testament and a covenant with us, so that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. In this covenant God is truthful and faithful, and is bound by what he has promised. ‘Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, etc.’ (Matthew 7.7-8) Hence the doctors of theology rightly say that God gives grace without fail to whoever does what lies within them (\textit{quod in se est}).”

\textsuperscript{140} Via moderna is the Latin for “the modern way” and Pactum is the Latin for “covenant”. Put together it refers to a specific aspect of the covenant theology of nominalist philosophy. It states, “God has established a covenant (pactum) with humanity by which he is obliged to justify anyone who meets a certain minimum precondition” (McGrath, 1999:106).

\textsuperscript{141} Protestant scholars deny the connection between Luther and Ockham’s theology of justification - stating that Luther’s reformation is based on his inner struggle and biblical studies. Nevertheless, the influence of via moderna theology cannot be denied due to three reasons: - Firstly, Erfurt where Luther studied was the centre of via moderna. Secondly, Luther was taught by Jodocus Trutvetter and Bartholomew Arnoldi of Usingen who were advocates of via moderna and thus indirectly could have influenced Luther. Thirdly, Luther’s early writings that manifest a clear influence of Biel’s (1410-95) exposition on salvation clearly points to the fact that Luther should have read Gabriel Biel’s \textit{Collectarium circa quattuor sententiarum libros} along with the works of Pierre Ailly and William of Ockham (Oberman, 1983:199-201; Lohse, 1980:20).
Human beings receive justification through a covenental framework between God and humanity. No matter how less the human effort is, “God is obliged to reward sinner with grace [through] the human effort” (Ozment, 1980:230). This notion of work - oriented theology that leads to conversion is rooted in semi-pelagian.\textsuperscript{142}

Luther retreat\textsuperscript{143} from this work- oriented theology happened gradually between 1513-1519, this is evident in his Lectures on Psalms, Galatians and Hebrews. During this period he wrote extensively on two important issues, namely, the possibility of individual preparation for conversion and Christian perseverance in conversion to attain final and perfect righteousness (Harran, 1983:20).

Luther in his \textit{Lectures on Psalms} (1513-15) gives a contradictory response, in relation to whether a “person can prepare for his conversion to faith, or whether humility provides the disposition for conversion” (Harran 1983:20). In expounding\textsuperscript{144} Psalms 84, Luther integrates Christology with conversion and makes it clear that “faith in the incarnated Christ is a requisite for human conversion” (Harran, 1983:21-23).\textsuperscript{145} This faith which is the “substance and firstborn of all spiritual gifts” is not based on the free will but rather it is “God’s grace given to the ungodly and by which they are justified” (Harran, 1983:83-83).

\textsuperscript{142} Semi-Pelagianism that denied the concept of original sin taught that strengthening grace is required for human beings that have been weakened their moral nature due to the fall. However, the response that happens initially towards God is due to free will and assisted by grace in a life of faith and good works. Pelagianism’s teaching was condemned in the Council of Orange in 529 where the Council states that grace is necessary at the beginning as well as throughout the Christian life (Horton, 2011:380).

\textsuperscript{143} Steinmetz (1968:10) attributes the influence of Augustine’s lectures on the Psalms and the influence of Staupitz (vicar of Augustinian order at University of Wittenberg) who explained the grace of God to Luther, it enabled him to move away from Biel’s semi-Pelagianism and toward Augustinian understanding of original sin and predestination. However, at a later stage Luther realized Augustine’s views on salvation were not accurate either. There were three primary areas within salvation that Luther disagreed with in Augustine’s writings which include: (1) the cause of justification; (2) the nature of righteousness; (3) how righteousness is given. (Heckel, 2004:89-120).

\textsuperscript{144} Luther followed the medieval exegetical pattern to interpret scripture, which is known as Quadrige especially in the first lectures on the Psalms even though he later rejected the allegorical style. Quadrige pattern viewed scripture through four senses. Firstly, historical literal sense where the historical context was taken into account (what the passage say about past event). Secondly, allegorical or mystical sense stressed on the doctrines that Christian were to believe and adhere too (what it spoke about Christ). Thirdly, tropological sense stressed the ethical aspect (what the passage teach us how to live). Fourthly, analogical sense applied to eschatological fulfilment (what the passage tells about ultimate fate) (Pelikan, 1955:104), Cf. Smalley (1952).

\textsuperscript{145} Luther’s Works 10:146 (Here after LW).
Even though Luther perceives faith as God’s grace to the ungodly and essential for a person’s justification yet, Luther used faith interchangeably with humility. In expounding Psalms 60:8 Luther mentions,

For that reason they are deservedly called Gilead because of their faith. Therefore they are humbled and not puffed up. For no one is justified by faith except one who has first in humility confessed himself to be unrighteous. This, however, is humility”. In essence, humility is characterized by a constant openness to correction by God and awareness of one’s need for grace; remorse is confrontation with oneself as one realizes the sins one has committed and the good one has failed to do. No one ever reaches a state of complete humility and contrition. But by grace, in Christ, and according to the pactum, God justifies the viator. Luther also interpreted the idea of preparation to mean that a person must constantly cry out to God for salvation in faith so that He might grant what He has promised. This crying out means that a person must humble before God and acknowledge that he is a sinner, a pronouncement that comes through the Word of God.

These contradictory statements reflect the continuing struggle in Luther to find out whether the awareness of being a sinner, and in need of God’s grace, occurs before conversion, simultaneously with it or after conversion (Harran, 1983:69). Even though Luther’s responses reflect certain ambiguities from previous work yet, we find a departure from the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification - where the concupiscence and the egocentric will was given less importance. Luther stressed that salvation is a constant struggle between sin and righteousness. Apart from grace, the human will is incapable of achieving righteousness.

The free will without grace has absolutely no power to achieve righteousness, but of necessity it is in sin. Therefore blessed Augustine is correct in his book against Julian when he calls it “a bound will rather than a free will.” For when we possess grace, then the will is actually made free, especially with respect to salvation. To be sure it is always free in a natural way, but only with respect to those things which are under its power and lower than itself, but not with respect to the things above it, since it is captive in sin and now cannot choose that which is good in God’s eyes.

Luther, based on Augustinian anthropology, expressed in his work on Romans that faith as imputed righteousness comes through faith in Christ and in “relationship to the working of the Holy Spirit” (Prenter, 1953:70). God’s righteousness evolves outside the human being (extranea, externa, or aliena iustitia) over against the human self-righteousness (propria or domestica

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146 LW 10:237
147 LW 11:428-29
148 LW 11:129-30
149 LW 25:258-78.
150 LW 25:256-57.
151 LW 25:375.
This righteousness of God, then, is what produces good works as God in His mercy bestows the “power of willing and doing”. The idea of merit, therefore, is effectively refuted (Forde, 1980:32-39) and needs to be replaced with “the righteousness” that “depends on the imputation of God”. In this sense righteousness is not a quality but rather “imputation of a merciful God through faith in His Word”.

Even though Luther’s work on Romans is a major breakthrough from the pactum theology yet we still find certain ambiguous expressions which Luther aims at resolving in his Lecture on Hebrews (1517-1518) and his Lecture on Galatians (1519). The Lecture on Hebrews, attests Luther’s complete dismissal of quod in se est. As Harran (1983:128) explains:

It is faith alone that sets one free from the impurity of one’s heart. With Paul, Luther insists that “faith in Christ is all that is necessary for our righteousness.” These lectures, however, unlike the Dictata and Lectures on Romans, contain no suggestion that righteousness is gained through faith and humility. Nor does Luther refer to humility when he writes of man’s initial reception of faith: “It is our function passively to receive God and his working within us…. Thus our knowing is a being known by God, who has also worked this very knowing within us. Therefore God has known us first.” The thrust of Luther’s statement is to dispel any thought of preparation for faith. God precedes man in everything, including the preparation of man’s heart to receive faith.

Moreover, the lectures on Galatians (1519) show perseverance in conversion as living and acting out of faith. “It is not that humility prepares a person to know God; rather the knowledge of God is directly given by God as faith. Faith, therefore, is a gift from God” (Erwin, 1980:32). Luther wrote in his commentary on Isaiah 12:26:-“Thus our knowing is a being known by God, who has also worked this very knowing within us. This is a very apt way of speaking for him to use against those who . . . want to get ahead of God with their works and to prepare for God a righteousness that should be accepted by him.”

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153 LW 25:388. Elsewhere Luther wrote that love and grace can be obtained in Jesus Christ, who pours out the Holy Spirit in order to enable Christians to do good work. See LW 25:326.
154 LW 25:274-75.
155 LW 27:294.
3.2.1.2 Conversion Teachings in the Post - Luther Period

Philip Melanchthon, a comrade and mentor of Luther, was seen as the new leader of the Lutheran movement after Martin Luther’s death in 1546. But his Humanist influence (mainly Aristotle’s ethics and philosophy) pulled him away from Luther on several issues including the understanding of conversion, even though he agreed whole heartedly with Luther’s reformation insight. Melanchthon accentuated on the human responsibility for receiving God’s grace in the process of conversion, thus reverting to several pre-Reformation concepts, in contrast to Luther’s teaching on the bondage of will (Strehle, 1994:201). For Luther, the human will independently cannot play any role in conversion due to the corrupt nature of the will. But for Melanchthon, the human will played an important role in conversion. He stressed that “We should not think that a man is a piece of wood or stone,” in response to God’s work of salvation (Melanchthon, 1965:60) and God “draws the one who is willing, not the one who resists” (Melanchthon, 1965:190). This inclination provided Melanchthon to declare in the *Loci Communes* of 1535 that “the will is one of the three concurrent causes (the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the will) of man’s conversion”. In this sense Melanchthon’s theology shows much resemblance to Thomistic theology than Luther, which stressed the role of the human will and works in salvation (Selden, 1984:182).

Two camps developed within Lutheranism: the “Philippists” (followers of Philip Melanchthon), and “Gnesio-Lutherans” (followers of Luther’s tenets). It was the “Gnesio-Lutherans” who won out in this “struggle for ascendancy” under the leadership of Martin Chemnitz (Stoeffler, 1965:182). It was Chemnitz (along with other “Gnesio-Lutherans” like Jacob Andrae, Nicholas Selnecker, David Chytraeus, Andrew Musculus and Christopher Koerner) who gave the Lutheran Church “The Formula of Concord”, and with it the completed “Book of Concord” of

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156 He was strongly influenced by Humanism and used that tradition to help Luther learn the biblical languages. Melanchthon also authored the *Augsburg Confession*, its *Apology* (1531), and the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (1537), to which the *Formula of Concord* would subscribe.

157 Melanchthon regarded the reformation of Luther as the best way to display the error with regard to justification. He wrote, “Luther brought to light the true and necessary doctrine” (Smith, 1918:254).

158 The importance of the human responsibility in the process of conversion is stressed in Melanchthon’s *Loci Communes* that underwent numerous revisions and editions between the years 1521 and 1555.

159 Leipzig Interim (1548) written by Melanchthon in the context of adiaphoristic controversy (1548-52) compromised the Lutheran teachings (which Luther had refused to compromise) in an attempt to placate Charles V. Melanchthon proposed to follow many of the medieval practices of the Roman Church along with core beliefs of the Lutheran Church. These discussions led to division and Gnesio-Lutherans, led by Matthias Flacius stood up to defend Luther teaching against Melanchthon teachings. Cf. Dingel, et.al. (2012).
1580 (Stoeffler, 1965:182). This formally resolved the doctrinal disputes within Lutheranism. Bente (1965:142) comments that the Formula of Concord was to avoid “all extravagant, improper, offensive, and inadequate terms and phrases in the questions concerning free will”.

Article 2 of the Formula of Concord stated:-

Since the will of man is found in four unlike states, namely: before the fall; the second, since the fall; the third, after regeneration; and the fourth, after the resurrection, the chief question is only the will and ability of man in the second state, namely, what powers in spiritual things he has of himself after the fall of our first parents and before regeneration, and whether he is by his own powers, prior to and before his regeneration by God’s Spirit, to prepare and dispose himself of God’s grace, and to accept and apprehend, or not, the grace offered through the Holy Ghost in the Word and Sacraments?" (Quoted in Preus, 1958:562)

The Formula of Concord defended Luther’s monergist position by explicitly stating that since the fall, humanity had no spiritual power or nature to receive the grace of God. Rather believers are passive recipients of grace and have no free will in their own conversion.

At the end of the 17th century a reaction developed against the Lutheran orthodoxy known as German Lutheran pietism, which had its partners in the Puritanism of England and America, and the Jansenism of France and the Netherlands (Stoeffler, 1976:9). Pietism grew out of the reformation via Johann Arndt’s devotional work, “True Christianity” and through the writings of Philipp Spener Pia Desideria that stressed “on Christian life which was not merely a product of orthodox doctrines, but involved an inner relationship based on the justified believer’s union with God” (Erb, 1979:14).

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160 The orthodoxy in the Lutheran church began in the last quarter of 16th century and continues into first quarter of the 18th century. Preus (1970:39) divides Lutheran Orthodoxy into three periods. The first he refers to as “the Golden Age” which runs from 1580 to about 1620 where attention was given to dogmas. But still dogmas were in its rudimentary stage and was similar in form to Melanchthon’s Loci Communes - a list of categories to which arguments and proofs were attached. The second period he refers to as “High Orthodoxy”. It occurs during the Thirty Years War (1618 to 1648). During this period the doctrinal position of the Lutheran church was clarified, especially over and against Romanism and Calvinism. The third and final period he refers to as the “Silver Age.” This period occurs during the time following the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which concluded the Thirty Years War. The approach to theology is more analytical.

161 Lund (1989:223) states “True Christianity”, known as the “single most influential devotional book in Lutheran history”.

162 Spener published his book Pia Desideria in 1670, which is considered to be the starting point of German Pietism. He stressed the importance of the Christian’s inner transformation and its expression in his life. In his call for reform Spener focused on six concrete proposals (Tappert, 1964:115-117):

1. A more extensive use of the Word of God.
2. More exercise of the spiritual priesthood.
3. It is not enough to have knowledge of Christianity, for Christianity consists of practice.
4. Great care must be exercised in the conduct of religious controversies.
5. Seminaries are to be places of spiritual formation, not just places of intellectual exercises.
6. Seminaries are to provide practical experience in ministry.
Influenced by Spener, August Francke stressed the importance of inner spiritualism. He introduced the Augustinian type of conversion experience into the Lutheran church. In 1687 he received his conversion experience, no less intense than Augustine’s while studying John 20:31, “these were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”. Francke states, “All sadness and restlessness of heart was taken away at once I was suddenly overwhelmed by a flood of joy so that audibly I praised and magnified God. Upon standing up I was minded entirely different from the way I had been when I knelt down. That then is the time which I may really regard as my true conversion. From that time on it was easy to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously and joyfully in this world “(quoted in Lindberg, 1983:151).

Francke’s experience of rebirth became the foundation for his theology as well as a central doctrine in Pietistic movement (Sattler, 1980:3). Thus Brown (1996:15) suggests that Francke introduced a “new spiritual emphasis into the Lutheran church, which caused Lutherans to look within them for evidence of God’s grace- grace in the sense of an infused quality.”

Though Pietists accepted justification by faith, yet they did not believe that the concept described wholly God’s work of salvation. For Pietists, justification is an objective aspect of salvation, but they also affirmed a subjective aspect of salvation which is regeneration (conversion and rebirth). Thus, they accepted the Lutheran order of salvation but, as Erb (1983:6) says, “they emphasized illumination, conversion, and renovation. In other words Pietism changed the emphasis from what Christ has done for us to what Christ does in us.”

The subjective aspect of salvation (in the conversion) was a major issue in American Lutheranism from 1870 onwards, especially between the Iowa synod and the Missouri synod.  

163 Dale Brown (1978:99) calls this rebirth experience as the locus classicus of pietist theology.
164 The Encyclopædia of the Lutheran Church flatly states, “Pietism’s central subject was regeneration (conversion, rebirth)” (Schmidt, 1965:1899).
165 “Lutheran churches are divided primarily by different languages and cultures. Although there were initially about a hundred different Lutheran groups in early America, by the mid- 20th century they were combined into three main synods, or church councils -The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (1847), The Lutheran Church in America (1960), and The American Lutheran Church (1962)- while about five percent of American churches and synods remain independent. Most Lutheran churches worldwide belong to the Lutheran World Federation, formed in 1947 as an international Lutheran organization for study and action. Many Lutheran churches in America belong to the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., formed in 1967 as an agency through which U.S. Lutherans could participate in cooperative tasks. Many Lutheran churches also belong to the interdenominational World Council of Churches.” Quoted from, http://www.holierthanhou.info/denominations/lutherans.html Date of access: 08 Dec 2014.
Regarding the necessity of conversion there has been no argument. The whole controversy rests upon the nature of conversion, whether God’s gift of grace to human beings was dependent on some action or even decision (on the part of human beings) to accept the gift. If human beings contribute towards conversion then arguably salvation is not by grace alone and if there is no contribution towards conversion then salvation is absolutely predestined by God. As a result of this impasse, “Missouri” stressed man’s total passivity and conversion as the occurrence of an instant (Nelson, 1980:323). The Iowa synod “contended for the possibility of man’s response through prevenient grace and regarded conversion more broadly, as beginning with the sinner’s awakening and culminating in regeneration” (Nelson, 1980:323-24). This dual understanding continues in the Lutheran church still today.

3.2.1.3 **A Broader View of Mission and Conversion**

The understanding of mission had undergone significant shift in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) during the last fifty years. The purpose of mission until the assembly in Helsinki, Finland (1963) was conversion. The Report of the Commission on World Mission (CWM) states: ‘[Mission] must not be falsified into some kind of humanitarian or social service or into an organization for inter-church aid. The goal of the Church’s mission will to the end remain the...

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166 Missouri’s teaching during this portion of the controversy can be summarized this way (Haug, 1967:263-266):–

1. Conversion is instantaneous—there is no middle ground. A person is either a believer or an unbeliever. The ability to cooperate and a free will come only after conversion.
2. Election is a free act of God’s grace without any consideration of human willingness, merit or worthiness. Election does not take place *intuitu fidei*.
3. Election is the cause that procures, works, and guarantees salvation.
4. Those who are not elect will remain lost not because God has predestined them to damnation but because of their own sin and unbelief.
5. Election *intuitu fidei* imposes a human condition on God and makes faith a cause of election which undermines salvation by grace alone.
6. The reason why some are chosen and not others is a mystery of God’s hidden will.
7. Missouri accused Iowa of synergism.

167 The teaching of the Iowa theologians can be summarized as follows (Haug, 1967:260-263):–

1. Prevenient grace gives human beings a free will which can assent to the prodding of grace in conversion. This assent is a refraining from resisting the working of grace.
2. It can therefore be said that salvation depends on a person’s own personal decision.
3. This assent or decision is not a meritorious cause of salvation but an explanatory reason.
4. Election in the strict sense is in view of foreseen faith which is a condition of election but not a meritorious cause. It is an instrumental cause.
5. Election in the wider sense -God’s eternal plan to save all who believe in Jesus—is the cause of faith.
6. The different destinies of two people who hear the gospel is not to be found in the hidden will of God but in the different attitudes of the two people. This difference in the two attitudes is the enigma that cannot be explained.
7. Iowa accused Missouri of teaching absolute predestination and irresistible grace.
same: to cross the border between unbelief and faith and to proclaim the living Gospel so that unbelievers may be called into the Church and to faith in the crucified and risen Lord” (quoted in Rasolondraibe, 2001:331).

But a radical shift in this approach began to rise between Evian, France, assembly (1970)\textsuperscript{168} and Curitiba, Brazil (1990) where mission was based on the God’s mission. Thus mission was not the function of the church but as the being of the church: “Participation in the mission of God is the central purpose of the church...Mission (‘sending’) belongs to the very being of the church, and thus the apostolic character of the church refers primarily to its missionary nature. It is not an optional activity but is participation in the continuing work of God...The church’s goal in this mission is not itself but the world” (Messenger, 2004:6).\textsuperscript{169}

Moreover, participating in God’s mission involved social activity. This was a radical change from the church’s position in Helsinki, Finland (1963). “Proclamation of the gospel, calling people to believe in Jesus Christ and to become members of the new community in Christ, participation in the work for peace and justice and in the struggle against all enslaving and dehumanizing powers are therefore an integral part of the mission of the church. All such activities point to the reality of the Reign of God and to its final realization at the fulfillment of history.”\textsuperscript{170}

This holistic understanding of mission was further reiterated at the Budapest assemblies DCC report (1984) where it stressed the commitment of LWF towards “racism, poverty, economic and social injustice, and its concern for ecumenical relationships and peace, represent one dimension of mission” (quoted in Rasolondraibe, 2001:335). Moreover, the Curitiba (1990), Hong Kong (1997) and Winnipeg (2003) assemblies stressed on the fact that the mission of the church is not just to convert others but it involves transformation, reconciliation and empowerment (Messenger, 2004:6). Furthermore, the Winnipeg assembly discussed the importance of dialogue

\textsuperscript{168} It was at Evian assembly for the first time the member churches from the South voiced their rejection of the view that they were the mission fields of churches from the North. They maintained that they were churches in mission, like their “sister” churches in other parts of the world, and requested that the LWF Department for World Mission be changed into the Department for Church Cooperation (DCC) (Rasolondraibe, 2001:334).

\textsuperscript{169} https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DMD-Mission-in-Context-EN-low.pdf Date of access: 10 Jan 2014

\textsuperscript{170} https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DMD-Mission-in-Context-EN-low.pdf Date of access: 10 Jan 2014
in multi religious settings. Questions were raised as to whether dialogue should replace conversion. The response was affirmative - the council quoting the WCC Mission and Evangelism Conference, San Antonio, 1996, added: “interfaith dialogue should not aim at converting or winning over dialogue partners” (quoted in Van, 1992: 386).

3.2.2 Conversion in the Reformed Tradition

In early Protestantism, both Lutheran and Reformed believers embraced the five watchwords in contrast to the Roman Catholic tenets. But in October 1529 both Luther and Zwingli (1484-1531), the early pioneers of Swiss reformation, went separate ways in relation to Marburg Colloquy, when they couldn’t achieve concurrence on the nature of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper. Thus Protestantism was divided into two traditions, Lutheranism and Calvinism- the latter being the Reformed tradition as comprehended and communicated in the writings of John Calvin (1509-64) and his fellow Reformers.

Although the reformed tradition was advanced in Switzerland with Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), who systematized it after Zwingli demise, yet the reformed tradition is termed as Calvinism against the will of Calvin himself (Warfield, 1931:59). This is because Calvin was able to “systematize the reformed protestant thinking through his Institutes of the Christian Religion, commentaries, sermons, and leadership, and also of noticeable influence role in the confessional and ecclesiastical debates that happened throughout the 16th century”.

Therefore, to understand the reformed concept of conversion the fitting place to start will be Calvin’s understanding of conversion enveloped in his own conversion experience and in the sequences of theological and intellectual positions that has became the basis for the Reformed tradition view of conversion.

171 The five catch words are: - Sola scriptura (scripture alone) against scripture and tradition of the Roman Catholics, sola fide, (faith alone) against faith and works, sola gratia (grace alone) against grace and merits, solus christus (Christ alone) against Mary and intercession of saints and solia Deo gloria (glory to God alone) against saints and church hierarchy. See Lillback & Gaffin (2013).

172 The Calvinist tradition is divided into three traditions: hyper Calvinist, moderate Calvinist and neo Calvinist. The hyper Calvinist holds to the doctrine of limited atonement and therefore denies the concept of universal call to repent and belief in the gospel. In contrast, moderate Calvinism focused on unlimited atonement and in this sense has resemblance to Lutheranism. Neo-Calvinism, developed by Abraham Kuyper, stresses the predestination tenets but emphasizes on the need for these teachings to be contextualized in all spheres of modern society. It thus emphasized the Lordship of Christ over all creation. Cf. Peter (2011), Bratt (1997).

3.2.2.1 Calvin on Conversion

Calvin’s teaching on conversion has its base in his own conversion experience as Luther. Among the three texts\(^\text{174}\) that narrates his conversion experience the prominent one is commentary on the Psalms (1557) in which Calvin mention his sudden conversion:

> When I was as yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor. I was quite surprised to find that before a year had elapsed, all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was as yet but a mere novice and tyro. Being of a disposition somewhat unpolished and bashful, which led me always to love the shade and retirement, I then began to seek some secluded corner where I might be withdrawn from the public view; but so far from being able to accomplish the object of my be desire, all my retreats were like public school (Calvin, 1979:xl-xl).

The preface explicitly shows the nature and origin of conversion which is the sovereign providence of God (Ganoczy, 1987:246). Here God is the “active party; man is passive; God acts, man is acted upon” (McGrath, 1990:70). This shows the powerlessness in face of divine intervention. Moreover, the importance teaching of the Word in conversion is also stressed upon (Cader, 1960:39). Calvin stressed that he became more teachable and that this “teachableness” imbibed in him a desire to learn purer doctrine. Calvin states “God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts”.\(^\text{175}\)

Conversion is one of the topics that Calvin wrestles right through the pages of his *Institutes of the Christian religion* (Book 3). For Calvin conversion is “double grace or two fold benefits of our reception of the grace of God in Christ as comprising the sum of the gospel” (Venema, 2006).

\(^\text{174}\)The other two texts are a preface (1534-1535) to the French New Testament and Calvin’s *Reply to cardinal Sadolet’s Letter (1539)* respectively. In the preface he clearly stated (later stressed in the first chapter of *Institutes* 1536) that the only true way of salvation is through Jesus Christ. In his *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet’s Letter* (1539) Calvin depicted the reason for his conversion from false faith and false religion, and he also mentioned that the Roman Catholic Church failed to teach him how to worship God with whole heart because it hid the light of the Word of God. Cf. Parker (2006).

\(^\text{175}\) InstitutioChristianae religionisn *Inst.*, 2.3.6 (Here after Inst.)
Calvin favoured using the term repentance instead of conversion and identified repentance with regeneration. For Calvin repentance is a departure from oneself [i.e. former mind] towards God by which one puts on a new mind. This “the inner turning [happens] when God regenerates [a person] by his own Spirit” which Calvin calls conversion. These usages denote that for Calvin “conversion, repentance, and sanctification are almost identical terms” (Wileman, 1998:15) even though he used repentance more than regeneration, sanctification, and conversion.

The frequent use of the term repentance in Calvin’s writings was to combat against the medieval idea of poenitentia agite (do penance) that stressed on “the external contrition manifested by many tears and labors and the outward fruits of penitence, often to the exclusion of the inward renewal of the mind, which bears with it true correction of life” (Schroeder, 1978:90). In his Institutes Calvin identified conversion with repentance contrary to the idea of penance. He defined repentance as, “Indeed, I am aware of the fact that the whole of conversion to God is understood under the term repentance, and faith is not the least part of conversion … On this account, in my judgment, repentance can thus be well defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of Him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit” (Calvin, 1977:597).

Calvin stressed the internal change of the heart in relationship with God (Ganoczy, 1987:58). He stated that genuine repentance does not consist in the “rendering of garments but of the

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176 Justification through faith is the first of these benefits or ways in which Christ lives in those who are grafted into Him (Venema, 1997:95).
177 Heinrich Bullinger (the proponent of Helvetic Confession) also states that Calvin’s treatment of conversion is equivalent of repentance—“a sincere turning to God and all good, and earnest turning away from the devil and all evil” (quoted in Coalter & Cruz, 1995:34).
178 Inst.,3.3.9.
179 Inst.,3.3.5
180 Commentary Lam. 5:21.
181 In his Institution of the Christian Religion Calvin used repentance 276 times, whereas Calvin refers to regeneration 148 times, sanctification 137 times and conversion 87 times (Joseph, 2007:42).
182 See. Canon of Trent, 90.
183 Inst.,3.3.5
184 The college that John Calvin attended in Paris (1523) was influenced by the Devotio Moderna, the spiritual discipline that rose against scholasticism in 15th and 16th century. It is an offshoot of the “Brothers of the Common Life,” propounded on the teachings of Gerhard Groote (1340-1384) of Deventer who stressed to live for “the glory of God by withdrawing from the world, to concentrate on the perfection of one’s own soul in imitation of Christ”. Thus, Devotio Moderna call was a return to Christian inwardsness (Hyma, 1926:275-78).
Repentance is always followed by grief along with “dissatisfaction and hatred of sin”. This experience of sorrow of repentance (2006:107) can only happen when a heart is changed by God, which consequently changes our heart for God. Repentant heart will exhibit “fruits and proofs of repentance” which are “proved by the conduct”. The fruit of repentance is not some “frivolous works” to satisfy oneself, demonstrated by a confessor; but rather a genuine repentance toward “innocence and holiness.” Such a life where our hearts are surrendered (affection must precede everything else) is necessary to serve God properly (Calvin, 1980:293). This true repentance occurs “in the soul itself,” so that a person is “renewed in the spirit of his mind.”

Although repentance involves a turning away on the part of the human being and doing the deeds of righteousness and exhibiting its fruit, yet for Calvin, (in line with Augustine) believed, God only “invites us to repentance” and is “declared to be the author of conversion” (Golding, 1973:165). This is because human beings have no ability to repent as they are “a rotten carcass until God has renewed them again by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Golding, 1973:165). Therefore, repentance is not by the power of the human being but rather “a singular gift of God,” “attained by us through faith.” Calvin (2002:211) elucidated this in his Commentary on Ezekiel 11:19-20 as follows: “After Ezekiel had announced the conversion of the people, at the same time he taught that the singular gift of repentance would be bestowed: because when any one has turned aside from the right way, unless God extends his hand, he will plunge himself even into the deep abyss. Hence after a man has once left God, he cannot return to him by himself.”

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185 Inst.,3.3.17
186 Inst.,3.3.6
187 Commentary, 2 Cor 7:10
188 Commentary, 2 Cor 7:10.
189 Commentary, Ezek. 18:30
190 Commentary, Matt 3:8
191 Commentary, Acts 2:38
192 Commentary, Acts 2:38
193 Commentary, Jer 31:19.
194 Commentary, Jer 31:19.
195 Inst.,3.3.21
196 Inst.,3.3.1
Although Calvin stressed on the work of God in repentance, yet he did not deny the human side of conversion. For Calvin, “holiness proceeds from God’s mercy and [humanity does] nothing of their own making.”197 Yet, human beings need to “strive for” 198 holiness by “standing guard against sin” 199. In this sense, repentance is a “job that is to be done”.200 These statements reflect the fact that Calvin did not deny the human responsibility in answer to God’s initiative of grace of God in our repentance.

Was Calvin contradicting himself when he stressed on the the fact that God’s work in our repentance must be complemented by our cooperation? In the writings of Calvin one thing is clear that he completely rejected the idea of “‘co-operating grace,’ “which makes God only a co-worker with us”.201 But at the same time there is a responsibility on the part of the human beings to respond to and participate in the sanctification work of Christ, which God offers us in his grace (Farley, 2003:133). In other words, what we see superficially is the human effort and discipline, but the reality of all this is much deeper- namely, God himself is at work at the root of all our effort and discipline. It is a hidden reality, which seems to contradict our human experience.

With regard to the nature of repentance Calvin emphasized the process /gradualness of repentance rather than the instant/ suddenness of conversion in the Christian life (Bouswsma, 1988:11).202 Calvin stated,

> It does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples, renewing their mind to true purity that they might practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death...In order that believers may reach God’s image, God allocates them a race of repentance throughout all their lives.203

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197 *Sermon* on Eph.1:17-18.
198 *Inst.*,3.3.20
199 *Inst.*,3.3.14
200 *Inst.*,3.3.6
201 *Inst.*,2.3.11
202 There are people like Wilcox (1997:121) who consider that Calvin regarded “a sudden conversion experience as the norm”. But Lane (1987:26) and Ganoczy (1987:257) disagrees with Wilcox and states that “Calvin could speak of his own sudden conversion to the Protestant cause, but he does not seem to have regarded it as the norm”.
203 *Inst.*, 3.3.9.
Calvin regarded life as a journey, which is full of struggle\textsuperscript{204} where “we are converted to God little by little, and in various stages for repentance”\textsuperscript{205}. It is through such process that believers are renewed day by day by putting of old man. But this process has its own struggle whereby one may totter, limp and crawl on floor.\textsuperscript{206} Thus, for Calvin no one “is converted to God in a single day” and he even says, “Sudden conversion is never to be found in a human being”.\textsuperscript{207}

3.2.2.2 Conversion in the Post - Calvin Period

Although Calvin stressed the fact that the knowledge of God and of the self cannot be separated as it is so intertwined, yet in the scholastic Calvinism the importance was laid on God’s sovereignty and humanity’s inability to do anything to achieve salvation. This brought to the fore the debate over human will and free will that lay at the heart of Arminian controversy.

Arminius\textsuperscript{208} believed that in Calvinism God is made the author of sin due to the conflict between God’s love and man’s free will (Praamsma, 1968:29-30). Therefore, Arminius stressed that “God’s election is conditioned upon God’s foreknowledge of man’s faith” (Oslon, 2004:467). In the same manner, God’s grace is also conditioned on the basis of sinner’s use of freewill to resist and reject God’s grace. Thus, grace becomes effective to sinners only on the basis cooperation with God (Bangs, 1985:342). But how can a sinner cooperate with God unless grace is given. In response Arminius states, “While it is necessary for God to provide a universal, prevenient grace (grounded in a universal atonement) which mitigates man’s pervasive depravity and enables belief, God’s saving act to finally convert the sinner is conditioned upon the free choice of the sinner to accept or reject grace” (quoted in Hoenderdaal, 2007:24).\textsuperscript{209}

This synergistic view by Arminius has many similarities with the synergism of medieval theologian Gabriel Biel which led to the charge that Arminius was advocating Semi-Pelagianism even if it be an inaccurate one. After Arminius death in 1609 his synergism teaching took over

\textsuperscript{204} Commentary Phil.3:13.  
\textsuperscript{205} Commentary Jer. 31:18.  
\textsuperscript{206} Inst., 3.6.5.  
\textsuperscript{207} Commentary Jer. 24:7.  
\textsuperscript{208} Arminianism bears the name of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) who studied at the University of Leiden under Lambert Daneau, a colleague of John Calvin in 1560 and close friend of Theodore Beza. Moreover, in 1581 he moved to Geneva to attend the Geneva academy where he was influenced by the teaching of Beza, Calvin’s successor (Muller, 1991:17).  
\textsuperscript{209} It is based on human beings response to God’s offer of grace that one’s salvation and damnation rest and not on “predetermined by a fixed decree”(McGonigle, 2001:24).
many churches in Amsterdam. By 1610 there were many Arminian pastors and about forty-six Arminians under the leadership of Uitenbogaert and Episcopius, met in Gouda in 1610 and wrote a Remonstrance against the Calvinists, which included five canons articulating their beliefs. These articles were known as the “5 remonstrants”.

A council was convened in 1618 at Dordrecht (Dordt) by the state generals of Holland to analyze the Remonstrants canon on the basis of the Belgic confession of faith. It was concluded that the Arminians teachings were not based on biblical truth and therefore condemned. Moreover, the synod set out five articles against the remonstrants known familiarly as the five points of Calvinism, also called the doctrines of grace.

210 The pastors include Arminius colleagues Johannes Uitenbogaert (1557-1644) and Peter Bertius (1565-1629), as well as other disciples such as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Jan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619) and Johannes Corvinus (1582-1650). However, perhaps two of the most important successors were Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622), opposed by King James himself, and Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), both of whom succeeded Arminius at the University of Leiden (Kistemaker,1968:49-50).

211 The remonstrants are:
1. God’s election was based upon the fact that God foresaw that a person would repent and believe of his/ her own free will.
2. Christ’s death did not actually secure the salvation of any individual in particular, but simply made it possible for all humanity to be saved.
3. The need for regeneration (however further explanation of this revealed that even here they did not agree with the Reformers as to the nature of regeneration, or the depravity of human nature).
4. That God’s grace could be resisted totally; that is, that God might try to convert a person but might fail.
5. A Christian might after all be lost again after being once saved (quoted in full Bavinck, 2008:19-53).

212 The Belgic confession of faith is the oldest of the doctrinal Standards of the Christian Reformed Church, written by Guido de Bres, a martyr. It is usually called the Belgic Confession because it originated in the Southern Netherlands, now known as Belgium. The synod of Dordt after the revision of text but not the contents adopted this Confession as one of the doctrinal Standards of the Reformed Churches. Cf. Hyde (2008).

213 Although Dordt condemned their teaching, nevertheless shortly after Dordt, in the leadership of Episcopius they drafted a confession, which was published in 1621 as the *Confession or Declaration of the Remonstrant Pastors* (Elis, 2005: vii-ix).

214 Calvin himself never used such a model and never combated Arminianism directly. In fact Calvin died in 1564 and Jacob Arminius was born in 1560, and so the men were not contemporaries. The five points of Calvinism are:

1. Total depravity: Due to the fall of man [Adam] all people born into the world are enslaved to sin and all faculties of humanity are affected in totality. Therefore he cannot choose to follow God by his freewill and be saved as he is unwilling to do so. (Steele, 2004:25).
2. Unconditional election: This doctrine states that since eternity God, in His mercy, has unconditionally chosen to himself some people mercy and grant salvation through Christ alone. But those not chosen, he has withheld mercy and will receive wrath because of their sin (Steele, 2004:25).
3. Limited atonement: Although Jesus substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its purpose yet only the sin of the elect was atoned by Christ death. Therefore the atonement is “sufficient for all and efficient for the elect” (Steele, 2004:38)
4. Irresistible grace: The saving grace of God with the help of the Holy Spirit will in God’s timing effectually enable the sinners (determined to be saved) to overcome their resistance and bring them to saving faith. The sovereign purpose of God to save someone will surely lead to repentance and salvation (Steele, 2004:18).
An important consideration regarding [the council of] Dordt is that it never introduced new teachings but reaffirmed the doctrines upon which reformation had been built. Dordt affirmed humanity is completely depraved (will, mind, affection) and is enslave to a sinful nature and therefore, humanity is dead and cannot by itself return to God. In spite of this condition, the call of the gospel is for all humanity (by God’s grace) and thus it is not a hypocritical call as charged by remonstrants. However, Dordt stressed that according to his directive, he chooses to internally convert his elect. Dordt argues,

The fact that the sinner does not believe is nobody’s fault but his own (Canons of Dordt, 3-4.9). For the sinner to believe God must irresistibly and effectually, by the power of the Spirit, call that elect sinner to himself and awaken him to new life (Canons of Dordt,3-4.12). No mere moral persuasion will do, but unfailing resurrection to spiritual life is necessary (Canons of Dordt 3-4.11). Thus, when a sinner hears the gospel and believes, God alone receives all of the credit, for he is the one who first gave the sinner new life to believe (Canons of Dordt 3-4.10).

The emphasis of Dordt on the monergistic nature of grace was later reiterated at the Westminster Assembly (1643-49), whose confession

215 is the most important for the Reformed tradition today (Letham, 2009:52). In the Westminster confession, (esp. Ch. 10) conversion is not the preferred term,

216 but the term “effectual call” and ‘regeneration’ rather than lifelong repentance carry the theological content of conversion” (Letham, 2009:53).

Westminster’s understanding of God’s grace preceding any activity on the part of depraved sinner is further reinstated by John Owen’s and Thomas Goodwin’s Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Second London Confession (1677, 1689) of the Particular Baptists. The Confession states, that until God effectually regenerates the sinner, no faith will be present. To reverse this is to rob God of his glory and give man a ground to boast upon. Therefore, Pask (1940:105) is right

5. Perseverance of the saints: God’s plan cannot be frustrated and therefore those who are called and set apart (saints) into communion with God will continue to be in faith until the end. Even if someone falls away then the person had no true faith or will return back. Cf. for further reference on TULIP, see Palmer (1972) and Dabney (2007).


216 The word conversion does not appear in the Westminster Confession. But the verb convert does appear in the chapter on free will in 9.4 in the phrase; “When God converts a sinner” (Shaw, 2008:23).

217 Effectual Calling is defined as “the work of God’s Spirit, where by convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.31)
“when he observes that one of the main reasons the Puritans in England detested Arminianism so much was because it inclines men to pride by allowing man’s participation in the work of his salvation.”

In the later Reformed theology of conversion, the Calvinists varied on the relationship between effectual calling and regeneration in *ordo salutis* (McGowan, 2004:17). For instance, Murray (1995:86-94) and Frame (2006:184-187) placed effectual call before regeneration in *ordosalutis* and thus distinguished them. Berkhof (2003:468-476), Hoekema (1994:106-110) and Horton (2007:216-241) question such distinction between regeneration and effectual calling and insist to return back to the Westminster Confession where regeneration is included in effectual calling. Regardless of these minor dissents all Calvinists have agreed that conversion is always conditioned upon effectual calling and or regeneration regardless of the relationship. God does not respond to the sinner’s cooperation (i.e., synergism) but the sinner responds to God who works alone to regenerate the unbelieving heart (i.e. monergism). Nevertheless, the traditional Reformed *ordo salutis* has been challenged by some contemporary theologians like Millard Erickson, Gordon Lewis and Keathley.

3.2.2.3 Reformed Churches Always Reforming

The Reformed church acknowledges the need for a continual reformation both personally and institutionally as followers of Jesus. This notion has been identified with the descriptive phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* (the church reformed and always being reformed). It means that the Reformed traditions are devoted to a “process of continual self-examination,

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218 For Erickson (1998:981) “Salvation consists of three steps: effectual calling, conversion, and regeneration.” Moreover, Ericson’s order of salvation does not consistently follow Calvinism or Arminianism, instead he borrow from both. Sometimes he places effectual call prior to conversion as in the case of Calvinism but other time he places regeneration subsequent to conversion as that of Arminianism. At the core of the issue for Erickson is whether, “one is converted because of God’s work of regeneration within or does God regenerate in response to and because of the person’s repentance and belief?” (1998:983). He accepts that from a traditional Calvinist position it makes the most sense. However, he is not satisfied with this position as it is contrary to the biblical evidence where according to Erickson (2004:942ff) it is the “sinner’s will to exercise faith and repentance that arouses in God the act of regeneration” not the vice versa (2004:942 ff.).

219 Lewis and Demarest favor a traditional Calvinist position, but follows a “modified Calvinistic hypothesis.” They state:- “This moderately Reformed scheme agrees with Arminianism in holding that human conversion precedes divine regeneration and disagrees with high Calvinism in its claim that the Spirit’s regeneration take logical precedence over conscious, human conversion” (Lewis & Demarest, 1994:57).

220 What sets Keathley apart from the rest is that, although he affirms an Arminian view yet claims that his view can affirm monergism. Moreover, his anti- Calvinism is obvious when he declared openly that “irresistible grace that it is a doctrine “shockingly weak” and therefore the “I” in T.U.L.I.P. must go” and affirmed that distinction between gospel and effectual call is unbiblical (2007:686-785).
reformation, change and conversion in the context of ever changing circumstances and situations”. This continuous reformed understanding is reflected in the Accra Confession.

The Accra confession even though acknowledges the traditional understanding of mission as conversion yet it broadens the context of mission of the church based on the exigency of human life. In this sense the gospel of the kingdom is not meant to convert the soul and to increase the numerical growth of the church alone but it is the good news of total liberation of all people regardless of caste, creed and colour from all bondages and enslavements of whatever nature in all regions and times (Verkuyl, 1973:22).

Even though healthy engagements with the culture and social context are always commendable yet the desire for healthy engagement should not lead to unhealthy forms of innovation. As Welker (1999:137) rightly asserts, “our strong emphasis upon semper reformanda [should not put] itself at the mercy of the shifting Zeitgeist and [fall] to the cultural stress of innovation”. To safeguard against such innovations, it is important not to allow the context to determine what is true and false but in every generation one should hold the unadulterated gospel that becomes the determinable factor for judging the culture and context.

3.2.3 Conversion in the Modern Missionary Movement

The evangelical revival and The Great Awakening began during the second quarter of the 18th century. The main exponent of this wide spread revival in Britain were John Wesley, and

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222 The Accra Confession, though not a doctrinal confession, was adopted by the delegates of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General council held at Accra, Ghana in 2004. It calls upon the Reformed Christians around the world to raise their voices against injustices in the world that deny God’s life-giving sovereignty and defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable. This is an integral part of the churches’ witness and mission. For a detailed view of Accra confession sees Presa (2010).

223 At the beginning his desire was to work out his own salvation and a desire to preach Christ to the Indians. Thus under the leadership of Colonel Oglethorpe, a friend of Samuel Wesley, John and Charles sought to accomplish these desires (Telford, 1947: 74-75). However, their missionary work to the Indians was abandoned and John became the pastor of the English churches at Savannah and Frederica (Henderson, 1997; 44). During three years of service in America the Moravians had a great impact on Wesley spirituality (1735-1738). He states in his journal; “it is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I the least of all suspected), that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God” (Wesley, 1872: 12:33). Wesley was perplexed to find out that he himself needs conversion. Therefore, Peter Bohler, a German pastor and Moravian along with Wesley searched scriptures and after relentless searching found the answer while attending a Society meeting in Aldersgate Street where someone was reading Luther’s Preface to the Epistle of the Romans. Wesley describes his May 24, 1738, experience in his Journal: “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the
George Whitefield. In America, Jonathan Edwards\textsuperscript{224} and Whitefield\textsuperscript{225} who were the principal figure of the revival. While there were many facets to the movement, the main emphasis was on a personal conversion to Christ and the evidence of a sanctified lifestyle (Latourette, 1975:1022).

This and John Wesley’s famous declaration, “the world is my parish”,\textsuperscript{226} became the impetus for the subsequent movement to convert the whole of Britain and North America from shallow nominalism to committed Christianity. This movement not only gave birth to Methodism but also imbued the other existing denominations with a new missionary consciousness (Stanley, 2001:2). From the conversion in one’s own land it was only a short step for the conversion of people in other lands. But for most churches in Britain and America, Anglican, Congregational, Baptist and most certainly Presbyterian, this short step was barred by a theology that denied the necessity for foreign missions.

The hyper Calvinist theology of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, with its emphasis on the sovereignty of God, put forth a doctrine of predestination and human inadequacy that became a stumbling block for foreign missions.\textsuperscript{227} The revolt against such theologians initiated - or at least is exemplified by William Carey, widely acclaimed as “The father of Modern Mission” (Winter, 1981:227).\textsuperscript{228} His change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death” (Wesley, 1872: 1:103). This experience became an important aspect in his religious and theological development.

\textsuperscript{224} Schillebeekx (1995:39) clearly stated that it is impossible for an individual to any good by his/ own will. Therefore, “conversion was the work of God, which resulted in a radical change in man”. This change is radical, but how to recognize that conversion has taken place? The answer, for Edwards, is love. Because of God’s love that includes all of God, including his holiness, mercy, grace, and justice makes it possible.

\textsuperscript{225} The preaching of George Whitefield in the First Awakening began with the Sovereignty of God where the salvation was completely depended on God as humanity did not have the capacity to turn to God (Elwell, 2006:523). Subsequently, he stressed on the perfection of God where there is an “optimal conditions in order for conversion to take place, and logical connections between guilt and repentance” (Elwell 2006:524). Whitefield like Wesley stressed the work of Holy Spirit in regeneration (Smith, 1986:14; Harrington, 1975:167).

\textsuperscript{226} When George Whitefield asked Wesley to preach outdoors in Bristol and Kingswood against church practice, he was reluctant to undertake field preaching. However, while reading the Sermon on the Mount, he was convinced to do so. Eventually when the Anglican bishop inquired of Wesley about this kind of preaching, forbidden by the Church, his answer was, “The world is my parish” (Telford, 1947: 106 ; Tuttle, 1978:119-120).

\textsuperscript{227} Of course, this peculiar problem of hyper Calvinism did not extent to Methodism whose Arminian theology rejected the doctrine of predestination. However, the Methodist churches in England and America initially concentrated upon domestic missions before organizing missionary societies by mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century (Engen 2004:261).

\textsuperscript{228} Stephen Neill has acknowledged that Carey is the father of the Modern missionary movement by pointing to the influence of Carey’s own missionary efforts in the formation of the BMS in 1792, which eventually led to the formation of the (congregational) London Missionary Society (1795), American board of Commissioners foreign Missions (1810), the American Baptist Missionary board (1814) and many other after them (Neill, 1964:261). However, some have argued that Carey is not the father of the modern missionary movement due to the fact that he was not the first missionary of the modern period. Before Carey left to India, Moravians were already there who
famous book, “Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use means for the conversion of heathen” is a contextual document, written to counter hyper Calvinism. In this document Carey (1961:7-13) insists that the great commission is not limited to the disciples of Jesus but is binding for all ages. Christian still have the obligation to go forth among the nations and “convert the heathen”:

After all, the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection against preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument for it. Can we as men, or as Christians, hear that a great part of our fellow creatures, whose souls are as immortal as ours and who are as capable as ourselves, of adorning the gospel, and contributing by their preaching, writings or practices to the glory of our Redeemer’s name, and the good of his church, are enveloped in ignorance and barbarism? Can we hear that they are without the gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts, and sciences; and not exert ourselves to introduce amongst them the sentiments of men of Christians?

The proposal mentioned in the Enquiry (paradigm for the gospel) was developed from the existing structure available in Carey’s culture, where the commercial companies strive to see their projects succeed. For this they undergo hardship, develop deep relationship and suffer anxiety. Here is how he puts it in his Enquiry:

When a trading company has obtained their charter they usually go to its utmost limits; and their stocks, their ships, their officers and men are so chosen and regulated as to be likely to answer their purpose. Suppose a company of serious Christians, ministers and private persons, were to form themselves into a society, and make a number of rules respecting the regulation of the plan, and the persons who are to be employed as missionaries, the means of defraying the expenses, etc., etc. This society must consist of person whose hearts are in the work, men of serious religion, possessing a spirit of perseverance; there must be a determination not to admit any person who is not of this description, or to retain him any longer than he answer to it (Carey, 1792:54-82).

Carey’s proposal to develop “soladities”- absent in protestant structure, and a reason for failure for sending missonaries for first two hundred years after reformation, is according to Tennent (2010:260) an important “proposal for global missions in both theological and structural aspect for the Protestant missions” (Modern missionary movements) (Tennent, 2010:260). Philip

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inspired him and also George Liele, the first African American missionary who planted 500 member churches in Jamaica by 1793 within nine years of his ministry (Gordon, 1992:22-28). However, Tennent (2010:258-264) in support of Neill states that mission history needs to be seen not from the perspective of chronos but kairos where something unique and “qualitatively different” happens. “That is what Carey provided, under God”.

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considered this Enquiry as the charter to modern missions\textsuperscript{229} and Chaney (1976:9) refers to it as the beginning of the so called “Great Century” (1792-1910).

3.2.3.1 \textbf{Conversion Unlimited}

By the third quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Modern missionary movement was becoming a highly successful enterprise, in terms of numbers of converts. The growth of colonialism ensured large “mission fields” with plenty of “heathens” awaiting the prospective missionaries. The spirit of the times - expansion, optimism, and duty produced hordes of willing missionaries. The glaring contrast between the rapidly developing western nations and the abject conditions in most of the “mission fields” stimulated the piety and purses of the supporters back home. These and other factors combined to produce a sense of achievement and optimism for the future (Bosch, 1991:334). Some predicted the demise of other religions with the conversion of thousands in the “mass movements”. Others even interpreted them as revivals and he long expected ‘turning of the nations to God’\textsuperscript{230}.

By the centenary of William Carey’s publication of the Enquiry…in 1892, the tables had been turned on the objectors of foreign missions. The 18\textsuperscript{th} century hyper Calvinism, in which God alone could convert people, had given way to the hyper activism of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century which rendered conversion almost totally dependent upon human effort. There was optimism and triumphalism that the world would soon be converted to Christ. Such was the emphasis on human effort that the mission “to preach the gospel to all nations” became a means to precipitate the second coming of Christ. In 1889, the student Volunteer Movement adopted the famous slogan “The evangelization of the world in this generation”. The General Secretary of the Norwegian Missionary Society, Lars Dahle, confidently predicted that by the year 1900 the entire human race would be converted to Christ (Bosch, 1991:6). Conversion unlimited!

\textsuperscript{229} Philip in Edinburgh to Salvador: twentieth century ecumenical missiology \url{http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1573&C=1518} Date of access: 16 Feb. 2014

\textsuperscript{230} Methodist bishop J Waskom Pickett was the first to do an academic study in his famous 1933 work, Christian mass movements in India. Subsequently, Pickett’s findings were taken up by McGavran to formulate the Homogeneous Unit Principle of his church growth theory. McGavran describes the mass movements as the ‘bridges of God’ in his seminal book, Understanding church growth (1970). However, Methodist missionary E Stanley Jones, described the mass movements as merely “horizontal” and therefore inadequate, i.e. conversion-church membership without the real turning to Christ. In his book, Christ at the Round table (1928), Jones emphasized the necessity of vertical dimension or God -ward conversion.
3.2.3.2 Conversion Both Personal and Societal

The preceding sections may have created the impression that the Modern Missionary Movement was mainly concerned with the conversion of people, and everything else being secondary. Certainly, much of the history literature and rhetoric focuses on “converting the heathen”. But mission historian, Mary Blaufuss (2000:19) argues for a more nuanced understanding of conversion in the Modern Missionary Movement. She makes a distinction between the first stage where the emphasis was on individual conversion and church planting, and the second stage where there was more emphasis on socio-economic transformation. But even in the first stage, she points out to mission theories that broadened the scope from purely individual conversion to the transformation of the structures of society especially in India. One of the reasons for the shift towards socio-economic transformation was due to the fact that there were few conversions and too many among the low caste and tribes. The upper caste remained untouched and insensitive to the gospel because the upper caste ethos. Conversion meant severing ties with the social context they belong to. Thus, caste in particular became an insuperable barrier to conversion.

In order to win the upper caste many missionaries began to understand education as an essential and unavoidable aspect of the mission. Therefore, roughly from 1830 onwards education was used as *praeparatio evangelica*, where the “minds of Hindus were prepared for later receptiveness to the word of God” (Cust, 1879:14). Middleton, the first bishop of India, articulates that, “the minds of the people are not generally in a state to be impressed by the force of argument, still less to be awakened to reflection by appeals to their feelings and to their fears… what is further required seems to be a preparation of the native mind to comprehend the importance and truth of the doctrines proposed to them; and this must be the effect of education” (quoted in Neill, 1985: 206).

In 1872 Miller, principal of Madras Christian College (which itself was an outcome of this emphasis on education), while addressing Allahabad Missionary Conference, stated that, “conversions were not the measure of the success of Christian education, nor even what it principally aimed at; such education sought, instead, a change of thought and feeling, a modification of character and formation of principles tending in a Christian direction… to leaven the whole lump of Hinduism, aiming not directly to save souls, but to make the work of saving them more speedy and more certain than it would be without it” (quoted in Mathew, 1988: 56).
This model of *praeparatio evangelica* was followed by the Scottish missionary to India, Alexander Duff, who also believed in “Western Education as preparation for the Gospel” (Laird, 1994:271). Duff believed that Western education in the English language would effectively Christianize Indian society and build up a strong Indian leadership. From the second stage of the Modern Missionary Movement, i.e. after 1875, liberal theologies and the social gospel movement evoked greater missionary attention regarding the social conditions of the people. Blafuss (2000:48) points out the representative mission theory of James Dennis for whom the main emphasis of mission was societal transformation and the conversion of the social structures. Dennis did not disregard evangelism for individual conversion as a goal of mission, but he believed, that God intended mission to have broader results than simply individual transformation.

As a result of western education, and the foundation of Christian schools, several well-known educated Indians (especially in the later part of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century) from the upper caste were attracted to Christianity and took baptism. These new Indians provided intellectual leadership to the Indian churches. These Indian leaders along with Hindu reascent leaders (an outcome of cultural and religious ferment under the influence of Western culture which was taking place in the beginning of 20th century) reacted against Hinduism and some of its social evil practices. This brought hope among the missionaries that there would be more high caste Hindus who would embrace Christianity. But soon this proved to be wrong as seen in the words of the drafting committee of the Edinburgh conference, quoting Pandit Rama Bhai, a Brahman convert, and an influential figure in the Mukti mission revival:-“The majority of the higher classes are getting western secular education, which is undermining their faith in their ancestral religion. They are not getting anything better to take the place of the old religion in

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231 Even though western education led to the conversion of some high caste Hindus yet, it did not create the desired result. The educated Hindu classes (several of them educated in English schools) did not consider Christianity as a substitute to Hinduism, but through English education (in the light of new knowledge) they understood the plight of their religion and society, and worked to reform it. Moreover, it also led them towards the love of the country and a desire for true and national existence. They also saw Christianity as intertwined with the British Raj (rule) which did not offer an alternative to their ancestral faith. Furthermore, Church for them appeared to be foreign and denationalizing and thus could not be accepted (Suresh & Usha, 2005:187).
their hearts, and are therefore without God, without hope, without Christ, going down socially and morally, and becoming very irreligious”.  

3.2.4 Conversion in the Ecumenical Movement (World Council of Churches)\textsuperscript{233} 

The “birth place of modern ecumenical movement”\textsuperscript{234} began at the World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh\textsuperscript{235} (Latourette, 1967:382). The growth of the movement took an important turn at the inauguration of International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921. Different issues debated and studied at the IMC meeting in Jerusalem (1928) and in Tambaram, Chennai (1938) point to an important landmark in the development of mission thinking. In 1950’s an important shift took place on the understanding of mission within the ecumenical movement – it changed the visage of the ecumenical mission permanently. Until now the “how”, “wherefore” and “whence” of mission was discussed and implemented in the mission fields. But now the “why” and “what” of mission was taken seriously (Anderson, 1961:5-7). In Willingen (1952) the question “why mission” surfaced during the discussion at the IMC meeting, especially when the missionary obligation of the church was dealt with (Scherer, 1987:38). This discussion on “why mission” led to “what” and a stirring period was inaugurated by such prompting questions. Freytag comments about this period, “Formerly missions had problems, but now they have become a problem themselves” (Scherer, 1987:38).\textsuperscript{236}

\textsuperscript{233} My discussion on conversion in ecumenical movement is heavily dependent on Van der Bent (1992).  
\textsuperscript{234} Today it is common to distinguish between evangelicalism and ecumenism. Such distinctions have further divided the Christian community into evangelicals and ecumenicals. Theologically speaking such a distinction is not convincing. Pachuaau (2001:181-82) states, “If one takes the distinction in its extreme, there is no room to discuss the question of conversion from an ecumenical perspective as it belongs too definitely to the evangelicals”.  
\textsuperscript{235} Unlike other international missionary conferences (Liverpool 1860, London 1885 and New York 1900) Edinburgh conference (1910) had more participants (1200 delegates) and was an ecumenical meeting.- where missionary societies from all protestant groups were represented in the conference. Cf Nigel (1993); Stanley (2009). Edinburgh’s conference had a lasting impact on the history of Christianity in four ways:- 1) The conference alluded to the importance of mission as the heart of the church-“ the place of mission in the life of the Church must be the central place, and none other. That is what matters” (Conference document 340) (Potter, 1982) The conference gave importance for the promotion of younger churches through three-self principles in every field (Latourette, 1967:358). 3) Edinburgh conference became an instrument for the “first permanent International Christian conference outside the Roman Catholic church” Neill (1964:544).  
\textsuperscript{236} Freytag called this emerging period as “a period of crisis in mission” and also “a period of creative thinking”. In other words mission as evangelism that was indisputable practice of mission became itself problematic in itself (quoted in Pachuau, 2000:539).
Amidst these discussion on “why” and “what” the most decisive contribution at Willingen- was the resurgence of the idea of *missio Dei*.

It was observed that: “The church is not the true centre of gravity towards which one should direct missionary thinking; rather it should be the self-revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ. Out of the depth of God’s love for us, the Father has sent forth his own beloved Son to reconcile all things to himself, that we and all men might, through the Holy Spirit, be made one in him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God” (quoted in Stransky, 1991:688).

In the concept of *missio Dei*, mission is God’s misson and not the activity of the church. It also marks the end of the age of missions (plural) and the beginning of the age of mission (singular) (Bosch, 1991:391). The main purpose of the missionary activity is to “turn towards God in humility and participate in the conflict between the reign of righteousness and the powers of death and evil” (Van der Bent, 1992:382). The missio Dei perspective within the WCC gave more importance to the “the non religious approach to humans and societies and thus criticizing the church in an exaggerated way. By consequence, evangelism practically disappeared from the mission agenda of mainline churches in the West and North”.

In addition, there was such openness to other religion that the other religions were looked upon as valid as Christianity. This was because the *Missio Dei* became an affirmation of plurality of existence which lies in the providence and love of God. Engelsviken asserts,

> *Missio Dei* is the affirmation that God’s creation and moreover is an acceptance of the plurality of existence, such as, race, sex, language, geographical differences, cultures, faith systems that God has graciously granted. No life lies outside God’s providence and love”. All nations and people are, therefore, within God’s saving purpose, and in all places and at all times people have responded to God’s presence and activity in the world. Salvation history cannot be reduced to the history of religions or to the history of only one people. God loves the world...the whole creation is the object of God’s salvation (2009: 481).

Such an unbiblical openness towards other religions- along with the rise of national identity and the resurgence of world religions among the colonized nations challenged the very morality of mission which emphasized conversion and “rescue the perishing motive”. In such a context the

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237 David Bosch (1991:369) observed that the idea of *missio Dei* was first reflected in the writing of Karl Barth when he stressed that mission is but an activity of God. However, the conceptual phrase *missio Dei* has its origin in Karl Hartenstein’s report of Willingen where he defined mission “as participation in the sending of the son, in the *missio Dei*, with an inclusive aim of establishing the lordship of Christ over the whole redeemed creation” (quoted in Schoonhoven, 1978:302).

Ecumenical studies on conversion were dealt with in the mid-1960s which resulted in a special issue on the subject of conversion in the “Ecumenical Review” of 1967. While introducing the subject in Review, Paul Löfler, at that time secretary in the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, wrote:

While ‘evangelism’ is concerned with the representation of God’s acts in history, ‘conversion’ is about the human response. Both deal with man’s participation in the missio Dei. The form of the response does not follow, and never has followed, one universal pattern or model. It must obviously vary for instance with those who have been ‘born into the church’ and those who belong to a different religion or do not hold any religious views... In short it is extremely difficult to give a more precise definition of “conversion” which would be widely acceptable (Löfler, 1967:252).

Even though it is difficult to define conversion in a way that is widely acceptable to all yet in Löfler preparation for the WCC’s fourth assembly in Uppsala (1968), wrote a study document entitled Conversion to God and Service to Man, which became the official document of the WCC on the subject of conversion. In this document while examining the theme of the assembly, “Behold, I Make All Things New” Löfler examined the meaning of the call to return to the Bible and outlined its implication in a number of issues:

1. Conversion and social transformation. In the New Testament and Old Testament there is absolutely no gap between turning to God and its realization in the personal and social spheres. The consistent teaching of the prophets which is carried further in the New Testament insists that a new relationship with God and service to man belong in separately together. It is repeatedly said that society at large can only recognize conversion by the “fruits” which it produces (quoted in full from Van der Bent, 1992:383).

2. Conversion, baptism and the church. The immediate interdependence between conversion and baptism has been visible at several points of the New Testament survey, and in fact, exists from the very beginning (Mark 1:4ff)... The argument as to whether baptism or conversion marks the beginning of Christian life states a false alternative. In the synoptic gospels, Christ’s call to repentance is immediately followed by his calling the disciples. The coming of the kingdom finds a visible manifestation in the creation of a new first-fruit community (quoted in full from Van der Bent, 1992:383).

3. Conversion and mission. The New Testament church is not a juridically defined ecclesiastical body. The boundaries between the disciples close to Christ and the multitudes are always open (Matt. 5:1). We hear of a constant coming and going, of changing commitments. Most important, conversion and baptism, while linked with the entry into the church, do not serve its interests but the larger purpose of God for the whole creation. The church itself exists as a pars pro toto (quoted in full from Van der Bent, 1992:384).

As much as Löfler was the major proponent on the issue of conversion in the ecumenical circles in the 1960s, Emilio Castro was for 1970’s and the 1980’s.

The following three points are quoted in full from Van der Bent (1992:383-384).
Reiterating the themes of Uppsala M.M. Thomas (1973:159) commented that: “The mission of the church in this context is to present within the creative liberation movements of our time which the Gospel of Christ itself has helped to take shape, and so participate in them as to be able to communicate the genuine gospel, of liberation from the vicious circle of sin and alienation, law and self-righteousness and frustration and death – into the new realm of Christ’s new humanity where there is forgiveness and reconciliation, grace and justification, and renewal movements and eternal life.”

The socio-political mission of the church and the emphasis on the social gospel stressed at Uppsala was further echoed at Bangkok 1972/1973 CWME conference. The conference urged the mission agencies “to undermine oppression and foster liberation in the oppressive situation” in their own country. Such an “act is a spiritual act, a practice of the theosis, a struggle against the false spiritualities of the ungod of race, nation and class and of the self righteousness of ideals which reinforce collective structures of inhumanity and oppression” (Niles, 1992:165). Therefore salvation encompassed both spiritual and socio-political aspects of humanization (Hesselgrave, 2005:321). But in the post Bangkok assemblies the mission of the church was considered as socio-political- this was overemphasized to such an extent that mission as conversion in any form was completely rejected. For instance section 1 of Nairobi assembly states,

We deplore cheap conversions, without consequences. We deplore a superficial gospel-preaching, an empty gospel without a call into personal and communal discipleship. We deplore conversions without witness to Christ. There are millions who have never heard the good news... We find it more comfortable to remain in our Christian circles than to witness in the world... We regret all divisions in thinking and practice between the personal and the corporate dimension. The whole gospel for the whole person and the whole world means that we cannot leave any area of human life and suffering without the witness of hope... We regret that some reduce liberation from sin and evil to social and political dimensions, just as we regret that others limit liberation to private and eternal dimensions (quoted in Paton, 1975:45-46).

The holistic approach to mission, influenced by the Latin American liberation theology, was further developed in the 1982 document of Melbourne conference, “Your Kingdom come”. The assembly highlighted “the call to a clear witness to Jesus Christ and the promised kingdom of God, as well as the mandate to live in solidarity with those exploited and rejected by social and economic systems” (Mathey, 2005:13). It insisted on the kingdom as an option to the poor and to the poor churches in God’s mission “highlighted the serious challenge the kingdom message
threw down to traditional missiology and mission programmes” (Mathey, 2005:13). The document also coined the expression “mission in Christ’s way and reflected how Christ’s choice of vulnerability and his way to the cross challenged the use of power, in political, church and mission life”.241

The meetings at Canberra (1980), San Antonio (1989) Harare (1998), and Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006) emphasized and echoed the call of previous assemblies to be in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. Moreover, the Bustan, South Korea (2013) assembly also gave emphasis to “victim theology”. As Bishop Chickera from Sri Lanka comments,

Jesus always sought out people on the margins and that therefore the churches must always be sensitive to, and take sides with, the plight of the marginalized victims in their societies who are seeking fullness of life. In this way, he argued, we locate ourselves alongside the no-people to whom Jesus says, “yes”. It is our sustained pastoral presence among the victims that gives us authority to call the aggressors to account. In this context, Bishop Chickera described the assembly theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace” as a “timely prophetic petition” (quoted in Ross et.al. 2014:3).

The assembly clarified that the mission of the church is not to increase the church membership but transform the power structures by challenging the dehumanizing forces. “Mission is not a project of expanding the churches but of the church embodying God’s salvation in the world” (Keum, 2013:58) in terms of “challenging the self-interest of the powerful who desire to maintain the status quo” (Keum, 2013:30).

In the above survey on the ecumenical tradition, one can see that the socio and political involvement have become a paramount concern in the mission of the church. With such an emphasis on the social dimension of salvation, the traditional mission approach of conversion-seen as a decision made by individuals, or repentance from sin and turning towards God - was neglected. Instead, sin was structural evil and salvation was societal redemption. This societal approach has moved “from charity to the comprehensive approach to the developmental approach and finally to the liberationist approach” (Keum, 2013:58).

3.2.5 Evangelical Understanding of Conversion

Various attempts to define the term Evangelical have met different degree of acceptances. Olson (2004:3-6) mentions seven distinct definitions, arrayed from scholarly to the popular, with some referring to the earliest Protestants and others exclusively to 20th century movement. For the purposes of this study, evangelicalism is defined as a movement that began due with the revival of Protestant Christianity in Germany, Great Britain and North America in the early 18th Century by the Pietists and by different revivals. This definition on evangelicalism is used by David Bebbington (1989) that has even become the working definition for much of the scholarly discussion of evangelicalism. It has been aptly described as the “Bebbington quadrilateral”. Bebbington (1989:2-3) describes four basic characteristics of evangelicalism that spread across denominational lines: “conversionism” (emphasis on the need for repentance in response to the work of God); activism (in spreading the gospel and helping the needy); “biblicism” (the role of the Bible is central); “crucicentrism” (stressing the death of Jesus on the cross). These characteristics have remained fundamental to evangelical thought from the 18th century up to the modern-day.

3.2.5.1 Conversion Through Personal Decision

Conversion experience plays an important role in the evangelical circle to the extent that it was regarded as the entry way to Christian life. As Gilpin (2006:257) rightly states, “conversion became not a moment in one’s life, but the key to interpreting the meaning of one’s life from beginning to end”. Unless and until one has been converted one cannot be considered Christian. If this experience is a sudden, “punctiliar event”, triggered by an encounter of some sort, just like

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243 Evangelicalism has become an hyphenated movement as its adherents qualify it to the evangelical branch they are attached to. Some are conservative evangelicals, others post-conservative evangelicals yet others are post-evangelicals and younger evangelicals (Oslon, 1995:482).

244 The world-wide evangelical movement was shaped in the eighteenth century by Pietism (in Europe), the Evangelical Revival (Britain) and the Great Awakening (America). Analyzing the impact on British Protestantism Bebbington (1989:146), states how the decade beginning in 1734 “witnessed in the English- speaking world a more important development than any other, before or after, in the history of Protestant Christianity: the emergence of the movement that became Evangelicalism”.

245 He used this definition in his influential book Evangelicalism in Modern Britain : A History from the 1730’s to the 1980’s.

246 Larsen describes the overall agreement by many scholars of Bebbington’s definition, as well as its limits. Cf. Haykin (2008:21-36).

247 Dayton (1991:48) suggests that it is a movement characterized by “convertive piety”.

Paul’s Damascus road experience, then it is much better (Peace, 2004:8). Therefore, evangelicals view conversion as a crisis event where one accepts Christ as Lord and savior and through this acceptance one is justified in a moment, even though sanctification remains a continuous process throughout one’s pilgrimage journey (Harris, 2008:201). This according to Bebbington (1989:6) is the “major theological convictions” of conversion for the evangelicals. Although not mentioned but it is generally assumed that Christianity [western or European] is the norm. Conversion will always be from the other religions to Christianity.

3.2.5.2 Conversion and Social Responsibility

Even though, the evangelical church has connected evangelism and social responsibility for most of its history, yet, the church showed laxity towards social responsibility between the years 1865 and 1930, especially in North America evangelism due to three factors: premillennialism, individualism, and a reaction to the social gospel (Smith, 1957:11). Nevertheless, “a great reversal” happened after 1960’s, influenced by the ecumenical movement-the evangelical camp gave emphasis on social action as evident in the Church Worldwide Mission Congress in

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248 Some of the prominent figures who were involved in social work were William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry, George Muller, Henry Venn and Anthony Ashley-Cooper- they played a vital and unquestionable part in “securing anti-slavery legislation, penal reform, improving factory working conditions and the care of needy orphans in a society desperately requiring change” (Heasman, 1962:13). Moreover, Finney who was part of the revival movements was also involved in reforming work. He wrote: “The great business of the church is to reform the world. The Church of Christ was originally organized to be a body of reformers. The very profession of Christianity implies the profession and virtually an oath to do all that can be done for the universal reformation of the world” (quoted in Senn, 2000:260). Furthermore, the followers of Finney devoted their life to fight against slavery and prominent among them is Theodore Weld.

249 Premillenialists approached history and the world pessimistically. They considered sin personal not structural and believed that as time went on the earthly affairs would further worsen and will culminate in tribulation. This attitude was reflected even in revivalism and evangelicalism where, “the emphasis shifted away from the social involvement to exclusively verbal evangelism” thus social concern whether “social or political was seen with suspicion and was relegated to a very minor role” among the evangelicals (Bosch, 1991:318).

250 Since sin was viewed as personal, the individualistic view of humanity became the centre for all discussion on sin and salvation, thus ignoring the structural evil. Most frequently, salvation was depicted as getting off a sinking ship onto the lifeboat, one person at a time (Stott, 1967:13).

251 Social Gospel was espoused by Walter Rauschenbusch. He defined the Kingdom of God as “a reconstruction of society on a Christian basis”, contrasting the “old evangel of the saved soul” with the “new evangel of the Kingdom of God” which was primarily a matter not of getting souls into heaven, but “transforming life on earth into the harmony of heaven” (quoted in Handy,1966:266-67).

252 The increased commitment by Evangelicals to social issues after 1960 is hailed as a “Reversal”, a term coined by Timothy Smith (1957) and later popularized by David Moburg (1977) in a book which incorporated the phrase in the title- “The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern”. David Hesselgrave (1988:79) thinks that many Evangelicals were influenced by the Ecumenical understanding of the missio Dei.
Wheaton (1966) and in Berlin a year later (Utuk, 1986:205). The paper on social responsibility entitled “Mission and Social Concern” offered the following four guidelines as quoted in full:

1. That any programme of social concern must point men to - not away from - the central message of redemption through the blood of Christ.
2. Expression of social concern must provide an opportunity for spoken witness to Christ recognizing the incompleteness of non-verbal witness.
3. Efforts must not arouse unrealistic and unscriptural expectations; the reality of sin and the Second Coming were not to be minimized.
4. The desire to do good in the name of Christ should not lead to wasteful competition with secular agencies (quoted in Lindsell, 1966:222-25).

Although at Wheaton the evangelicals were critical of WCC yet, it noticeably advanced the evangelical missiology in the sense that for the first time they were critical of their own missiology which neglected social action. However, the Congress saw social activity as a consequence of evangelism which was even reemphasized at Berlin: “The commission of the Church is not to reform society, but to preach the Gospel. Certainly Christ’s disciples who have embraced the Gospel, and who themselves are being transformed by the Gospel, are intended to be salt of the earth and light of the world. That is, they are to influence the society in which they live and work by helping arrest its corruption and illumine its darkness. But the primary task of the members of Christ’s Church is to be Gospel heralds, not social reformers” (Stott, 1966:50-51).

Thus the understanding among the Evangelicals at Wheaton and Berlin Congress was that social action will result from the changed life affected by the gospel. However, there was a radical shift in the Evangelical thinking regarding social responsibility at Lausanne conference in 1974, where Stott (1989:23) admitted that there was a change in his theological position from Berlin:

Today ... I would express myself differently. It is not just that the commission [i.e. the Great Commission] includes the duty to teach converts everything that Jesus had previously commanded (Matt 28:20), and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I see now more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.

The influence of Stott’s shift in his theological thinking was well reflected even in the Lausanne covenant (article 5), where social action was no longer seen as a consequence of evangelism.

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254 Smith (1966:480-81), as WCC observer at Wheaton, was surprised at how deep the hostility of the evangelicals was towards ecumenicals. Out of the 15 major papers presented 9 of them were attacking the Ecumenical movement. In these papers the Evangelical charged the Ecumenicals as “theological liberalism, loss of evangelical conviction, universalism in theology, substitution of social action for evangelism.”
rather as a mission of Church where it is inseparable from evangelism: “Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty... The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination ... the salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities” (quoted in Scherer & Bevans, 1992:253).

The Lausanne covenant according to Padilla (1976:93) was a “death blow” against the lopsidedness of the evangelical understanding of Church’s mission: “[The covenant was] death blow death blow to the superficial equation of the Christian mission with the multiplication of Christians and churches and questioned the wedge that the evangelicals created between kerygma and diakonia, didache, and koinonia. It took a stand against the mutilated Gospel and the narrow view of the church’s mission that was defacing it, and has definitely claimed for itself a number of biblical features that it has tended to minimize or even destroy.”

The Lausanne covenant clearly put away the dichotomy between evangelism and social action and emphasized that both are the two sides of the same coin with equal importance.

3.2.6 Pentecostal Understanding of Conversion

It is generally believed that Pentecostalism began among a few Bible students in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 but now has grown to more than 400 million members worldwide (Hollenweger, 1996:3). This movement is also called as “the third force in Christendom” (McClung, 1986:3). Pentecostal believes and practice to what is known as the “full gospel” or “five-fold gospel” — “Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer and coming king” (Cartledge, 2008: 95).

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255 Until 1960, the term “Pentecostal” was exclusively used to that denomination that directly traced its origin to Azusa revival. But after 1960 such as Azusa experience became part of the mainline such as Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. This new form of Pentecostalism became known as the “Charismatic movement”. Consequently, the word “Pentecostal” is no longer exclusively used for a particular denomination but generally used to any Christian denomination that has some sort of “Pentecostal” phenomenon-such as speaking in tongues cf. Synan (1971). However, there is still a difference between Charismatic and Pentecostals, where Pentecostal belief that “normative” Christianity includes the baptism in the Holy Spirit ( termed as second blessing of conversion) that is regularly accompanied by the sign of speaking in tongues (Higgins, et.al., 1993:157-58).

256 By the middle of year 2000, Pentecostalism in India has grown to approximately 33.5 million strong, ranking fifth in the world (behind Brazil, the United States, China, and Nigeria) Cf. David Barrett and Todd Johnson (2001).

257 Missiologists have also referred to Pentecostal movement as the “third wave” (Synan, 1971:163).

258 For a more complete explanation of the five aspects of the “full gospel,” see Simms (1995).
3.2.6.1 Pentecostal Conversion: An Evangelical replica

As a subset of Protestant Christianity it is evident that the Classical Pentecostals\(^{259}\) have adopted some central Protestant themes (Cartledge, 2006:55). As a part of this association the concept of conversion\(^{260}\) and the imperative in the work of evangelism are an important aspect in Pentecostalism. The work of conversion is intertwined with the action of Jesus as saviour. (Cartledge, 2006:13). Jesus as saviour refers to the conversion or salvation experience, where one is restored to a right relationship with God through Christ, whereby one is spiritually changed. Therefore, according to Flinn (1999:51-52), Pentecostal “conversion is regarded as metanoia or convertere, a turning away from the old life of sin to a new life of righteousness in fellowship with God and other Christians.”

The belief in individual conversion coupled with the unique Pentecostal experience of “baptism in the Holy Spirit”, and premillennial eschatology propels the Pentecostals for evangelism. Consequently, evangelization that leads to individual conversion has an important place in Pentecostal theology. Pentecostals see a sense of urgency to lead individuals to a “personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ,” and “to a personal, dynamic encounter with the risen Spirit of Christ” (Karkkainen, 1999: 69-70). This understanding of conversion has a close resemblance to the evangelical conversion where the repentant sinner is to accept Jesus by simple faith as his saviour and ask the Holy Spirit to unite him to Christ and into his death and resurrection (Cartledge, 2010: 60). This experience is termed as new birth. In this sense, Gee (1944:42) states that “to be Pentecostal is to stand for that type of evangelicalism (touching and changing the most formative elements in human affairs) that aim above all at personal conversion, and emphasizes to each individual the gravity and importance of their own decision concerning repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus.”

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\(^{259}\) Due to the rise of the Charismatic movement, traditional Pentecostals are usually referred to as “Classical Pentecostals”.

\(^{260}\) Being such the case it is surprising that an important compilation such as the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (1988) contains no entry on “conversion”, nor does a book such as *Pentecostals from the Inside Out* by Smith (1990).
3.2.6.2 Pentecostal Conversion and Water Baptism

Pentecostals do not consider baptism to be “a constitutive means of salvation”\(^{261}\) or as an initiatory event. Rather, baptism is viewed as a means of strengthening the faith the converted.\(^{262}\) As William (1974:189) rightly asserts that,

> Pentecostals believe that water baptism is by no means essential to salvation rather water baptism is understood as having to do with conversion/regeneration but not in the sense of mediating or conveying such sacramentality; rather water baptism is primarily the believer’s action whereby he expresses obedience to the commandment of the Lord. However, the all-important matter is the prior act of faith wherein occurs the new birth. Baptism is an outward symbol of this profession, but as symbol it has no integral relationship with the experience itself (whether performed earlier, as with infant baptism, or afterwards in believer’s baptism as a sign of the faith professed). Water baptism is by no means essential to salvation.

Therefore, for Pentecostals the participation in baptism is of secondary importance.\(^{263}\) The most important is the interior process of conversion. This understanding is based on Romans 10:9 - “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9)”.\(^{264}\) As conversion is related to confession, “the central element of worship is the preaching of the Word. As persons respond to the proclamation of the Word, the Spirit gives them a new birth, which is a pre-sacramental experience, thereby making them Christians and in this sense creating the Church”\(^{265}\).

3.2.6.3 Pentecostal Conversion: Rupture and Continuity

For Pentecostals, the act of conversion requires a concept of rupture, i.e. a complete break from the past (Robbins 2004; Wanner 2007). This understanding is seen in the testimonies of converts where we find a break between life before and after conversion (Snow & Machalek 1984).\(^{266}\) Thus, Wenk (1999:21) categorically states that in Pentecostalism, conversion involves the “reorientation of a person’s life from a pattern of attitudes, beliefs, and practices judged to be wrong or inferior to another judged to be right or superior”. Berger (1966:76) aptly puts it like

\(^{263}\) Ibid., Catholics acknowledge a “baptism of desire” when a person wishes to be baptized but is not capable of receiving it for whatever reason. Such a desire is thought to be exceptional but efficacious.
\(^{266}\) In one typical conversion account, a Pentecostal reports: “I liked to drink, I was a womanizer. My home was going down the tubes. I was destroying myself. I didn’t even think about my kids. On 12 June 1979. God had mercy on me. He called me. I felt God’s touch. I accepted Christ into my life. Afterward I Felt His strength” (Bereymann, 1994:149-50).
this: “Conversion introduces a new periodization in one’s biography - BC and AD, pre-Christian and Christian”. Converts are encouraged to keep traditional and post-conversion cultures separate. Thus, conversion-regeneration constitutes a very real experience for the Pentecostal.\textsuperscript{267}

The rupture understanding was promoted strongly among the Pentecostals because “Pentecostal mobilized a diabolizing stance towards indigenous gods, which are recast as demons operating under the aegis of Satan” (Meyer, 2010:121). Therefore “their religious past prior to conversion is not merely to avoid or forget it, but rather to actively combat it. Pentecostalism therefore tends to contour a culture “against culture” (Robbins, 2004:140).\textsuperscript{268}

Even though some scholars stress the rupture view of conversion, others deny or reject the before–after dichotomy of conversion. Scholars like Blasco (2000) see conversion as a process in which both continuity and discontinuity resonate in people’s lives. Blasco argument came from his study on “Evangelical Gitano in Spain” in which he found that for Gypsies of Madrid, Pentecostalism “embraces what they perceive as unavoidable change while remaining Gitano” (2000:2). It is rather a synthesizing process of an old and a new; converts say they stay Gitano, but at the same time become better Gitano as in case of Khrist bhakta (see chapter 6).

**Summary**

In this chapter we have dealt with the teaching of conversion in four major Christian traditions that are prominent in India, namely, Roman Catholic, Protestant churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Modern missionary Movement and conciliar ecumenical movement), Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The focus is not on “why” there are differences about conversion in these traditions but “what” the differences are and similarities concerning conversion among these traditions.

The Christian traditions’ understanding of conversion is the product of a constellation of events and creeds during different historical periods. Even though all Christian traditions wanted to espouse their understanding of conversion from the Bible, yet in reality they could not formulate a biblical understanding of conversion in its pristine form since it was always mixed with

\textsuperscript{267} Many Pentecostal believers can clearly state the moment when and where he or she was converted, baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. All these phases of “Christian initiation are consciously experienced and so become existentially highly significant” cf. Mathew (2004).

\textsuperscript{268} This phrase is Krik Dobrowski’s, quoted in Robbins (2007:159).
external elements. In the Roman Catholic Church, we see different paradigm shifts in the understanding of conversion based on external factors which are as follows:-

1. Till the middle ages we see the influence of Augustine. Augustine teaching on conversion itself was based on his own conversion experience that he underwent from philosophy, Manichaeism and finally to Christ. He developed his teaching of free will and *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (the doctrine of ecclesiology) against Pelagianism and Donatism, which later were approved by the magisterial documents and council of Florence.

2. Even though Augustine denied the use of force, yet he justified it in the context (showing the fact that he relied on historical realities) of bring back the Donatists to the mother church. The same model was used by the Roman Catholic Church in the middle ages unquestionably for saving souls and implanting of churches.

3. The discovery of new lands and areas that have not heard the gospel catalyzed the idea of implicit faith and baptism of desire which was approved by the council of Trent.

4. The exclusivist idea of salvation through the church was jeopardized in the Vatican II council. Vatican II emphasized the inclusive approach to salvation. Even the post Vatican II official document “Outside the Church, no salvation” axiom disappeared which is quite startling. The reason for such an epistemological break from the earlier position was the post world war context of unrest in the world, especially in the context of the Holocaust, poverty and decolonization. These social forces compelled the church to redefine the nature of the church in response to the issues the world was facing and also in relation to the world religions (the Catholic Church that benefited from colonial influx was now facing an altogether new world). The church also emphasized dialogue instead of conversion as the mission of the church.

Just as the Roman Catholic Church the Protestant churches understanding of conversion were also historically determined by the social forces shaping the world at that time. The reformers were morally, doctrinally and practically united in opposition to the medieval Roman Catholic Church’s abuse. This opposition is the core in the formation of the Protestant church and its doctrine, especially in relation to the role of good works.

Both Luther and Calvin’s understanding of conversion are shaped by many factors. For Luther, it was the categories offered by the church of his time, *via moderna’s pactum theology* and his conversion experience. Even though he broke away from the Catholic Church yet he retained the Catholic teachings of sacrament of Baptism which affirms God saves through baptism and grace is infused in baptism. Calvin, however, was influenced by his own conversion experience and Luther’s Larger Catechism; this is especially reflected in his Institutes of the Christian Religion.
Although the Lutherans and the Reformed tradition believed in the five catch words of reformation yet they disagreed on the issue of Christ’s presence in the Lord supper which leads to division between them. But with regard to conversion both traditions believe that the Spirit – worked repentance and faith in the substitutionary atonement are necessary. But the Lutherans remained more focused on justification by faith whereas the Reformed tradition without minimizing the effect of justification by faith, stressed sanctification more than the Lutherans. Moreover, both traditions have been marked by debates about the nature of conversion which have led to the formation of different groups within the traditions.

The hyper Calvinist view emphasized the sovereignty of God curtailed the mission of the church. Against this hyper Calvinist approach the modern missionary movement stressed the importance of mission and thus gave more importance to both personal and societal conversion. Here societal conversion was a preparation for individual conversion. But one of the problems of modern missionary movement was its nexus with colonial powers which determined the modus operandi for mission. This nexus had been a bane for the India church as the Indian church is still labelled as foreign.

The influence of enlightenment became more visible in Protestantism (especially in ecumenical circles) towards the end of the 19th century - especially when the church began to embrace the secular society and showed openness towards other religions. This led to the desacralization of the church and ecclesial activities, and stressed the dialogue and social gospel. Against the ecumenical movement, the evangelicals (an offshoot of revivals) and Pentecostals stressed the personal conversion and have been critic of the ecumenicals. But there was a shift in the understanding of the evangelicals and Pentecostals after ecumenical meeting in Uppsala, where there was an emphasis on the societal responsibility along with the personal conversion.

The study of conversion in Christian traditions has shown that every single theology of conversion is the product of its time which raises the following missiological questions?

1. If theology of conversion is also historically determined by the social forces shaping the world of the time, then how can such theology of conversion be absolute?
2. How can such a theology of conversion relate to the Indian situation where the context is absolutely different? Does not India require a new theology of conversion in dialogue with the social forces that are at work in India?

3. How can such a theology of conversion claim that it captures the fully the nature of conversion?

The lack of this reality can lead to competitive and contradictory approaches rather than to a complementary approach towards other Christian traditions. It also leads to dismissive and counter charges that hinder the witness of the church. Moreover, a competitive spirit will lead the rest of the world indifferent to the meaning of biblical conversion as seen in the Indian context. All these issues are dealt in the forthcoming chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR

MISSIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO CONVERSION IN INDIA

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the church, as seen in the previous chapter, the problem has been that although Christian churches and groups have many experiences and practices of conversion, these are often not seen as complementary but as competitive, even contradictory. As Rudolf Heredia (2007:13) states, “Conversion is a complex and emotionally charged issue. Fundamentalists exploit it, liberals complicate it, many do not comprehend what the fuss is about, and others shy away from getting involved”. It is the different understandings of conversion played off against one another, that tends to create tensions and put the rest of the world indifferent to its meaning and value (Peace, 2004:8).

In a pluralistic country like India, these types of conflicting and contradictory understanding of conversion and the resulting disputes among different Christian traditions have a negative impact on the mission of the church. One’s view of conversion is significant, as it shapes and determines one’s view of evangelism (Peace, 2004:8). This matter therefore has deep missiological significance and tremendous repercussions in a pluralistic society like India. For instance, the worst anti-Christian violence and persecution in Indian history was witnessed in the district of Kandhamal (Orissa) on 23rd August 2008. “During this widespread violence that continued unabated for weeks, more than 58 Christians were killed. Over 6,000 Christian houses and 350 churches and Christian institutions were looted and torched. Over 54,000 Christians fled their homes”. The atrocities were committed by Hindu activists who accused Christians of aggressive evangelism leading to conversion which according to them is “violence against humanity and therefore evil and unacceptable and as ‘an attack on Hindu nationhood” (Kim, 2003; 167). They even projected that “conversion demonstrated the inherently intolerant nature of Christianity” (Kim, 2003: 169).

Although, the mainstream churches condemned these atrocities, yet they distanced themselves from these accusations of the Sangh parivar by stating that those responsible for conversion were

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fringe group churches, like the Pentecostals’ and charismatics. These mainstream churches even stressed that the aggressive evangelization campaign of the fringe groups has embarrassed them and left them in an undefendable position as “the sincere efforts of charitable activities of their churches were weakened” (Arun, 2008: 15). Therefore, the writings of the Indian mainstream church leader’s state “there were evident desires to distinguish mainline churches from fringe group churches who claim that Jesus is the only savior and use derogatory language about Hindu deities and to present the latter as a small portion of Indian Christians” (Kremmer, 1999:60). For instance, Vempeny, a Catholic theologian, in his book “Conversion: National debate or Dialogue” (1999) makes a clear distinction between mainstream churches and fringe groups mission emphasis. Vempeny states that mainline churches are engaged in bearing witness, especially through the ministry of compassion and love and are not interested in making people to change their religions. Whereas, it is the fringe groups, a minority sects, “who hold outdated Christian doctrine [and] engage in converting people” (1999:24). By making such distinction Vempeny appeals to the Sangh parivar asserting that their allegation that Christians are involved in conversion is not a fair picture - it is this fringe groups who are the troublemakers and should not be considered under the big umbrella of Christian mainstream groups (1999:25). Vempeny’s book avoids the use of the word “conversion” and even it is used attempts are made to seperate it from proselytism.

These conflicting views and accusation labelled against each other by the Christian denomination have not benefited the mainstream churches because – in Indian’s context the Hindu fundamentalists do not understand the difference between conversion and proselytism as the Christian writers distinguish it. In addition, it is clear to Sangh parivar that the traditional Christian doctrine of salvation through Christ by means of conversion, as affirmed in the Ecclesia in Asia271- a document representing the Catholic Church world-wide, in spite of supposed changes in Christian theology- still remained a vital teaching of some Protestant groups in India. Such conflict among Christians has weakened the Christian witness - the Hindu fundamentalists now and then have taken this conflict on the understanding of conversion to prove their point that “if Christians themselves are divided on the issue of conversion, then how

271 John Paul II began Ecclesia in Asia (EA) with the following exhortation: “just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent” (EA: 1).
they can claim that the bible has explicitly commanded them to convert the other”(Shourie, 1996: 212) 272 In such a scenario, this chapter deals with the historical roots of the debate on conversion in India to elicit the missiological challenges the church faces in her evangelistic mission.

4.1 Christian Mission in India: A Historical Review

In order to understand the ongoing debate on conversion in India, the dominant missionary movements of the 18th and 19th Centuries, a component part of the debate needs to be analyzed. Therefore, what follows is a review of mission history keeping in mind that “history itself is its own kind of network, one which interacts with and informs contemporary social behaviour” (Bauman, 2013:636). At the onset, it must be clarified that it would be too simplistic and inaccurate to give a generalized picture of the missionary impact. Of course, the rich contribution of the missionaries’ is acknowledged both by the church and the state. But at the same time there are criticisms.

4.1.1 Pre – Colonial and Portuguese and Danish Colonial Period

According to tradition the origin of Christianity in India was laid by St. Thomas, 273 the apostle or even two apostles, St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew (Mundadan, 1989:21).274 Thomas preached the gospel and sailed to Malabar, and arrived at Palayur in AD 52. Apostle Thomas initially concentrated among the Jews who were living in Malabar but later on began to preach to the Hindu community of Palayur and enjoyed significant success among the deeprooted Hindu culture.275

The Malayalam-speaking St. Thomas or Syrian Christians276 - India’s first considerable community of Christians, achieved relatively high status within South Indian society and by 6th

272 Arun Shourie was the former minister of Disinvestment, Communication and Information Technology in the Bharatiya Janata party government.
273 The tradition is based on oral legends and written testimony of Apocryphal work of Acts of Judas Thomas or The Acts of St. Thomas. For a detailed historical and critical analysis of this theory involving its conflicting theories and and opinion of scholars, the following works of, Kuriakose (1905) & Mundadan (1970) are noteworthy.
274 This view is also supported by other historians, like Tisserant who say that there was a very ancient evangelization started by St. Thomas, the Apostle and mainly in South India (Tisserant, 1957 : 10).
275 This is evident from the fact that Thomas built seven churches, which were at Cranganore, Quilon, parur, Gokamangalam, Niranam , Chayil and Palur ( or palayur) (Mundadan, 1989:30, 31).
276 The St. Thomas/Syrian Christians are so-called because of their claims to have been founded by St. Thomas in 52 AD, and because of their historical connections with the West Asian Church of the East and the use of Syriac
century rose to further prominence. Bayly (1989:8) states that Syrian Christians were respected as, “a high-ranking warrior and trading community within the petty kingdoms of the Malabar Coast, competing for, and receiving, “honors” and patronage in exchange for loyalty and service by Medieval period. The honors the Christian community received would have involved being given the privilege of making certain sacred offerings during Hindu ceremonies and festivals.”

In order to endow such honours upon Syrian Christians it should be noted that the Syrians adapted themselves well to the Hindu culture. As a result, the Hindu community considered the Syrians “to be a ritually pure community, and neither they nor their shrines were considered polluting to upper caste Hindus” (Bayly, 1989: 275). As Brown (1956:16) rightly states, “there is no evidence at all that the Christians were considered a foreign community” rather they were considered as a part of the Malabar society and it is this community to an extent that has “coloured their understanding of Christianity” (Brown, 1956:16).

St. Thomas Christians’ continuous interaction with the Hindu community for centuries enabled them to develop a contextualized theological vision that was inclusive, pluralistic and liberal in nature. This is evident in the architecture of church, in the manner of worship and customs, and the rituals that the St. Thomas Christians followed. Podipara (1970:79-98) shows this contextualized approach of the St. Thomas Christians who adapted well to the culture of the place.

The architecture of the churches resembled the temple (constructed virtually side by side of the temple), except for a cross on the top. The manner of worship like the processions, offerings, the rites and ceremonies connected with house warming (milk boiling ceremony) marriage (the groom tying the golden jewellery called Minu around bride’s neck) and funeral (family considered under pollution until special fast called Pulakkuli, took place after few days and celebration of sradham feast commemorating the death of a relative) were all similar to that of their non-Christian living around them.

It is evident from the customs and manner, life and culture of the Syrian Christians, though, the community was foreign in origin yet it was deep rooted in Indian soil because of their strikingly

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277 They followed many customs practiced among Hindus. In order to ensure prosperity a newborn child is fed with a paste of honey and powdered gold. This custom was practiced by the Brahmins (Brown, 1956:185). The infant was given a biblical name but at the same time a pet name was given that was indigenous in nature. When the child attained four years a Guru (probably Hindu priest) was called to spell the first letter of the alphabet into the years and make the child write on the rice. After this initiation the child is sent to the local school for further instruction (Zecharia, 1994: 120). These rituals were also followed by St. Thomas Christians and at time the guru also taught the infants Christian prayers and catechism (Podippara, 1970:81).
similarity to their neighbours (Brown, 1956: 167 & Cheryan 1973:153). Therefore, it can be said that Christianity in India began as an Indian religion while “the votaries of that religion zealously guarded the fundamentals of their faith as the most treasured of their possession” (Cheriyan, 1973:153).

At the time of the Portuguese arrival in the 16th century, the St. Thomas Christians were enjoying privileged position in the society, safeguarding the surrounding culture, and at the same time vitalizing it with biblical teachings. Therefore, the historian rightly points out that the identity of St. Thomas Christians is: “Hindu in culture, Christian in Religion and oriental in worship” (Placid, 1970:27).

The imbibed connection of St. Thomas Christians with the Hindu culture was in jeopardy after the arrival of Portuguese in Calicut.278 The Portuguese even though established an alliance with St. Thomas Christian but in their relation with the Syrian Christians they always maintained superiority about their form of Christianity. They believed that their form of Christianity was the true form of Christianity and all those who do not conform to their mode of Christianity were not following perfect Christianity. Therefore, their aim was always to convert the St. Thomas Christians to their mould of Christianity which was of Latin derivation. Thus some of the practices of the St. Thomas Christian were considered heretical by the Portuguese.279

The St. Thomas Christians, however, considered the Portuguese on a par with them and believed that both are the living expression of Christianity and part of the universal church. St.Thomas Christians were even “ready to accept from the Latin missionaries what they lack in instruction, a better discipline but not those missionaries” (Perumalil & Hambye, 1972:86). In no way the St. Thomas Christians were willing to adhere to the fact that Latin form of Christianity alone was the true form of Christianity (Perumalil & Hambye, 1972:86).

278 The first batch of Portuguese under the leadership of Vasco de Gama arrived in Calicut in1498 in search of Christians and Spices. See Watkins (2004).
279 The St. Thomas Christian symbol was the Persian cross (Mar Thoma sleba in Malayalam). The liturgy was still called Qurbana (derived from Hebrew Korban) meaning sacrifice. Pesaha, the narration of paschal event and especially the tradition of observance of Pesaha at home and the use of Syriac liturgy were considered heretical by the Portuguese. See. http://eereporter.blogspot.ae/2014/08/the-seed-is-word-of-god.html Date of access:16 July 2013
The relation between the two communities was short lived, particularly after 1560 when the Inquisition, which considered St. Thomas Christians inadequately Orthodox, was established in Goa. In the consequent centuries the European Catholics constantly attempted to “detach the St Thomas from their Eastern Patriarchs” and bring them under the ecclesiastical authority of the Padroado Real, to which a substantial number of Syrian Christians agreed at the Synod of Diamper in 1599 (Pearson, 2006: 119). Moreover, the Portuguese in due course also disentangled the Syrian Christianity from the native religion and Europeanized it. The reason for this was that the Portuguese regarded the native religion as inferior and demonic. This superiority complex of the Portuguese can be seen in the series of detailed instructions given to the governor of Goa in how to deal with Indian heathens by King John III of Portugal in 1545:

In this brief the king orders that neither public nor private ‘idols’ be tolerated on the island of Goa and that severe punishment must be meted out to those who persist in keeping them. The houses of people suspected of keeping hidden idols are to be searched. Heathen festivals are not to be tolerated and every Brahman is to be banished from Goa, Bassein and Diu. Public offices are to be entrusted to neophytes and not to heathens; Christians are to be freed from heavy labour at the port of Goa, such tasks in the future being reserved exclusively for heathens. Portuguese, under pain of severe punishment, are forbidden to sell heathen slaves to Muslims, since heathens are converted more easily to Christianity under the Portuguese and to Islam under Muslim ownership. Revenues previously used for the support of mosques and temples should be diverted to aid in spreading the gospel (Lach, 1965:239-40).

The Portuguese did not maintain any religious tolerance with native religion or tradition. Rather for them all the native religion and traditions had to be eradicated and replaced with Christian faith (Europeanized form). To achieve this goal the spread the gospel and the conversion of the heathen was important, if not peacefully, then through force. This way of mission was in line with the Augustine’s view using force for conversion (in his time against Donatist) and the mission paradigm, “compelle intrare” of the Roman Catholic church in the middle ages as discussed in chapter three. Such an unethical attempt of conversion made Christianity a hated and untenable religion among the Hindu community. Firth (1961:111) says: “In the eyes of the

280 St. Thomas Christian who did not adhere to the synod of Diamper, under the leadership of archdeacon Thoma showed allegiance to the Syrian Orthodox Church, whose Antiochean bishop Mar Gregory had arrived in India. The St. Thomas Christians, thus were divided into two Syriac Orthodox Church (Syrian liturgical tradition) and Syro Malabar Church (in communion with Catholic Church). See Podipara (1972).

281 The doctrine of Padroado (jus patronatus established by the Papal Bull of 1514) vested the authority for missionary work effectively in the hands of the Portuguese crown in areas where Portugal claimed political rights.

282 Synod of Diamper (1599) is the synodal council at Oodiamperoor, or Diamper where the Roman Catholic rites were forcefully imposed upon the St. Thomas Christians. The decrees were violently enforced by Menezes the Arch Bishop of Goa with the help of Portuguese authorities.
Hindus Christianity was the religion of the ‘franks or parangis’ the term used to denote especially the Portuguese but also any kind of European. It was not a complimentary term; it suggested meat-eating, wine-drinking, loose- living, arrogant persons, whose manners were so far removed from Indian propriety that social intercourse with them was unthinkable.”

Several Christian mission efforts went peacefully amidst these tumultuous periods. Francis Xavier (1506-1552), the first missionary of the Jesuit order, who concentrated among the southwestern coast of India, converted many fishing communities that remain Christian to this day. His approach was different from his contemporary Catholic missionaries. Instead of singing Latin hymns and following Latin liturgy he gave importance to the translation of hymns and prayer books into the local language (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004: 184).

Following Xavier’s inculturation approach was another Jesuit missionary Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) who arrived in Goa, then the capital of Portuguese India in 1605. On his arrival he learned that Christianity was detested by the high caste Hindus as Parangi marga or westernized religion. Accordingly, he learned local languages, Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit, the language of sacred Hindu religious texts (Rajamanickam, 1967:83). The advantage in learning Sanskrit was that he could easily understand the Hindu world of thought. Sensing the resistance of natives against parangi margakam he adopted life style that detached from European ways -a life style akin to local priestly class: “Nobili presented himself as a Christian Brahmin priest called tattva bodhkar (teacher of reality) and aiyar (guru). He chooses a life style of a Hindu sannyasi (renouncer). He adopted kaavi (ochre- colored grab) instead of black cassock and exchanged his leather shoes for wooden sandals. He anointed his forehead with sandal paste and wore sacred thread across this shoulders with a cross fastened to it” (George, 1998:91).

As Nobili’s concentration was to convert the Brahmins he mostly adopted high caste Hindu life style and thus accepted the caste system, which according to him should not be challenged as it was a fixed gradation in Hindu society. Therefore, to minister to the lower caste he developed separate missionaries’ called Pandaaracaami (non- Brahmin renouncers) (Cornin, 1959:251). This distinction was officially recognized by Pope Benedict XIV in 1744 which led to the

\[\text{Sacred thread also known as upanayanam (sitting close by), is given to a high caste child at the age of 7 as a reminder to be committed to learning. At this point he becomes “twice born”. Everyone has a biological birth, but when a young boy seeks his spiritual identity he accepts his spiritual guru as his father and vedas as his mother.} \]
creation of Pariah missionaries and Pariah churches (Deliege, 1990:53). But such distinction and adherence to caste system, a dehumanizing evil practice, and entertaining it inside the church cannot be justified. In reality the gospel breaks down such barriers and forms a community that is relational in nature. Nobili’s approach has an impact on today’s church where, especially in Tamil Nadu, the discrimination among members of the church based on caste is still practiced.

Nobili even substituted the church ceremonies with local rites. For instance, the use of taali, in marriage ceremony instead of ring was introduced. To this taali a cross was attached (Neil, 1984:289). He even encouraged the Catholics to partake in the cultural festival, pongal, where rice and milk was cooked at the foot of the cross which was specially erected for this purpose (Rajamanickam, 1967:86).

Nobili’s inculturation process was not without resistance. His work, although accepted by the Hindu leaders, was opposed by rival Roman Catholic orders, who considered his work as syncretistic. He was arrested and tried by the Goa Inquisition on the charge of heresy. But the intervention of Pope Benedict XVI insisted on a round table conference consisting of Archbishop and theologians to investigate the matter. In the conference as there were supporters from both sides the matter was referred to the Vatican. The papal decision was in favor of Nobili and his method of inculturation was accepted in 1623. The papal decision stated, “We grant to Brahmin and other Gentiles who have been and will be converted to faith the permission to wear the thread and grow the kudumi as distinctive signs of their social status. We allow them to use the sandal paste as an ornament, provided, they remove all superstitious and all alleged of scandal” (Anchukandam, 1996: 104).

But after a century the controversy rose again - as to whether Nobili’s method of inculturation should continue. However, there were others in his order that supported his work and this becomes a controversy, which came to be known as “Malabar rites controversy” (Boyd,

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284 Taali is commonly known as mangala sutra, meaning “Holy thread”. It is the marriage necklace that is tied by the groom around the bride’s neck that identifies her as married woman. Cf. (Chandra, 1999)

285 Pongal is a harvest festival cerebrated in Tamil Nadu for four day in mid- January. It is mainly a thanksgiving festival to nature and takes its name from Tamil word meaning “boil”. The first day is celebrated as bhogi festival in honor of Indra (supreme cloud gods) for abundance of harvest. The second day puja is performed when rice is boiled in milk outdoors in earthen pot and the food is offered to sun gold along with other oblation. The third day is called Mattu Pongal where cow is garland and worshipped. The cow is also fed from rice cooked. The fourth day is called Knau pongal where turmeric leaf is washed and placed on the ground and then the women perform aarti (fire waving) and bath brothers with turmeric water to have longevity. Cf. (Kapur, 1999).
Nevertheless, nearly four centuries after Nobili’s inculturation method in the post
Vatican II era “his method stands enlightened and vindicated approach and has become the
accepted Catholic mission practice (Hedlund, 2000:183). Cultural adaptation is today accepted in
the area of architecture and liturgy in the Roman Catholic circles, which is evident today at
NBLC in Bangalore as discussed in chapter 3.

Similar to the Catholic mission at the beginning of the 18th century, the Protestant missions
concentrated on the eastern coast of South India. The Danish missionary Bartholomeus
Ziegenbalg came from Halle University, a centre of German pietism – a movement which gave
particular focus to individual conversion and the desire for pious living as discussed in chapter 3.
After his arrival Ziegenbalg, just like his contemporary Europeans, held the view that Indians
were Barbarians and their religions were full of superstition. In one of his letters he confessed
what he did out of his ignorance of Indian culture and religion: “We overturned some ( terracotta
images) and knocked off the head of others, to show some people that these were powerless and
useless gods, unable to help themselves and still less to help their worshipper’s” (Neill, 2002:32).

Although, Ziegenbalg throughout his missionary carrier did not change his view on Hinduism –
seen as an idolatrous religion, displeasing to God and unable to bring salvation to its followers,
yet by 1708 he realized that Indians were civilized people and devoted himself to the study of the
Tamil language. During his study of the language, he came to understand that the spoken
language and its written form were different and therefore if the Christian faith has to be
respected and understood by the people then he would need to translate the Christian truth in
their language. Accordingly, he devoted more time to the study of Hindu ideas and customs and
often had dialogue with Hindu friends on various issues – such as the need for conversion, why
they were not willing to accept Christianity and so forth. In keeping with these dialogical
questions, Ziegenbalg composed a Tamil pamphlet entitled Abominable Heathenism, and
distributed in all of Tamil Nadu. The aim was to convince the local Hindu of the need to convert
from the error ways that they were rooted in (Grafe, 1972:58). He used the word a-jnana to
convey the idea of sin or error, Ziegenbalg told these Hindus the following: “We have come to
you to save you from a-jnana. … Make a study of the Christian precepts and accept them in
faith, and so become the people of God” (quoted in Grafe, 1972: 59). In the eight chapters of the
pamphlet, Ziegenbalg told the heathens how the gospel would save them from their ignorance.
The contents of the pamphlet which are in question answer format are quoted in full from Grafe (1972:59-60):

i. What is a-jnana? – It is idol-worship and moral perversion according to Rom 1: 21-32.
ii. How a-jnana spread in this world. – It did so because of the devil’s deceit and men’s guilt and not because of God.
iii. How detestable a-jnana is – Because by a-jnana soul and body will be perverted and punished.
iv. How God is helping those in a-jnana to be saved. – Jesus Christ took upon himself the burden of a-jnana and delivers from a-jnana saving soul and body.
v. What are the things, those who wish to be saved from a-jnana have to do – Scripture reading, realization and confession of sin, faith in Jesus Christ, asking for baptism with renunciation of a-jnana and acceptance of the triune God, living in the communion of the Word of God and the Lord’s Supper, living a life of witness and suffering and a life of love and justice.
vi. The trials and tribulations which those who give up a-jnana and enter the church experience in the world for the sake of righteousness.

vii. The benefits promised to those who give up a-jnana, accept the true religion and stand in the Christian faith unshaken.

To effectively communicate the gospel to Hindu friends, Ziegenbalg devoted himself to the study of Hinduism and became one of the pioneers to make the study, “genealogy of Malabar gods” available to the western world (Neill, 2002:32). When the book was sent to Halle for publication (in 1713), Francke and the director of mission at Halle objected to the proposal by stating that, “the printing of the book ‘genealogy of Malabar gods’ was not to be thought of, inasmuch as the missionaries’ were sent out to extirpate heathenism, and not spread heathenish nonsense in Europe” (quoted in Neill, 2002:33). But after a century and half, the book was published in German language by W. Germann. Although Ziegenbalg did not receive support from the mission board in the study of the local culture, customs and religion yet, it did not dissuade him from its study. Rather, he did all this with the intention to achieve the most important missionary task - the translation of Holy Bible into Tamil which was completed by 1709.

Even after the study of Hinduism, Ziegenbalg did not change his former view,286 yet in his later years he always held a positive approach to Hinduism. He negated the wrong view held by the missionaries’ and presented Hinduism scrupulously as Hindus understood and practiced.

286 Even in his later years speaks of Hinduism “in terms of blindness and idolatry of these heathens in heathenism” (Neill, 2002:31).
These writings of Ziegenbalg enabled to remove misperception of Hindu culture and to create a more sympathetic approach to the Hindu religion. For instance, Alexander Dow - an East India company official, who happened to read many of the Ziegenbalg’s writings - in his dissertation “History of Hindustan” (1768) states that he appreciated the most about Hindus was that they did not convert: “Contrary to the practice of all other religious sects, they admit of no converts; but they allow that every one may go to heaven his own way, though they perhaps suppose, that theirs is the most expeditious method to obtain that important end. They chuse (sic) rather to make a mystery of their religion, than impose it upon the world, like the Mahommedans, with the sword, or by means of the stake, after the manner of some pious Christians” (Dow 1768:110). A few pages further, Dow states that Hindus never claim nor convince others that there is the only way to heaven but for Hindus “heaven is like a palace with many doors, and every one may enter in his own way” (Dow, 1768:115).

In a larger context, it was common practice by the East India Company neither to interfere in religious affairs of the natives nor to preach the gospel to them. The company believed that the demise of the Portuguese was largely due to the evangelistic zeal. In contrast, the company was interested in trade and was a profit oriented enterprise.

The positive approach to Hindu religion was short lived by the coming of the London Missionary Society (LMS) by the beginning of 19th century. For the society, India was a battle ground between God’s truth and Satan’s deception. This is expressed in LMS missionary George Gogerly’s, words stating that “an unusual feeling of solemnity” that crept his mind at the first glimpse of India: “Before me was the land of idolatry, concerning which I had heard and read so much; and I was now to come into contact with that mighty system of superstition and cruelty which was holding millions enslaved in its bonds; to see its hateful rites, and by the exhibition of the Truth, to contend with its dreadful power” (quoted in Kitzan, 1970:29-30).

Having such a pre-conceived idea about Hinduism, cultivated a strong desire to convert the Indians from the superstitious believes that holds them enslaved. How can this be done? Of course through the Truth! That is, the gospel should replace Hindu mythology. It is true that the biblical account in Acts also supports this fact (Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:20; 19:20). But there is a difference between the biblical approach to native religion and India’s the missionaries. In the
biblical account, the missionaries’ had a crucifying mentality, whilst Western missionary in India had a triumphal mentality as if they were crusading. For instance, when Christian Wolf arrived in Goa (1833) he heard the church bells and saw the cross of Christ planted, his reaction was: “Behold! The triumph of the cross over idolatry” (quoted in Kaul 1998:56).

Another missionary, William Carey, also reminds Christians of their obligations in his “an inquiry into the Obligations of the Christians, to Use the Means for the Conversion of the Heathens”. He asks rhetorically:

After all, the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection against preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument for it. Can we as men, or as Christians, hear that a great part of our fellow creatures, whose souls are as immortal as ours, and who are as capable as ourselves, of adorning the gospel, contributing by their preaching, writings, or practices to the glory of our Redeemer’s name, and the good of this church, are involved (sic) in ignorance and barbarism? Can we hear that they are without the gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts, and sciences; and not exert ourselves to introduce amongst them the sentiments of men, and of Christians? (Carey 1792:69-70)

Carey had a sympathetic and contextual approach towards the Hindu culture. As a result, his pioneering work around Calcutta in the north was accepted and respected by social and political leaders. As Ziegenbalg, Carey and his co-workers concentrated on Bible translation and education. One of the important features of their translation work was the absorption and accommodation of the local culture. For example, Carey used the word *doba* as the Bengali translation for baptism. In Bengali the word *doba* or the verb *duba* means “to immerse” and etymologically, the word means “to sink”, which can be traced back to middle Indic period (Sukumar, 1971:375). Induction of this word caused a world of uproar among the Christian missionaries (mainly Baptists and Anglicans) both in India and in Britain. This lasted for more than a century resulting in friends becoming enemies and in economic sanctions being imposed on the Baptist to make them [the Baptist] replace the word for something else.  

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287 In Bengali – English dictionary there is no word called *doba* for baptism. Rather the dictionary uses the word *kristadharne diksha*, which means baptism is the rite of passage to Christian religion. Moreover, it uses the word *namakara*, which denotes baptism as name giving ceremony (Brekke, 2006:218).

288 Even though Baptists at Serampore have already raised some concerns regarding the word *doba* used for baptism yet it was only in 1827 when a group of missionaries working around Calcutta raised a further objection and the issue became quite serious. Their concern was brought before the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) and thus asked the society in London to discontinue their support to the Baptist version of the New Testament. The BFBS unofficially wrote to Carey to withdraw the term. But Carey insisted in its use and did not yield to BFBS pressure. Carey stated that BFBS is taking sides and becomes sectarian rather than accepting all Christians from every community. Due to the resistance of Carey and non-willingness on the part of non – Baptist to accept the
Amidst all these confrontations, Carey sought for cooperation among all denomination in consultation and prayer. But at the same time Carey, would take the Lord’s Supper only with believers baptized as adults; many Anglicans in their turn would refuse to take it with him (Brekke, 2006:218). Such parochial attitudes were criticized by the Indian converts from the high caste. For instance, writing to the editor of The Indian Social Reformer, Parekh (1919:240) states:

My main contention is that the present method of evangelism has resulted in the creation of a Christian community which is entirely proletarianised, denationalised, anglicised, and materialized … it would end in organizing in India what is nothing less than an anti-Hindu counter state which would be ruinous to the best interests of both the Indian civilization and the Kingdom of Heaven; and that all this is absolutely contrary to the command of St. Paul and of the Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in 1 Timothy 6:1-5.2

Indeed, this denominational spirit has created disunity among the Christians churches, which till this date continues among Indian churches. It has become one of the main hindrances to Christian witness which is based on love- “if ye love one another, the [world] will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:35).

4.2 British Colonial Era and Conversion

As stated earlier, East India Company was very incredulous about missionary activity in their jurisdiction, whereby the Baptists worked illegally in Bengal. But with the change of company’s charter in 1813 a new era was opened in which trade and missionary activity would go hand in hand. This open attitude was welcomed by missionaries and in one of his letters Carey (1792:68) wrote that in the last days when there is glorious increase of the church then “Commerce shall subserve the spread of the gospel”. Thus, in the mind of Carey and others trade and commerce across the oceans became one of the most important metaphors for missionary activity, and the trader became the model for a new kind of missionary:

When a trading company have obtained their charter they usually go to its utmost limits; and their stocks, their ships, their officers, and men are so chosen, and regulated, as to be likely to answer their purpose; but they do not stop here, for encouraged by the prospects of success, they use every effort, cast their bread upon the waters, cultivate friendship with everyone from whose information they expect the least advantage. They cross the widest and most tempestuous seas, and encounter the most unfavorable climates; they introduce themselves
into the most barbarous nations, and sometimes undergo the most affecting hardships; their minds continue in a state of anxiety, and suspense (sic), and a longer delay than usual in the arrival of their vessels agitate them with a thousand changeful thoughts, and foreboding apprehensions, which continue till the rich returns are safe arrived in port (Carey, 1792: 82).

This nexus of trade and mission or in other words the nexus between colonial powers and missionaries led to the destabilization of caste system, mass conversion and the rise of Neo-Hinduism. Thus, the Hindu community developed resistance during the British colonial period (1800–1947), just as they resisted the conversions associated with the Muslim invasions.

4.2.1 Nexus between Colonial Powers and Missionaries: A Distortion of the Image of Christianity in India

Although confrontation existed between the missionaries and colonial powers in India, yet the missionaries used the protection and benefits of the colonial powers to advance their missionary activity, including conversion activities. It is this nexus that has become a bane for Christianity or “a fault line” (Fox, 2002:89) among the Hindu community who opposes Christianity as the religion of imperialist and foreignness in origin. They further argue that the imperialist powers were sympathetic towards the Christianization of India as theyt annihilated the local cultures of India through the missionaries. This confusion is well stated by Devanandan (1957:67): “Hindu leaders attributed the rapid spread of Christianity through mass movement conversions, resulting in the growth of a strong Christian section of the Indian population numbering nearly ten million after a century of missionary activity, to the friendly support given unofficially by the government to Christian missions.”

It is not only the view of the Hindus that Christianity and colonial powers worked hand in hand but also the view of Christian historians. Raj (1986:2) states Christian states that Christianity “flourished under the pelf and patronage of foreign rulers.” Dharmaraj (1993:16) also states that “missionaries and colonizers sailed on the same boat; gun and gospel were carried on the same ship.” Thus, Christianity in India is labelled as a “foot soldiers of imperialism” (Gorringe, 2004: 188) and a “advance guard” of colonial rulers (MacQueen, 2007: 21).

Such a magnitude of accusation would be an extreme view, but many church historians and ecumenical theologians do agree that the missionaries commonly supported the colonization process of the non-European world due to which the “process of colonization was seen as the colonization of non-Christian peoples by Christian nations” (Bosch, 1991:227).
4.2.2  

Caste System and Mass Conversion

As described earlier missionaries viewed Indian people (especially all the third world) as ignorant, barbarian and under developed in comparison to them. This ethnocentric attitude was a common aura among the missionaries’ as their governments were militarily superior to other nations. In such a context, their teaching of Christianity was mainly the moral critique of the local culture, especially of the caste system.

For the Hindus caste system\(^{289}\) is one of the major factors that preserves Hindu culture and religion for centuries. The caste system provides both social and religious context within which Hindus live. No one is born a Christian but a Hindu is. A Hindu is born not only into his religion but also into his very caste. Hinnells and Sharpe (1972:128) state that, “A Hindu is a Hindu not because he accepts certain doctrines or philosophies, but because he is a member of a caste. Therefore, to become a Hindu, other than by being born into a caste is impossible.”

The caste system practiced for centuries and has become the part of the Hindu structure. However, according to missionaries, it was an obstacle to the progress of the gospel and therefore has to do away with it. This view was stated at the Madras missionary conference in 1850 (Driks, 2001:26). For this reason the Christian missionaries’ criticized severely the caste system- particularly its hierarchical character and the practice of untouchability, and even constructed text and literatures that the removal of caste system was the opinion of the majority of indigenous populations (Inden, 2000:90-93). These texts were even sent to the colonial administrations.

\(^{289}\) Caste (Jati) system refers to the stratified social hierarchy that specifies a group of people having a specific social rank prevalent only in India from 1200BCE. It is very complex and multifaceted structure. There are thousands of jatis with its own rules and customs but broadly of all these jatis come under one of the four basic varnas (color):- Brahmans (priest and learned class), Kshatriyas (rulers, warriors and property owners), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (laborers). Outside these four varnas were the untouchables whose job was to clean toilets and remove garbage. Due to such menial jobs they were considered impure and thus untouchables. They are not permitted to enter temple and any public places, even today - the legislation (1950) that states that any form of discrimination towards untouchable is punishable by law. Cf. Bayly (2001).

Even though there are various myths with regard to the evolution of caste system the most commonly accepted version comes from Rig veda (first of the four Vedic book), considered to be the source ancient Indian wisdom. Rig veda states that Purusa, the first man created, was sacrificed to give rise to four varnas: “The Brahmin was his mouth, his two arms were made the Kshatriya,.. His two thighs (lions) the Vaishya, from his feet the Sudra was born” (Bayly, 2001:25f).
Although the caste system was acknowledged as a boon among Hindu thinkers, the untouchability practiced was condemned. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India, is renowned for critique of the practice of untouchability. He even went to the extent to elevate the outcastes in their own eyes and in the eyes of the society by naming them Harijans (children of God). This led many Harijan caste leaders to emerge and demand social and religious reforms. Due to this environment in southern India, masses of Harijans converted to Christianity expecting release for social discrimination. It is estimated that during this period the number of Christians increased from one million in 1860 to five million in 1930, which includes one million Dalit (Moffett, 2007:422 & Webster, 1994:33). An official census taken in 1931 indicates that approximately five out of six Indian Christians lived in rural rather than in urban environment (Webster, 1994:61). This mass conversion was a social protest of liberation against the oppressive structure of untouchability. Moreover it provided the converts with economic, educational and employment benefits within colonial India. The missionaries provided these weaker and oppressed societies the most welcome social service through mission schools and hospitals. Thus, “people converted because it was economically advantageous in the colonial empire” (Chandra, 2004:203) and also they saw “conversion as a social, religious and political liberation for the poor and oppressed people of the village” (Thomas, 1965:61). However, Clarke (2004:330) argues dual benefits of Dalit conversion: “Conversion to Christianity is part of a historical movement among Dalit that attempted to concertedly eject the conventional and comprehensive Hindu world order while at the same time calculatingly reassemble an egalitarian religious world vision that is not obliged to the implications of the former worldview.”

But the real question is whether conversion of Dalit to Christianity has liberated the Dalit Christians from social discrimination and untouchability? The answer is negative - as recorded in the words B. R. Ambedkar, the father of Indian constitution and who led his mass of followers in Maharashtra State into Buddhism rather than into Christianity. While analysing the issue of conversion to other religions, especially Christianity, Ambedkar (1989:470) raised some thought provoking questions:

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290 The word Dalit is derived from the root ‘Dal’, meaning i.e. weak, crushed, split open and trampled upon. Cf. Michael (1999:11).
Has Christianity been able to save the convert from the sufferings and the ignominy which is misfortune of everyone who is born an untouchable? Can an untouchable after his conversion to Christianity take water from a public well? Will he be allowed to live in the touchable quarters of the village? I am sure the answer to every one of these questions must be in the negative. In the other words conversion has not brought about any change in the social statues of the untouchable convert. To the general mass of the Hindus the untouchable remains an untouchable even though he becomes a Christian.

Although the Dalit Christians accepted Christianity with the view that they will regain their lost humanity and dignity in Christ, as they become new creatures in Christ, yet the opposite remains true. The conversion has added further misery instead of change in their status. Bishop Sahu commented: “The Indian church has to make a confession first. If you are alienated in the society and you become a Christian, you are alienated again. We tell them, if you become a Christian then there is no discrimination, but once they become a Christian they are looked down upon by Christians of higher castes. A higher caste Christian will never marry a Dalit Christian, yet we say we are all one.”

Dalit Christian not only suffered discrimination in the churches but they were also disqualified from a lot of constitutional provisions and privileges due to conversion to Christianity. The government of India has brought a distinction between Christian Dalit (including Muslim) and other Dalit communities that belong to other religions (Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist). One of the reasons for such distinction is that the other religions are of Indian soil and thus a conversion between any of these religions doesn’t debar the individual provision granted under the constitution. This is not the case with Christianity which is considered as foreign religion. Although the President of India can include and grant a special status for disadvantage groups under the title “scheduled caste”, this has not been granted even after many suit petitions filed by the Dalit Christian and the recommendation made by “National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities”. This clearly shows that the Dalit Christians are penalized for just being Christians.

292 In 2004 Dalit Christians filed a writ petition no. 180/2004 in the Supreme Court in this regard. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government referred the matter to the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities (NCRLM) headed by Justice Ranganath Misra. The Commission justified and recommended to delete the paragraph 3 of Constitution (SC) Order 1950 to “make the Scheduled Caste net fully religion-neutral like that of the Scheduled Tribe.” The report of the commission was submitted to the prime minister in 2007. But no action was taken by UPA government or the subsequent governments to implement the recommendation. In today’s
4.2.3 Neo- Hinduism and Conversion

According to Klostemaier (1989:56) Hinduism “has grown like some gigantic Banyan tree, with numerous spreading branches that put down their own roots, and yet remained, however tenuously, attached to the main trunk”. The term Hindu has been defined in at least six way, among which the modern Hinduism has evolved out of religious definition of Hinduism (Neo- Hinduism). 293

Neo- Hinduism movement began due to its encounter with Christianity and Enlightenment thought in the last decade of 19th and the beginning of 20th century. In other words, Neo Hinduism is a revitalization movement within Hinduism. According to Wallace (1956:240), “revitalization movements arise when traditional worldviews are threatened by external changes”. 294 It is peoples attempt to find meaning of life “in the face of external challenge and growing anomie” (Hiebert, 2000:50). Mass conversion to Christianity as discussed earlier was one such attempt to find the meaning of life.

293 The following are the six ways Hinduism is defined (Hiebert, 2000:48-49):

1. Geographical definition:- Persian word Hindu was originally used instead of Indian for the people living beyond the Indus River by the Turk, Persians, Arab Muslims and British rulers (Ludden, 1996: 7).
2. Brahmanical Hinduism definition: - It refers to the social religious Hindus who believe in sanatana dharma (eternal religion) and are rooted in the caste system (Freykenberg, 1993:527).
3. Western definition: - When the west encountered Indian civilization, the Europeans (scholars, painters, journalist etc.) developed a compelling images of Hindus as “mysterious, exotic, sensual, despotic, traditional, and irrational in their fervent religiosity” (Said, 1978:46). Thus India was known in the West as “a land saturated with religion; its people . . . obsessed with the destiny and status of man in the hereafter” (Wallbank, 1978:25).
4. Political definition: - The Hindu kings maintained and administered the affairs of temple that generated lot of revenues. This usually led to lot of strife for power. But during British rule all the administration of temple came directly under British’s. This led to the codification of an official Hinduism run by the British Raj that is separate from all other religions (Freykenberg, 1993:560).
5. Religious definition:- this definition of Hinduism was born out of the encounter of Indian religious philosophy with Christian thought and Enlightenment which gave rise to different tradition like bhakti (devotion), vedanta (school of Indian philosophy) etc. This is what is termed as Neo – Hinduism.
6. Fundamental definition: - This defines all religion of Indian origin under the Hinduism and the rest as foreign. Christianity is considered as foreign and therefore should leave the country or convert to Hinduism (Savarkar, 1964:4).

294 According to Wallace (1956:270) there are three ways people respond (called as movements) to cultural collisions, which are as follows:-

1. Conversion movements: - people are attracted to the new ideology that they change allegiance to the
2. Accommodation movements: - Elements of the new ideology are adopted and re-interpreted on the basic of old categories and logic.
3. Revitalization movements: - The past elements are revived by the synthesis but at the same time accommodates new sufficiently to survive in new context.
The mass conversion led to the self-evaluation among the Hindu thinkers. The question that confronted them was why people are living the religion of birth? Was Christianity superior to Hinduism as the missionaries argued? The self-evaluation, led to internal reforms of Hinduism and the Hindu leaders also developed a defense against missionaries’ criticism of the superiority of Christianity - to show that Hinduism was compatible with Christianity. The confrontation response was on three levels: “Firstly, People like Ram Mohan Roy were able to see ‘the equivalence of Christianity and Hinduism, based on the ‘ethical core of religion’; the second strand, proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, was that both Hinduism and Christianity were valid although each followed different paths; but the Hindu pundits (scholars) argued for the supremacy of Hinduism over Christianity” (Kim, 2003: 13).

Ram Mohun Roy (1722-1833), is known as the “father of modern India” (Parekh, 1929:181) and the “father of Indian renaissance” (Das, 1983:25). He was the founder of the *Brahmo Samaj*. He was attracted by the ethics of Jesus and the teachings of monotheism that enabled him to denounce the polytheistic concepts of Hinduism. Roy himself stated this in a letter he wrote to John Digby (1815): “The consequence of my-long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth has been that I have found the doctrine of Christ more conducive to moral principles and better adapted for the use of rational beings than any others which have come to my knowledge” (quoted in Thomas, 1976:8-9).

Roy never took interest in the historical Jesus or his miracles but he was attracted to Jesus’ precepts or ethical teachings. He went to the extent of extracting the teachings of Jesus from his death, resurrection and their biblical interpretation (Thomas, 1976:10). The outcome of this...

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295 The custom of sati (self-immolation of widow after the death of husband) and, the system of polygamy was banned in India due to Hindu thinkers encounter with missionaries (Manilal, 1929:16).

296 Gandhi philosophy was based on three principles, *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *swadeshi* (service of immediate neighbourhood). Gandhi taught that,

One can worship God as Truth, but not Truth as God. God is Truth, but God is many other things also. That is why Gandhi preferred to say Truth is God. One can worship what he feels to be the Truth, for Truth is known only relatively. Truth is not one of the many qualities that we normally known. It is the living embodiment of God as the only life. Gandhi identified Truth with the fullest life expressed in concrete realities. God is His whole creation, the whole of existence, the service of all that exists. Truth is service of God. https://pcdnetwork.org/blogs/truth-is-god-and-mahatma-gandhi/

297 Brahmo Samaj began as *Atmiya Sabha* (spiritual fellowship) by Roy “for the cultivation of spiritual life accordance with the truths of Upanishads and Vedanta sutra” (Manilal, 1929:16). They were against idol worship and offered their praise and prayers to Brahma, the supreme God (Morrison, 1906:169).

298 He found it difficult to accept the death of Jesus on behalf of sinful human beings. The concept of death was inconsistent with the general notion of justice where an innocent man had to undergo such suffering.
extraction of ethical teaching from New Testament was the publication of “the precepts of Jesus the guide to peace and happiness”. Roy stated that this ethical teaching was sufficient to bring in desired change in human nature: “I feel persuaded that by separating from the other material contained in the New Testament, the moral principles found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding. Jesus is a great moral teacher” (quoted in Bray, 1971:175).

When Roy was criticized for being selective in his teachings of Jesus also blamed the churches of the same. Roy stated that the churches have created dogmas which have led to strife and division, have counteracted against the genuine philanthropy work and have created confusion in the mind of Hindus. Roy believed that even though the moral law is partially taught in all other religion yet it is principally found in Christianity. This does not mean that one needs to accept Christianity. Rather, one can learn and follow it but remain in one’s religion (Thomas, 1976:10).

Just like Roy, Gandhi (1869-1948) also interacted with Christian missionaries and was influenced by Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount (Holtman, 2011). He never viewed Christianity or the presence of missionaries’ - as a threat to India but he viewed the mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity as a threat to the unity and harmony of India and to the very fabric of Indian tradition. Conversions to Christianity, he suggests, “often lead to immoral behaviour and to an attitude that is un-Indian, un-national, and disrespectful of Indian traditions” (Gandhi, 1968:91–93). Gandhi was vehemently opposed to any form of conversion and especially conversion by the use of humanitarian work. Gandhi (1995:219–220) asserts, “Will not the great missionary bodies of India, to whom she owes a deep debt of gratitude for what they have done and are doing, do still better and serve the spirit of Christianity better, by dropping the goal of proselytizing but continuing their philanthropic work?”.

The imperative of missionaries in India is not to make superior claims of Christianity and convert others, but genuine conversion takes place within one’s tradition. The missionaries’ should help the converts to retain one’s tradition and improve it (Gandhi, 1968:295–301). Gandhi stated that the work of missionaries suffers because of conversion, the agenda of British
Raj (rule) and the call for the retention of foreign missionaries after independence (quoted in Kim, 2003: 25).

The opposition to conversion during these periods was more intellectual than political reality. This is because the aim of the Hindu reformers like Roy and Gandhi was to show the similarities between Hinduism and Christianity that is, equality of religion based on the fact that both religions were unified in their basic beliefs and people (Jones 1989: 212-3) even though in reality it is far from truth.

Beyond the intellectual dialogue, the issue of conversion took an ugly shape, it led to the formation of many organizations to defend Indian culture and Hindu religion, as these were political in nature. Although the aim of these organizations in the beginning was to reform Hinduism back to Hindu dharma yet these organizations took a militant strand of Hindu reform (Veer, 2000: 65). One such organization was Arya samaj formed by Dayanada Saraswati (1824-1883) in 1875. The preconceived idea of the organization was that the golden age of Hinduism was invaded by Muslim rulers and the British’s especially through conversion (Veer, 2000: 65). This planted seed of the Hindu fundamentalism (Stephen, 2004:187).

Saraswati wanted to reform Hinduism from all evil practices - especially from the practice of untouchability which made the Dalit convert to other religions, especially Christianity. For this purpose he called for the return to vedas, the sole foundation of the Hindu faith. This seems paradoxical because it is in Rig veda where the caste stratification of society is based upon. It remains unknown how Dayananda wanted to purge the evil practice of untouchability by returning to vedas. He even projected Hinduism as superior to all other religions and the mother of all religions and Christianity as alien sect (Saraswati, 2011: 385). Moreover, the disciples of Arya samaj went to the extent of combating Christianity by engaging in street debates and Suddhi ceremony. They claimed that Hinduism is their original religion and returning to their original religion is what they are promoting (Stephen, 2004:189).

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299 In Hinduism the age of dharma is known as the golden age, where the people adhered to dharma (law duty and truth) and a just society was formed. But the power of the golden age diminished with each successive ages until we reached the present age known as Kali yuga (dark age) marked by materialism. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/history/history_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/history/history_1.shtml) Date of access: 17 June 2014
300 Arya samaj also welcomed people who wanted to join Hinduism through a process called “Suddhi Karma”, meaning purification rite. The ceremony includes conducting homam (ritual done in front of fire), and chanting...
Following the footsteps of Dayananda and the Arya Samaj, Sangh parivar also consolidated Hindu masses and vehemently opposed the conversion of Dalit to Christianity. Sangh parivar, came to the forefront through the formation of Hindu Mahasabha (the great assembly of the Hindus) in the early 1920’s, under the leadership of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai (Prasad, 1988:76). The main purpose of the Hindu Mahasabha was to curtail conversion to Christianity - by purging evil practices in Hinduism and creating the Hindutva, which believed all religions are valid ways to God, devoid of conversion. But later on leaders of some militant group like V D Savarkar followed by M S Golwalker, the pioneer of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a key organization among the Sangh parivar today- defined Hindutva to include all religions that have its roots in India thereby, excluding all religions that were born outside India (Sarvakar, 1964:4). The main communities that were affected through this definition were Christians. Today, the Sangh parivar still considers Sarvakar as the champion of nationalist ideology. Once again, Sangh parivar is trying to implement this ideology in the form of cultural nationalism under the BJP government that is in power in India today.

4.3 Independence and Post-independence Period

Even after the independence, the issue of conversion remained the most controversial element in the relationship between Hindus and Christians. During the discussion at the “Indian Constituent Assembly” from 1947-1949, “conversion was one of central concerns [which] “provided a legal base for religious freedom as one of the main fundamental rights in the constitutions” (Kim 2003:37). During the constituent assembly, the Hindu leaders - who opposed mass conversion from Hinduism to Christianity through so many laws before the independence - were

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vedic hymns led by the priest. After the conversion a certificate was given to the convert. This certificate was legally valid based on the Government order given in March 19, 1985. But, historically in Hinduism Suddhi (purification), was performed on upper caste Hindus when they polluted themselves through forbidden things, like crossing the seas (going to foreign countries) or eating beef etc. Whereas, for Sangh parivar, suddhi in the context of re-conversion would mean a return of those who have left Hinduism. [Link](http://www.aryasamajthane.com/conversion.html)

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301 These laws are:-The Regulation Act in 1832, the Raigarh State Conversion Act in 1936, the Sarguja state apostasy Act 1945, the Patna State Freedom of Religion Act of I942 and the Udaipur State Anti- conversion Act in 1946. These laws aimed at eliminating the rural and tribal rights of freedom of conscience and religion. Even it went to the extreme to forfeit the property of the converts. Moreover, it required a person who wanted to convert to “submit an application to a designated officer” (Jenkins, 2008: 109-127).
particular in mentioning the prevention of conversion to Christianity (Arpita, 2002:45). Even though the Hindu leaders attempt proved futile, yet they continued to call the article 25 (1) of the Indian constitution, “right to propagate” as “a charter of Hindu enslavement”, “the most disgraceful article, the blackest part of the Draft constitution” (Kim, 2003:19).

The inclusion of the term “right to propagate” in the constitution seems to be “a concession given to the Christian viewpoint” (Smith, 1963:182). However, the later development in the Indian judicial system has challenged and reinterpreted the term “right to propagate”. The classic example of this is visible in at least five states (Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat) that have enacted laws to either curtail or cease conversions.

A massive enquiry into the activities of missionaries’, who were alleged to use fraudulent means to converts the backward classes (tribal’s and Dalit), was launched by Madhya Pradesh state government in 1954. A “Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee” was set up under the leadership of Bhawani Shankar Niyogi, a former retired Judge. He presented a 936 page report on missionary activities on 18th April 1958 which was called Niyogi report (Kim, 2003:62). The Niyogi report made scathing observation and strong criticism against missionary activities (Pachuau, 2001:189). The Committee stated, “conversion are mostly brought about by undue influence, misrepresentation etc., or in other words not by convictions

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302 The word conversion became the most debated word in the constituent assembly, especially when the meaning of article 25:1 of the Indian Constitution which entitles to “freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion” (Article 25:1) was discussed. It took almost 20 sessions to define the meaning of the article (Kim, 1998:8). This article, adapted from the Irish Constitution, has undergone various interpretations in India’s judicial systems (Saldanha, 1981:147). During the formation of the Indian constitution the debate centred on to drop of the word “right to propagate” which, according to the Christians, was synonymous to the right to convert – a concept ingrained in the Christian religion (Kim, 1998:3). The Hindu leaders opposed to interpret the “right to propagate” as the basis for the “right to convert” (as stated by Christians). In a memorandum submitted to the constituent assembly in 1946, Hindus insisted to withdraw the term and interpret religious freedom on the basis of Hindu tradition of dharma (Kim, 1998:6). They even emphasized that this view can contribute to “social peace and political stability”. But the article along with the controversial term “propagate” withstood the test and became a part of the constitution (Kim, 1998:19).

303 The order for enquiry by the Madhya Pradesh government was in succession to a private bill introduced in Lok Sabha by Jethalal Joshi that required a special license from magistrate to convert the other (Pachuau, 2001:189). Moreover, in 1955 a new policy was adopted by the government of India regarding foreign missionaries in which it required that any foreign missionary “coming for the first time will be admitted into India, if they possess outstanding qualification or specialized experience in their lines” (Smith, 1963:205-206). What the criteria to evaluate “outstanding qualification” of foreign missionaries? In reality “the new policy can be used for gradual closure of missionary work” (Smith, 1963:206).

304 The Niyogi report findings were based on 385 questionnaires (of which 55 were only of Christians and the rest non - Christians) and interviews done among 11360 people, of which 20 percent were Christians. For details on creation of report, see Kim (2003: 62-64).
but by various inducements (quoted in Pachuau, 2001:189). The committee even “questioned the convert’s loyalty to his or her country and state” (quoted in Pachuau, 2001:189). The committee also recommended conversion of any kind to be reported to the magistrate within the prescribed time limit, or else s/he will be imprisoned for one year or a fine of Rs 1000 or both.

It also made provocative statements which could lead to communal riots - it stated that Protestant churches abused and denigrated Hindu deities (The Nyogi Report I: 116).

Even though the state government did not approve the findings and recommendation at that time, yet its effect were seen in 1967 - when the state of Madhya Pradesh enacted the “Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam” that curbed conversion activities. In addition, the report of Niyogi commission had a detrimental effect on Christianity. RSS, which had a strong presence in Madhya Pradesh, picked up the report and propagated that conversion as “a denial of Hindu identity and therefore a rejection of being Indian and the missionary as an instrument of foreign oppression” (Kim, 2003: 63). It also saw conversion activities of Christian missions as a menace to RSS ideology and its political wing Jana Sangh.

Therefore, Jana Sangh launched an “anti-foreign missionary week” in the whole of Madhya Pradesh, led to the formation of similar groups all over India (Sinha, 2010:17).

Orissa, the neighbouring state, also enacted more stringent laws, namely, Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (1967) against conversion followed by Arunachal Pradesh that passed the Freedom of Indigenous Faith Act (1978) which condemned missionary activities and prohibited conversion, especially from Hinduism. As the anti-conversion laws were enacted, it became a

305 The report contained testimonies, such as, “The following persons reported that they were converted by giving [getting] loans for plough” (Niyogi report I: 106).
306 The effect of such laws on the lives of the converts is evident from ground reality. In 2002 two priests and a nun was sentenced to one year imprisonment on the grounds of fraudulent conversion even after the converts (twenty two people from Dalit background) made a written statement to the authorities that they had converted voluntarily. But their statements were ignored on the grounds that they lacked independent judgment. Cf. Acts of Bad Faith: Anti-Conversion Laws in India, human rights features fortnightly, Jan. 16, 2007.
307 Jana Sangh (an off shoot of RSS) was started as a political party against the unwillingness of Congress government to curb missionary activities. Jana Sangh became later Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
308 Other states that enacted anti-conversion laws are: Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance (2002) included severe penalty not found in the Orissa or Madhya Pradesh statutes. Instead of 1000 rupees and one year imprisonment as in case of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh Tamil Nadu anti-conversion bill put one lakh rupees and four year imprisonment for forcibly converting the other by fraudulent means.

The Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill of 2003, like the Tamil Nadu anti-conversion bill imposed one lakh fine and four years rigorous imprisonment for converting women and Scheduled Castes and Tribes. But it also went one step
common scenario to see clashes between the Hindu fundamentalist and missionaries. Even though the state governments took necessary steps to curtail such incidents, yet from mid-1990’s onwards such incidences rose drastically as “the Hindutva ideology of one nation, one culture and one people through their participation in active politics through BJP” became more prominent (Bhatt, 2001: 149). Moreover, in 1998 when BJP government came to power with the strong support of Sangh parivar, there was wide spread attacks on Christian churches and many missionaries were persecuted. In such context, prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, called for a national debate on conversion. The Hindu fundamentalist organizations used this opportunity to show to the general public how Christian missionaries were destroying the Hindu culture. In support to their view the Sangh Parivar pointed to the pamphlets published by Christian groups which have made commitments to evangelize India – “to plant church in every village and colony of every town and city of India” (Robinson, 2004:153). The Sangh parivar also pointed to certain Christian organizations appeal that had the tone of crusaders – “it was as our last and final chance for fulfilling the great commission [by the] “means of specialized strategy, by mighty army, and task force” (Robinson, 2004:153).

Countering such attempts on the missionaries, the Sangh parivar initiated Ghar Vapsi (home coming) programmes aimed at reconverting those who have converted to Christianity back to Hinduism. Subsequently, they also started schools and other welfare activities in the tribal areas (Shah, 1999: 312-315; Kim, 2003: 156-158). Such Ghar vapsi attempts caused communal violence in Northern India. The most affected states being Gujarat and Orissa where many missionaries were attacked and killed. Till today one is reminded of the killing of an Australian missionary Graham Staines along with his two sons, who worked among the leprosy patients in Manoharpur village in Orissa. Conversely, Christians protested these attacks with protest rallies and leaders condemned these attacks “as a deliberate campaign of Hindu fundamentalist organizations with the blessings of the central government” (Martin, 1999: 607). But these protest rallies did not avail much as the authorities and Hindu fundamentalist groups placed the

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further by stating that any conversion act is to be notified to the district magistrate in advance and has to be certified from the magistrate that conversion act does not include any coercion. The Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill (2007), like other states anti-conversion bills introduced hefty fines and imprisonment up to four years for fraudulent conversion. The startling aspect of this bill was that it was passed by the Congress government (which is historically a secular and pro-minority government) that was in power both at state and at national level.
blame of this incidence upon Christians stressing that “the root cause of communal violence was the deliberate act of the Christian missionaries who abused and attacked Hindu deities” (Shenoy, 1999:21). In addition, they associated conversion as “violence against humanity, an attack on Hindu nationhood” “as something alien, a symbol of oppression and enslaving power imposed upon the people of India against their will, and therefore essentially evil and wrong”( Kim, 2003:50-51). Thus, from this time onwards the Hindu fundamentalist organization goad the Hindu religious sentiments by means of conversion issue aimed at building “Hindu India”.

4.4 Missiological Challenges in Relation to Conversion in India

David Bosch (1991:496) in his Transforming Mission writes, “Missiology acts as a gadfly in the house of theology, creating unrest and resisting complacency, opposing every ecclesiastical impulse to self-preservation, every desire to stay where we are, every inclination toward provincialism and parochialism, and every fragmentation of humanity into regional or sectional blocs.” Gadfly is a fly that is persistent and unrelenting in its stinging, known to irritate other animals so that the complacent animal would react. Similarly, the context of mission in India- as described above- unearths the fact that the traditional motives of mission, as interpreted and practiced- in terms of conversion, is inadequate in Indian context. The church cannot be complacent to this reality, but needs to respond to following missiological challenges.

4.4.1 Conversion and Challenge of Religious Pluralism

“In our world today, there exists a bewildering variety of world views, religions and confessions, ethical beliefs and life styles. Historic faiths as well as new religions and religious movements strive for attention, if not supremacy, in multi-religious and multicultural world. Indeed many gods are worshipped today, for our is a religiously pluralistic world”. 309

Today religious pluralism (not as a fact of life but as an ideology), as described in the above quotation, is a reality that the church at large and especially Indian churches can no longer ignore. This does not mean that religious pluralism is a present reality. Of course in all ages this diversity of religions and world views existed. However, in the past these realities were

regionally confined. Today, the followers of different religions co-exist peacefully than in the earlier eras and call for healthy pluralistic thinking in order to put an end to plights of the suffering people. This is a big task for one religion to accomplish. Therefore, such a task call for inter-religious dialogues (Hick & Knitter, 1987:160). All religions talks about promoting the well-being of individuals and therefore are same. Most importantly the pluralist believes that religions are just paths and all paths leads to ultimate goal - God. Therefore, none can claim exclusiveness. This pluralist view is reflected in Gandhi and later taken over by the Hindutva groups. For Gandhi, all religions are equally true and therefore demand great respect: “I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance, but we accept all religions as true. As different streams having different sources all mingle their waters in the sea, so different paths which men take through different tendencies various though they appear; crooked or straight, all lead to God” (Gandhi, 1942:2).

In such a pluralistic world view there is no place for conversion. As Gandhi (1961:3) pointed out, For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore, they are equally true, though they received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere. It is an error which perhaps the greatest impediment to the world’s progress towards peace. Warring creeds is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the mother as I believe her to be of religion or religious. If she is truly the mother the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man?

This pluralistic idea actually poses important challenges to the church, which sees the mission as an act of obedience to Jesus. According to Anderson (1993:201) “no issue in missiology is more important and more difficult and more divisive for the days ahead than religious pluralism”. This view of Anderson is emphasized by Thomas (1987:15) who also remarked that “the churches today face no greater challenge that the one they encounter in the situation of religious, cultural and ideological pluralism”. But how does religious pluralism pose challenges for the Church’s mission, especially in the context of evangelism in India?

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In the context of evangelism, religious pluralism hoists two challenges. Firstly, on one hand to respect the integrity of the hearers who are committed to their religion and, on the other hand to uphold the integrity of the gospel which judges all religious experiences outside Christ. Should one engage with other religions and abandon what is distinctive and authentic to the Christian faith? Secondly, how can evangelism which is often echoed as a threat to national integrity contribute to the national integrity?

In the milieu of the confrontation of the gospel with other religious traditions, the importance of dialogue is put forward as the solution for the harmony and co-existence of different religions. Dialogue in the context of religious pluralism is understood as “enhancement of truth, where the limited perspective of one religion can be complemented by the differing perspective of the other” (McGrath, 1992: 490). In addition, in dialogue “the criteria derived from one religion cannot be the made the norm to judge the responses of other religious traditions” (Samartha, 1998:95). Such an understanding does not allow any religion to make exclusive or unique claims.

The theo-centric model proposed by John Hick diminishes the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, “as one lord and savior for all people in all cultures” (Netland, 1991:25). It means that in order for harmony to exist between religions, Christians have to “give up all claims to final truth”. As Kaufman suggest, “none of us – Christian or non Christian- possesses absolute or final truth” (quoted in Hick & Knitter, 1987:12-13). Therefore, when Christians come to dialogical table, they have to give up entirely God or Christ which are central to Christian faith (quoted in Hick & Knitter, 1987:12-13).

Therefore, is it possible to engage in dialogue with the other religions without being “committed to the intellectual shallow and paternalist view that we are all saying the same things” (McGrath, 1992:490)? The problem with the pluralist view is that they have not differentiated between respect and agreement in Dialogue. Dialogue does not imply agreement (in all things) but of course respecting the other (McGrath, 1992:490). As Taylor states (1981:212) dialogue “is a sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect the differences, the contradictions and the mutual exclusion between their various ways

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312 In Kerala, India, a theology teacher resigned his position in Bishops College and joined the Gandhian movement by giving up his confession statement “Jesus is Lord” to “Jesus is a leader” (Thomas, 1990:50).
of thinking”. It is important to note that respecting someone doesn’t mean that you agree with everything they have to say. However, it denotes that you listen to them and in many occurrences listening leads to learning from the other\textsuperscript{313} to a point of changing in positions. Here it does not mean that dialogue will only benefit non-Christians but it will also enrich Christians. McGrath states that such dialogue has benefitted in the development of Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{314} Therefore, in a pluralistic context one does not need to compromise with the uniqueness of one’s religion and agree with the other, rather one can share one’s uniqueness without disrespecting the other partner.

4.4.2 Conversion and Cultural Challenge

India is a land of a vast population and with the most diverse levels of culture. Anthropological studies “reveal that almost all known groups have migrated to India at different times in the past with their own language, religion and culture”.\textsuperscript{315} Jha (1997) in his book, “Ancient India: an Introductory outline” expounds how these different groups of migration have laid the foundation to Indian culture. Jha (1997:28) states,

The cultural inputs and influences from the ancient tribes of India, the urban-centred Indus valley people, and the whole galaxy of subsequent arrivals -Sanskrit speaking people, the so-called Aryans (pastoral nomadic, horse-riding) -laid the foundation for the cultures of India. Since there was plenty of space, the migrating cultural and racial groups could pass on and penetrate further into the interior without much opposition. Thus, the various cultural groups did not destroy each other, but continued to live on and consolidate into the main components of the present-day population.\textsuperscript{316}

The most important feature of these migration groups was that they never attempted a homogeneous identity but rather held their heterogeneous identities. In addition, the caste system, the existence of different race, paved way to the formation of heterogeneous identities,

\textsuperscript{313}The classical example of this is Sartre (atheist), and Kierkegaard dialogue. Kierkegaard in his book “sickness unto death” tries to explain how one needs to follow Christ amidst pain. His main thesis “faith in Christ alleviates pain”, even though this was not accepted by Sartre, yet Sartre drew from Kierkegaard description of self to write his book “Being and nothingness”. Cf. Stewart (2011).

\textsuperscript{314}Here McGrath is not stating that Christian doctrine was formed because of outside pressures but rather such dialogical interaction with non-Christians have provided the stimulus to change the long held view. For instance, the acceptance of the theology of suffering of God was considered heretical in the Christendom. But in dialogue with “protest atheism” the biblical and doctrinal basis of the doctrine of \textit{apatheia} of God” was reconsidered. Which was later widely acclaimed by Luther and Wesley (McGrath, 1992:490).

\textsuperscript{315}Missra, Neeru. Nationalism and the issue of culture: cultural institution in colonial and post colonial period. \url{http://sol.du.ac.in/mod/book/view.php?id=234&chapterid=237} Date of access: 26 June 2014

\textsuperscript{316}Quoted in Vinod. Mission as inculturation. \url{http://svindoo.blogspot.in/2015/04/mission-as-inculturation.html} Date of access: 26 June 2014
as it strongly kept the social and cultural groups apart. It is important to understand that the “Indian civilization is the confluence of different cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic traditions”. Thus the population of India is very heterogeneous and accepting this diversity is the unifying force of Indian civilization. As Kothari (1988:109) rightly asserts, “in the absence of a centralized political authority” it was “the Indian civilizational enterprise” which “over the centuries achieved a remarkable degree of cohesion and held together different sub-systems in a continental-size society”.

Acknowledging this diversity of the Indian culture is a very important approach to the understanding of Indian society. The approach one chooses influences one’s methodology on the Christian mission. From its inception the Christian message permeated the context of its hearers, however, its permeation varied in different context. While the early church and the first missionaries (the Syrian church, Catholic and Protestant), who came to India in 1700s, took the culture seriously and attempted to contextualize the message - yet this sensitiveness towards the culture diminished from 1800 (see chapter 3). One of the reasons for such lack of interest towards the culture was the belief of the superiority of the western culture, therefore to remove the pagan culture, which was considered devilish and ignorant, meant that the pagan culture would become Christian and modern, i.e. “to become Christian meant to become civil” (Hiebert, 1994:77).

In order to achieve this goal the 19th century mission was carried out with a dual purpose “to evangelize” and “to civilize” (Jacob, 1993:237). The evangelization of the natives led to the acceptance of the missionary culture i.e. “Let us create the world in our image and likeness,” became the “missionary slogan” (Hiebert, 1987:104) and “tabula rasa (clean slate) became the missionary doctrine that everything in the foreign culture must be erased before you can build Christianity” (Hiebert, 1987:104). In essence, the use of native cultural forms was completely unwarranted because of the superiority of the missionary culture (to create Christian civilization) and missionaries worked towards creating a homogeneous culture.

318 What constitutes “Indian culture” and “Indian identity” is an ongoing debate. The Indological approaches developed by the orientalists and colonial writers have conceived that the Sanskrit culture is the mainline culture (see Ganesh, 2005). Despite the fact of Indology influence with its dependence on classical texts and high culture, the anthropological knowledge of India has developed and challenged the idealized homogeneous notion of Indian culture by empirical documentation of diversities of culture that exist from time immemorial. Cf. Robinson (2003).
This “monocultural” perspective of the missionaries has both advantages (from a Christian perspective) and disadvantages (from Indian perspective). The advantages are that the “monocultural” notion affirms “the oneness on humanity and of human history.” Moreover, it takes history and cultural change seriously and also affirms both absoluteness and universality of human cultures and the gospel by concentrating on preserving the uniqueness of the gospel and to avoid syncrétism (Muchimba, 2007:20).

But the “monocultural” perspective practiced by missionaries had also a negative impact, especially in India. The missionaries failed to understand the heterogeneity of the Indian culture and thus wanted to impose a homogeneous culture on the converts, i.e. the missionaries own culture. This practice led to a *quam* mentality, secluding the converts from their culture into a mission compound culture of the missionaries. As Neill (1934:63) rightly points out, “Missionaries wished their converts to become as much like Englishmen as possible”. This tendency has labelled Christianity, in the eyes of Hindus, a Western culture and as a foreign religion. This allegation of the Hindus is not without ground when one sees the practice of crusading mission in the past with the support of colonial powers. In addition, the architectural structures of the church, liturgies, customs and administrative control give room for suspicion that the Christian churches are conjoined with western powers and are indirectly exercising colonialism until today. Moreover, the westernised life styles of Christians especially in North East India and Goa have also turned Hindu’s “suspicion into paranoid conviction”.

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319 Karokaram (1996:149) defines monoculturalism as “the causes/ dynamics which turn the Gospel into a strange tongue and evangelization into a process of alienating converts from their identity is to be named monoculturalism”. He further goes to show that this monocultural attitude was practiced by the missionaries in India (Karokaram, 1996:149). The philosophy of monoculturalism is that it identifies faith with a single culture and based on this identification it destroys the unique culture of the convert and instead thrusts missionaries’ own culture (Karokaram, 1996:149).

320 Here one is reminded of Hilaire Belloc’s (1870-1953) slogan –“faith is Europe and Europe is faith” (quoted in L. Malieckal, 1996:200).

321 For instance, the crusading attitude of the missionaries on the native culture is very much evident from a letter written to the Portuguese king by Bishop Durate Nunes, a Dominican who was visiting India in 1522. Nunes wrote, "Regarding the people of Goa they have in the island temples decked out with figures of the enemy of the Cross and statues and they celebrate their feasts every year. These feasts are attended by many Christians. It is a big mistake to continue to show favour to their idolatry. It would be to the service of God to destroy in this island alone these temples, and to raise in their stead churches with Saints. And let him who wants to live in the island become a Christian, and he shall possess his lands and houses, as he has till now done; if not, let him leave the island (quoted in Mattan, 1996:103-104).

322 The Portuguese had much influence in Goa as it was the centre for their mission work. The Christian in Goa are called the elite of the church in India yet through their life style they are Anglo-Indians. They also remain cut off
well known journalist Khushwant Singh (1992:76) states, “Many Christians continued bearing high sounding English names, their women wore a comical mixture of European and Indian dress. Their hymns translated sung to outlandish tunes (which) evoked more derision than reverence.”

Along with the gospel “unessential Western accompaniments” were brought by the missionaries in the process of “monoculturalism”, it created cultural alienation of the converts (Winslow, 1954:77). In the course of becoming a member of a church the convert also begins to condemn traditional custom, rituals and practice. This leads to tension and disruption in family and society. As Shourie (2000:1-2) in the introduction to “Harvesting Our Souls” writes, “the conversion of even an individual causes grave disruption. His family is torn apart. Tensions erupt in the community”. In addition, the tension escalated further when the convert took baptism- this is viewed in India as “the mechanism for imposing western culture to root out the native Hindu, Indian culture” (Mattam & Kim, 1996:7) - due to the wrong practice and mispresentation of baptism in the Indian society. The missionaries presented baptism as “total repudiation of one’s socio-cultural heritage and accepting a name, a life of style alien to one’s own” (Singh, 1985:2). This has led to the debate in different quarters regarding the place of church membership and baptism in Indian context.

In the second half of the 19th century attempts were made in Kolkata (Culcutta), Tinnevelly, Chennai (Madras) to create indigenous churches (dealt in chapter 5) (Baago, 1969:1-11). This positive attitude towards Indian culture and religion- with the aim to free the churches from foreign influence and control was to develop an Indian Christian theology. However, these indigenous attempts did not “go beyond inclusivism”- i.e. transplanted churches- where the Indian church looked like a potted plant - transferred to a new culture, is expected to grow and reproduce exactly as it did in the original culture” (Rheenen, 2001:1). The foreign gospel - the ready-made western gospel, with all its features (structures, rituals, languages and flavours are transported to new culture but with adjustment made to some of these features to accommodate

from the main stream of Indian culture (Avila, 1996:154). The same is the case with North East, a tribal belt which comprises of seven sisters states.

cultural difference in a new culture (Gerald, 1990:13-14). Thus, the “indigenization attempt was an artificial attempt to make indigenous that which is not indigenous” (Nirmal, 1980:108).

The attempt to indigenize the gospel is always appreciable but it is equally faced with a challenge - “Are we contextualizing or neo-colonizing?” In the eyes of Hindu’s these attempts are neo – colonizing attempts. As a result a new model which is concrete, organic and deeply enriching is required in Indian context in order to share the gospel with Hindus. In this context Richard (2003:8), writes:-

The fundamental stumbling block for most Hindus when facing Christianity remains that Christianity is a foreign religion, and all the evidence shows that this Hindu perception is true. Clearer thinking about Hinduism should lead to a deeper commitment to radically incarnational (contextual) approaches to the Hindu world, so that Hindus might see and feel that Christ and His good news are vitally relevant within their civilizational heritage. Without such shifts of paradigm and approach, there is little reason to hope that present and future Hindus will heed the biblical message any more than their forefathers have.

This new and relevant approach is contextualization, which will be looked marginally (as a challenge) in the next session and a detail approach to the contextualization of the gospel with the Hindu world view will be dealt in Chapters five and six.

4.4.3 Conversion and Challenge of Contextualization

It was Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian, directors of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) who used the word contextualization for the first time in 1972. According to Sapsezian,

Shoki and I began to use this word sometime in February, 1972. Long before that Shoki was famous for using the phrase, “Text and Context,” and he was pleading for contextual criticism as a necessary counterpart of textual criticism. In a sense this is the pre- history of words “contextuality” and “contextualization”. The discussion in the house around these two words were that we should go beyond the older notion of “indigenization,” in the sense that theology would take into account certain aspects of culture which had been hitherto neglected (quoted in Kinsler,1978:24).

As clearly stated in the words of the proponents, contextualization was a replacement word for indigenization. As Nicholls (1979:21) states, “Contextualization implies all that is involved in the familiar term indigenization, but seeks to press beyond it to take into account “the process of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice which characterized the historical moment of nations in the Third World.”

Even though the concept of contextualization is implemented in varying degrees in the history of mission yet “it is a challenge to define the meaning, limits, and application of the term
contextualization, in relation to church’s mission to the people of other faiths” (Karkkainen 2000:265). This is because in the process of “seeking to press beyond” indigenization, contextualization becomes “susceptible to many nuance of meaning as there are many who employ the term” making contextualization amorphous (Engle, 1983:90). As Hesselgrave (1995:115) rightly states, the word contextualization is loaded with “multitudinous approaches”. In this sense, that there is “still no single, widely accepted definition” of contextualization (Karkkainen 2000:261). In other words, Hesselgrave (1984:693) states “contextualization has already been defined and redefined, used and abused, amplified and vilified, coronated and crucified”.

Nevertheless, contextualization is an important aspect in mission to and evangelization of people of other faiths. Its presupposition is based on the fact that it is necessary [to know how] to present the gospel to the people of other faiths, to make it relevant to their context and to help them understand how one can relate to Christ within the sphere of their experience. As Kato (1975:1217) expressed, “In reference to Christian practice, it is an effort to express the never changing word of God, in ever changing modes of relevance. Since the gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary.”

This encounter of word and the world in a particular context is not static but is dynamic, resulting not in transplanting churches but contextualizing churches. Thus, a contextualized church will be like a seed that is planted in a new soil where the seed grows naturally by receiving water and nurturing from the native soil. In other words Kraft (1999:389) says that a contextualized church will grow by “adapting to the language, thought processes, and rituals of the new culture without losing its eternal meanings”. The contextualized church will look different as a tree that has grown in a different region looks different even though the species remains the same.

The challenge in contextualization of the gospel is how to blend the biblical principles to “become all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:22) with “come out from among them” (2 Cor. 6:17) especially in the area of “communication adaptation”, “conversion adaptation” and “messenger
adaptation”. These are not varied modes of adaptation but rather are interconnected with each other.

4.4.3.1 Communication and Messenger Adaptation

In order to communicate the gospel in a particular culture understanding the language of that culture becomes the primary tool. Often, even in our own mother tongue, when communication gap occurs it can lead to confusion. If that is the case, then how difficult it would be to communicate the gospel in a foreign culture. In such a context, how can one share the gospel in an effective way so that hearers understand the gospel? To be precise, can a western missionary in India communicate the message and use the same methodology as applied in western context? In response many may nod affirmatively by stating that it doesn’t make any difference whether one shares the gospel in east or west. However, the ground reality as discussed in Chapter three points to a different direction. Whilst many Hindus (like Roy, Gandhi, et.al.) believed in Christ, the gospel proclaimed by the missionaries did not appeal to them as it was foreign in nature and considered as a threat to Indianess. In this way, the gospel of freedom became a stumbling block for the Hindus. For instance, it seems to be good news from a Christian perspective when one is invited to be “born again”, and to receive eternal life. But that is not true from a Hindu world view. Within Hindu world view, a Hindu is desperately trying to escape the wheel of samsara (re-birth) inorder to receive Moksha (cessation of individual self). This is the opposite of the concept of eternal life in the Christian world view (Billington, 1997:31). Hence, it is important for the western communicator to understand that what is understood in one’s (European or western) context is not automatically understood in other cultures (in this case India).

Although the gospel message (content) is unique and the same in all cultures yet it needs to be interpreted clearly from the hearer’s cultural perspective. This hoists another challenge, “How can the gospel ‘come alive’ in all these different cultural contexts, and still be the same authentic

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324 The adaptation terms are taken from Don Fanning. 2009. Contextualization. http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=cgm_missions Date of access: 1 July 2014
gospel (Newbigin, 1989:142)? Or how can one be relevant to the context and at the same time faithful to the gospel?

4.4.3.1.1 Relevance to the Context and Faithfulness to the Gospel: A Dialogical Tension

In order to effectively communicate the gospel one needs to take seriously into the account the context of the hearer. The message of the gospel (which is supra cultural) needs to be contextualized into the cultural forms of the other. For some, like Troeltsch, this seems impossible due to Christianity being inextricably intertwined with Western culture - to the extent that there no pure gospel to be shared with other cultures, as it has always influence of western gospel (Niebuhr, 1951:30). In one sense, this is true- for centuries’s beliefs, principles and ideals were dyed in western thought and then transported by the missionaries where ever they went. Conversely, the “gospel is capable of permeating all cultures without being subject to any of them” (Evangelii Nuntiandi 20). It can be distinguished from all cultures as the gospel acts as a counter cultural agent or a critique of the culture. But this de-contextualization of the gospel from the western grab will not happen as a thumb snap but requires a tremendous amount of willingness on the part of the Indian church resulting in an incarnational approach.

This incarnational approach evident in the New Testament as it exemplifies the pattern for cultural adaptation. Dr. Kato (1975:1217) asserts that,

The incarnation itself is a form of contextualization. The Son of God condescended to pitch his tent among us to make it possible for us to be redeemed (John 1:14). The unapproachable Yahweh whom no man has seen and lived has become the Object of seeing and touching through the incarnation (John 14:9, I John 1:1). The moving old hymn on humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ, the Lord (Phil.2:5-8) was evidently an incentive to Apostle Paul in his philosophy of the ministry which was to become “all things to all men”.This in turn should motivate us to make the gospel relevant in every situation everywhere as long as the gospel is not compromised.

On the basis of incarnation theology, Christianity should continue to contextualize otherwise it cannot be faithful to Christ (Bevans, 1992:8). Similar view is expressed by Padilla (1979:286),

The incarnation makes clear God’s approach to revelation of himself and of his purposes: God does not shout his message from the heavens; God becomes present as a man among

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325 Tippett also stressed the importance of this challenge when he raised a similar question: “The greatest methodological issue faced by the Christian mission in our day is how to carry out the Great Commission in a multicultural world with a gospel that is both truly Christian in content and culturally significant in form” (quoted in Buswell, 1978: 13).
men. The climax of God’s revelation is Emmanuel. And Emmanuel is Jesus, a first century Jew! The incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God’s intention to make himself known from within the human situation. Because of the very nature of the gospel, we know this gospel only as a message of contextualized in culture.

Jesus not only took human flesh but he was also born into a particular cultural context. Walls (1982:97) states, “When God became man, Christ took flesh in a particular family, member of a particular nation, with tradition of custom associated with that nation”. This incarnational model provides the impetus for contextualization where the “gospel becomes the genuine part” of the hearers without annihilating the “innate culture that provides them sense of meaning and history” (Frost & Alan, 2003:37).

The contextualization of the gospel is also evident in the apostolic times especially when the gospel took root in the Gentile context. Instead of imposing the Jewish culture of circumcision on the Gentiles the Jerusalem council decided to contextualize the message to them (Davis, 1994:21). As Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:10-11) states, “the decision concerning circumcision was an instance of contextualization; the council determined that salvation did not depend on the traditions and institutions of any particular ethnic group” thus the council did not incline to the demand of the Jewish Christians “that Gentiles submit to cultural conversion” (Kraft, 1979:340-41).

In align with the Jerusalem council’s decision, Paul also contextualized the content of the gospel in various contexts in which he preached. This does not mean that each context dictated the content of the gospel but rather Paul’s contextualization approach was “faithful to the central Word of truth and [at the same time] open to the uniqueness of each situation” (Gilliland, 1989:70). For instance, when proclaiming the gospel to the Jewish audience he expounded the message based on the special revelation found in the Old Testament regarding Jesus (Acts 13:15-43; 17:1-9). Conversely, when proclaiming the gospel to a Gentile audience at Lystra and Athens Paul instead of quoting from the Old Testament, as he did with Jewish audience, he began with an explanation about himself, then God, creation, and then their form of worship and also quoting from their own poets (Acts 14:14-18; 17:16-32). Similarly, in speaking to a Hindu one will start with the redemptive analogies found in the Vedas and the Bagwath Githa.326 The hymn

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326 The comparative redemptive analogy is based on the study done by Godfrey Harold, A contextual Methodology for communicating Christ to hindus. http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/16677/Harold_Contextual (2010).pdf?jsessionid=DD1F53E0E782208FF7EA1A3504DC9FE3?sequence=1 Date of access: 2 July 2014
of *Yajur Veda* chapter 31 verses 18-19, while describing the creation of the world, states that God is not created but, at the same time, he is born and takes the human form. It states, “Never being born is born in sundry figures. The wise discerns the womb from which He springeth. In Him alone stand all existing creatures” (v19). As bhaktas (devotees) it is important to understand this reality of God’s birth in order to be delivered from death or, in other words, one cannot attain *moksha* from this life if one doesn’t understand this reality (v 18). This analogy of god’s birth against the concept of avatar, found in *veda*, can be a point of contact to present the incarnation of Jesus to the Hindu friends. Similarly, the concept of Prajapati (Lord of all creation) found in the *Tandyam abrahmana* (2.7) describes how god himself became sacrifice for all people. In the context of Hinduism, this is interesting because normally it is the duty of the people to offer sacrifice and it is god who receives the sacrifice. Here god’s self – sacrifice can be used to describe the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for all humanity. As Aguilar (1976:76) rightly states, “taken in its totality the myth of the *Purusa/Prajapati* is not unworthy of the Christian conception of the redemptive incarnation of the logos”.

In contextualization it is important to balance between the universality and particularity of the gospel, whereby “one hold to the constant of faith” and recognizes at the same time that “constants will take on a different shape depending on the context” (Bevan & Schroeder, 2004:396). Furthermore, “The church’s mission has been lived out in the concrete circumstances of particular contexts but also in fidelity to the constants of the gospel and the church’s rich and diverse traditions of theology, liturgical practice and Christian life” (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004: 397).

This denotes that the church’s mission has to be dialogical as it engages in the understanding of how different contexts grasp the gospel. The engagement with different contexts will point to different dimensions of the meaning of gospel. The gospel will converse differently with each context as each context becomes a lens through which one views reality and truth. This will sway

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327 It should be noted here that god coming in human form in *veda* is not similar to *avatar* (descent or appearance of deity on earth) as stated in the post Vedic text. Nowhere in *vedas* do we find the concept of avatar but it was later interpolated into the religious and non-religious texts including Gita. According to Chowdhary (2014:89) “the avatar concept fabricated a socio-political template making general populace believers in the destiny and the providence.”
the way one will express the faith.\textsuperscript{328} This was true for writers of the scriptures as it is for us today. According to Bevan (1992:3) Old Testament theology “reflects, different times, different concerns, and even different cultures as Israel moved from agrarian society to a monarchy, from an independent state to a vassal of Assyrian, Greece, and Rome.” Similarly, in the New Testament we see different types of theologies which point to the “contextualization of gospel message under diverse circumstances and historical epoch”.\textsuperscript{329} As the context of the writers was different (depending on the concern of the communities)\textsuperscript{330} their writings engendered different theologies. For instance, Pauline theology of “righteousness” is different from James theology of “righteousness”, and Mathew’s theology is different from John’s. This does not mean that the gospel message (content) changed according to the context but in the proclamation of the gospel the “context becomes critical in the interpretation of the message of gospel itself” without compromising the gospel message.\textsuperscript{331} For instance, John used Hellenistic and Gnostic thought forms to express the gospel so that it is understandable to John’s audience, but never compromised the content of the message. John’s begins with a Gnostic term \textit{Logos}. “In the beginning was word (logos)” (Jn 1:1). From a Gnostic framework \textit{Logos} denotes “impersonal and invisible law of rationality that permeated the universe giving it order”.\textsuperscript{332} Whereas for John this \textit{logos} is the personal, loving man Jesus Christ, whom John identified with God (Jn 1:7)

Moreover, even in the history of the church every theology is rooted in a particular context and reflected the concerns of that context. As described in chapter three “all expression of Christian doctrine are rooted in history and are therefore, historically and culturally conditioned” (Woodbridge, 1994:91). No one can escape the net of conditioning. Even some doctrinal aspects were culturally conditioned. For instance, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine were influenced by the stoic, Plato and Neo-Platonist philosophy respectively (see chapter 3).

\textsuperscript{328} John Corrie. Mission and Contextualization.http://citespaceerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid Date of access: 2 July 2014
\textsuperscript{329} Peter O. Okafor. The challenge of contextual theology. File://C:/Users/sako/Downloads/contextual _theology. pdf Date of access: 2 July 2014
\textsuperscript{330} A study done by Brown (1984) entitled,“the churches the apostles left behind ” reveals that there were plurality of ecclesiologies based on a diverse community life. His research shows there were seven such churches after the apostles death.
\textsuperscript{331} John Corrie. Mission and contextualization.http://citespaceerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid Date of access: 2 July 2014
\textsuperscript{332} John Corrie. Mission and contextualization.http://citespaceerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid Date of access: 2 July 2014
Aquinas, the father of school was influenced by the scholasticism of his time (13\textsuperscript{th} century.) and by the work of Aristotle (newly discovered work)- to the extent that Aquinas’ work was known as Christian Aristotelianism (a combination of Aristotle’s philosophy and the revealed truths of Christianity). Even Luther’s theology of “justification by faith” evolved out of the corruption in the church.

The contextualization of the gospel doesn’t compromise the truth of the rather it opens our eyes to the truth - that there is no single way of interpreting the gospel nor any Christian tradition or culture can claim to be its custodian. In addition, contextualization will enlarge and stretch our understanding of truth. Whiteman (1997:4) asserts, “Contextualization forces us to have a wider loyalty that corresponds to an enlarged and more adequate view of God as the God of all persons, male and female, and as a God who especially hears the cry of the poor. God can no longer simply be the God of myself, my family, my community, my nation; such a god is ultimately an idol or false god, one made according to my narrow and limited image and perspective.”

The faithfulness to the gospel or the Bible does mean to curtail the cultural understanding of truth but rather it encourages and enables people in their respective context to have interaction with God - that will ultimately lead to a contextual based relationship with God as we find in the bible. As Shaw (1995:158) rightly states “that contextualization is more than the initial presentation of the Gospel; it involves the evaluation and reintegration of life impacted by the revelation of God’s truth; allowing the opportunity to create new and much needed local theologies for the newly emerging church” as we see in the case of Khrist bhakta movement in Indian context (see chapter 6).

In order for such theologies to emerge, the communicator of the gospel should have an understanding of his/ her own culture, the culture of the biblical context and the receptors culture (Guthrie, 2000:104). This understanding is necessary to present a neutral message dissected from one’s own cultural overtones (Hesselgrave, 2005:246). Although to present a neutral message dissected from one’s cultural heritage is a challenge in itself yet, the greater challenge is the threat of syncretism in the process of giving cultural expression to biblical truth. This is because
there is always a chance somewhere along the slippery road\textsuperscript{333} where contextualization can lead to syncretism.

4.4.3.1.2 Contextualization and Syncretism

According to Pieris (1996:66) where ever there is an interaction between two religious traditions, the interaction may take three forms: “synthesis”, “symbiosis” and “syncretism”. In synthesis the elements of two religions are combined to create a new religion. In symbiosis two religions are integrated in a meaningful way. In syncretism the elements and symbols of two religions are blended indiscriminately (Pieris, 1996:66).

Droogers and Greenfield (2001:27-28) give succinct history of syncretism. According to them:

> Syncretism was first used by Plutarch to describe the temporary coming together of the quarreling inhabitants of Crete in the face of a common enemy. . . . The Greek word from which the English “syncretism” is derived refers to people joining together, in this case in battle. Erasmus later employed it metaphorically to refer to an agreement between people with seemingly disparate opinions. The new reference centered on ideas and beliefs. Seventeenth-century theologians then gave it a negative connotation by using it for what to them was the undesirable reconciliation of Christian theological differences. Syncretism for them became a threat to “true” religion. To this negative judgment a more neutral view was added in the second half of the nineteen century when students of the history of religions began to use the word to acknowledge the mixing of religious elements from diverse sources, including Christianity that had occurred and continue to take place.

The negative connotation among the 17\textsuperscript{th} century theologians against syncretism is seen in Christian missiology. This is because syncretism is viewed as “illegitimate mingling of different religious elements” (Kraemer, 1937:203) which tends to dilute “the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements” (Scott, 2000:924) due to which the “gospel loses its integrity and message” (Tienou, 1999:177).

In the history of the Christian mission, the churches’ approaches to other religions and cultures have two extremes, namely accommodation and displacement (Nxumalo, 1980:6). Both have negative effects on the type of Christianity they produce. On the one extreme is to displace the culture to which the gospel is presented and replace it with the messenger’s culture, because the messenger denies the fact “that there is anything that is of good in non-Christian religions” (Nxumalo, 1980: 6). This was the case of the Portuguese and the modern missionary movement

\textsuperscript{333} Slippery because there is the ever present danger of going too far in the effort of making the message with a meaningful result.
approach towards non-Christian religion in India. This resulted in Christianity being labelled as a foreign religion. On the other extreme is the mind to accommodate the gospel with the non-Christian culture. But this approach accepts the traditional practices of the church uncritically (Hiebert, 1985:185) with the presupposition that these practices are “part of a people’s cultural heritage that is cherished” (Carpenter, 1996:504). Nevertheless, the fact is that “these traditional practices often contain syncretistic non-biblical elements from the receptor culture” (Smith, 1989:29). On the syncretistic approach of the church Rheenen (1997:173) observes: “Syncretism frequently begins apologetically: The Christian community attempts to make its message and life attractive and appealing to those outside the fellowship. Over a period of years the accommodations become routinized, integrated into the narrative story of the Christian community and inseparable from its life. Syncretism thus occurs when Christianity opts into the major cultural assumptions of its society.”

The influence of syncretism as discussed above points to the fact that in every age the church is prone to syncretism. It is a threat found among Christians universally as they express their faith culturally. But should the threat of syncretism stop the church from contextualizing the gospel?

The Indian churches, especially Roman Catholic churches, have attempted to contextualize the liturgical rites, commonly known as “twelve points” (in the areas of dress, postures, gestures and materials used) of integration with the Hindu tradition. These contextualized forms were approved by the Congregation of Divine Worship in the Vatican (Van Leeuwen, 1990:30). These twelve points included waving of lamps, incense and flowers at various moments of the liturgical action. These liturgical actions are accompanied by chanting the syllable ‘OM’ (ॐ) which is common among the Hindu in worship and meditation. Basically OM is understood as “the tone of primordial sound, the manifestation of waves of energy”. It is the primordial symbol of the Absolute. In Hindu cosmology, before all other elements came into being OM is the first evolute of the Absolute which is pure and non-denominational symbol of the absolute.

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334 Even Jains and Buddhists use the this their mantra. But they do not give any meaning to it.
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At NBCLC the leaders feel that OM can be used as a sound form of the Word (Jn 1:1) as Christian also speaks of the Word as the first self-manifestation of the Absolute (father). Therefore, the symbol of Absolute. Superficially this analogy of OM and word, the son who was before all things, sounds like a positive attempt of contextualization. But if we look closely at the role of Christ in gospel cosmology, we find that a different cosmology is presented in the bible, where there is no primal evolute of the Absolute rather, Christ is the one who created everything. Hence, the biblical cosmology points not towards a primordial energy but towards a reality built on the personal Christ. In such situation the analogy of OM and Word is not accommodative rather an antithesis is developed.

Many churches stated that this practice is syncretistic and have discouraged and controlled such practices. In such a scenario, one needs to ask how far can we go with contextualization. Or as Lesslie Newbigin (1989:144) stated, “How far should the gospel be ‘at home’ in a culture, and how far should it resist domestication?” In addition, how to judge if a particular move under the umbrella of contextualization is truly Christian and truly Indian. And who decides (individual, Christian traditions or body) what is contextualization and what is syncretism? These questions are not easy as they are matter of intense debate with lots of disagreements, and it would consume lot of time to reach viable solution. But, at the same time it is important to have some criteria to answer the stated questions- how far is too far? According to Kerrigan this question cuts both ways in relation the faithfulness to gospel and the relevance to context: “We are too far away from the contextualized gospel if we fail to engage with the particularities of human condition in any given culture. Conversely we are too far away from a contextualized gospel, in the opposite direction if we focus exclusively on contextualizing the scripture that we forget the message of the cross or faithful to the scripture” (2013:7).

Similar view is echoed by Padilla when he comments regarding the question of how far is too far: “Faithfulness to the Gospel should never be sacrificed for the sake of quantity. When the Gospel is truncated in order to make it easy for all men to become Christians, from the very outset the basis is laid for an unfaithful church... I am for quantity, but for quantity in the context of faithfulness to the Gospel” (1975:138).

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337 National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre is a Catholic Centre in Bangalore that aims to promote life and mission of the church in a contextualized way.
The very purpose of the gospel is to make the gospel understandable and effective in one’s culture. But if through contextualizing the very content of the gospel is compromised then what is the purpose of such attempts? Here one should be aware that in biblical contextualization, especially in the New Testament, “despite the flexibility of their message, it was always Christ centered and always carried the implication of decision in repentance, faith and Baptism” (Green, 1975:165). At the centre of the gospel is the recognition and conviction of sin and the efficacy of the cross. If our contextualization attempts “neglects engagement with sin that separates us from God, we are just one more political party”.

4.4.3.2 Convert Adaptation

Christianity in India made inroads among the Dalit community resulting in a mass conversion, yet it struggled to appeal to the high religious context (Brahmin). It is true that many were attracted to the teaching of Christ but majority of them were not converted (Tucker, 2004:130). Carey, for instance saw the first convert from a high caste only after seven years (George, 1998:129). The history of the Indian church testifies to the fact that high religious traditions have been immune to the gospel. But such inoculation against the gospel has enabled the missionaries to identify three reasons for such resistance among the high caste groups. They are theological resistant, culturally resistant and afraid of persecution.

In response to the resistance of the high traditions, we find the emergence of insider movements, especially in Indian context movements like Khrist bhaktas (see chapter 6). Even though the methodology of insider movement addresses all areas of resistance yet, the cultural resistance

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339 Krishna Pal was the first convert among the high caste after seven years of labour by Carey. But the repercussion of such a convert was that mobs gathered around his house, abducted his daughter and ostracized his family from the community. This was not because Pal accepted Christ but because he had broken his caste to eat with the missionaries. The model followed by Carey was that of extraction from the community, which was seen by the community not as a spiritual conversion but a social conversion (George, 1998: 129-132).
340 When the gospel is presented to low religious cultures, (Dalit and tribal’s) in comparison to high religious culture the theological resistance is less in nature (as evident from mass conversion of Dalit in India). This is because among the low religious culture there is no formal written text and the rituals and its meaning are more fluid. Therefore, it is easier to replace with other world view. But in high religious culture the meaning behind its practice are cemented by long held practices and doctrines resulting in opposing new religious systems. Cultural resistance as already mentioned in chapter three refers to the resistance by the high caste Hindu’s against missionary practices of double conversion, where the converts have to forsake their community and join the missionary culture (church). Such extraction leads converts into a new vocabulary, new religious structures, new relationships, and often a new name that ultimately destroys one’s identity as blamed by the Hindu fundamentalist. Such extraction leads to persecution and ostracism of the converts.
(the epitome of all resistance) is the central thesis that is addressed by the movements (McCurry, 1979: 14). That is, high religious communities are not against the message of the gospel but are against the cultural baggage surrounding the gospel (western) which stands as a stumbling block. Therefore, the insider methodology engages in removing these western cultural barriers so that people can contextually appropriate the message of the gospel.

To give a precise definition of the insider movement is difficult due to the diversity of nuances given by different groups. Rebecca Lewis gives two definitions of insider movements. She defines it as “a movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible” (2007:75).

In the above definition, Lewis does not explicitly mention about the forms that such gathering would take within the ecclesiastical structures. But the following definition state that a Christ centred fellowship within the socio-cultural context is inevitable: “The gospel takes root within pre-existing communities or social networks, which become the main expression of ‘church’ in that context. Believer’s are not gathered from diverse social networks to create a ‘church’ nor a new parallel social structures are not invented or introduced” (Lewis, 2009:16).

The Christ centred fellowship within the socio-cultural context of the believers is what makes the insider movement distinct from people’s movements. 341 In people’s movement the whole community decides to cut the former affiliations to follow Christ but in insider movements one remain’s within one’s own cultural context and confess Christ. It is in this context that John Travis (1998:407-408) set out the scale of Christ centred communities under the term C1-C6.

341 In relation to the unreached people there are two distinct movements, people movements and church planting movement. People movement proposed by Pickett (1933) and later analysed by McGravan (1950) are the mass movements in which the whole of the community decides to cut off their former affiliation to follow Christ. Even though the community is kept intact (like the insider movement) yet, the religious affiliation and community identity changes. Church Planting Movement (CPM) is “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment”. The similarity between people movement and CPM is that in both movements a great number of people are converted. But for some reasons in people’s movement these conversion are not producing churches where the converts can gather whereas in CPM the new believers rapidly reproduce new churches.
The C-scale focuses on Christ-centered communities in the Islamic world and how Muslims in Christ choose to relate to various types of churches.  

Table 1: C-Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1 Model</td>
<td>Traditional church using non-indigenous language</td>
<td>Christian churches in Muslim countries that exist as islands, removed from the culture. Christians exist as an ethnic/religious minority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 Model</td>
<td>Traditional church using indigenous language.</td>
<td>The church uses indigenous language, but in all its cultural forms is far removed from the broader Islamic culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3 Model</td>
<td>Contextualized Christ-centred communities using Muslim’s language and non-religiously indigenous cultural forms</td>
<td>Styles of worship, dress, etc. are loosely from the indigenous culture. Local rituals and traditions, if used, are purged of religious elements. They may meet in a church or more religiously neutral location. The majority of the congregation is of Muslim background and call themselves Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4 Model</td>
<td>Contextualized Christ-centred communities using Muslim’s language and biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.</td>
<td>Similar to C3 except believers worship looks like Muslim worship, they keep the fast, avoid pork and alcohol, use Islamic terms and dress. The community is almost entirely of Muslim background. Though highly contextualized, believers are not seen as Muslims by the Muslim community. Believers call themselves “followers of Isa Al—Masah,” Jesus the Messiah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5 Model</td>
<td>Christ-centred communities of “Messianic Muslims” who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour.</td>
<td>Believers remain legally and socially within Islamic community. Aspects of Islam incompatible with the Bible are rejected or if possible, reinterpreted. Believers may remain active in the mosque. Unsaved Muslims may view C5 believers as deviant and may expel them from the Islamic community. If sufficient numbers permit, a C5 “Messianic mosque” may be established.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C6 Model: Small Christ-centred communities of secret/underground believers

Isolated by extreme hostility, usually individual believers but sometimes in small groups. Believers typically do not attempt to share their faith, others suffer imprisonment or martyrdom

From the C-scale a similar scale was proposed by Richard for Hindu contexts known as H scale. In contrast to C scale, the H-scale\(^{343}\) mainly defines the degrees of contextualization in the Hindu world (Richard, 2004:316-320).

Table 2: H -Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H1 model</th>
<th>Traditional Christianity separates from everything &quot;Hindu&quot;</th>
<th>Traditional Christianity separates from everything Hindu, including diet, dress, name, caste, ceremonies, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Many Indian churches and missions have followed and follow this pattern, leading Hindus to consider Christianity a foreign religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 model</td>
<td>Traditional Christians renounces Hinduism but still accept some non-religious Hindu cultural practice</td>
<td>1) Name and diet do not necessarily change, although believers often alter diet even if not demanded for following Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Caste renounced with other religious and seeming-religious practices, e.g., a woman wearing a red dot on her forehead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) Some music drawn from indigenous traditions, but most of foreign origin or adapted from foreign sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) Cultural aspects of a few Hindu festivals might be celebrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5) Often not concerned with foreign funding of Christian work even though many Hindus consider it scandalous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Future leaders trained in western-style seminaries and Bible colleges - most have courses/discussions on contextualizing expressions of faith, but actions speak louder than words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{343}\) The H scale is completely taken from Richard (2004:316-320).
These institutions are strongholds of westernized Christianity in India.

Most Indian churches are comfortable in H2, which has not affected the Hindu understanding of Christianity as a foreign religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>H3 model</strong></th>
<th>Hindu Christian renounces Hindu religion for Christianity, but adapts Hindu religious and cultural practice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1)</strong></td>
<td>Hinduism is renounced in favour of Christianity, but with efforts to adapt Hindu religious and cultural practices into biblical faith and practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2)</strong></td>
<td>Efforts to develop contextual Indian Christian theology - willingness to use terminologies from Hinduism that traditional Christians avoid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3)</strong></td>
<td>Bindu (Red forehead dot) not a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4)</strong></td>
<td>Vegetarianism often practiced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5)</strong></td>
<td>Caste recognized at least to a limited extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6)</strong></td>
<td>Musical styles from Indian traditions adopted, but western music also used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7)</strong></td>
<td>Hindu festivals sometimes celebrated (in varying degrees, often modified). Hindu temples studiously avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8)</strong></td>
<td>Commitment to indigenous financing due to the stigma of foreign funding of Christian work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No historic Christian movements in India have effectively arrived at H3. The Christian "ashram" (spiritual retreat centre) movement beginning in 1920s was an attempt. Many individual Hindu converts experimented on these lines while within H1 or H2 institution.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>H4 model</strong></th>
<th>Hindu disciples of Christ do not develop contextual expressions of discipleship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) Hindus who come to Christ maintain sociological identity as Hindus within their birth community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Do not identify as Christian. Do not develop contextual expressions of faith and discipleship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Name, caste, diet and dress (including red dot) not changed because they are aspects of community life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Positive adaptation in Christ of Hindu values and methods not attempted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Occasional study and fellowship gatherings are culturally neutral, appearing neither “Christian” nor “Hindu”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6) Hindu festivals celebrated. Hindu temples visited for family-related ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-time workers funded from abroad not involved. At least one fledgling effort to develop ministry in H4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>H5 model</strong></th>
<th>Hindu disciples of Christ seek to develop contextual expression of discipleship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) Hindus who come to Christ maintain sociological identity as Hindus within birth community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Seek to develop Hindu patterns of discipleship in personal devotion, corporate worship, evangelism, etc., and to define their faith in contextual terms (contextual Indian theology).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Often identify themselves as “bhaktas” (devotees) of Christ or “Yesu-bhaktas”- Christian in India is a sociological term more than a theological tag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Initially viewed with skepticism by Hindus due to traditional associations of Christ with radical culture and community change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Minimal music from existing Christian traditions, perhaps except...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hindu disciples of Christ recognized as such by other Hindus but remain unassociated with other disciples of Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6 model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Hindus in Christ remain in birth communities as Hindus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Individualized discipleship to Jesus without corporate expression, excepting perhaps some attendance at occasional large Christian gatherings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Not secret, but known as followers of Jesus in their Hindu social circles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Hindu festivals celebrated and Hindu temples visited.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A significant number in Tamil Nadu in south India. Smaller numbers elsewhere in India.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Churchless Christians” - a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Christian music in traditional Indian styles.

6) Corporate expressions of discipleship often rare or non-existent due to practical considerations; but desire to follow biblical pattern of a corporate faith expression.

Corporate developments may be mono-caste for a time, but for practical rather than ideological reasons.

7) Socially acceptable means of inter-caste fellowship will be developed. (No known current or historic case of Christ-followers has upheld total caste exclusiveness in teaching or practice.)

8) Hindu festivals celebrated, sometimes modified.

9) Hindu temples sometimes reluctantly visited for family-related ceremonies.

Indigenous funding deemed essential.

Small stirrings toward H5
misnomer since they are not Christians but Hindu disciples of Christ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>H7 model</strong></th>
<th>Hindu disciples of Christ keep faith completely private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Hindus in Christ remain in birth communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Keep devotion to Jesus secret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Appear to participate fully in Hindu religious activity, but address all prayers to Christ or God through Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Such people have always existed, but hard to identify and harder still to quantify.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4.2.1 C and H Continuum models

It is important to analyze how effective each of these models will be in ministry. C1 and C2 models show less accommodative spirit to the Muslim culture with the exception in C2 with regard to applying indigenous language. These models carry along with it the Western cultural baggage (western style building, denominational affiliation and worship pattern) to the Muslim context. Although there may be Muslim convert to these churches yet these models are not effective for two major reasons. Firstly, it becomes a stumbling block in the effort to truly develop an indigenous movement within its cultural settings as it imposes outside cultural baggage. The church will always be labelled as foreign. For instance, Woodberry mention that it is in this context that the, “Muslim converts find the Christian worship strange and offensive [where] men and women are in close proximity in church; people sit on chairs or benches; they beat drums; and, worst of all they do not even remove their shoes (1989:283).”

Same is true with Hindu who has a vague and distorted image of the church because of his western cultural baggage it carries in Indian context. Tennent (2000:13) states:

Hindus do, indeed, have distorted and unfortunate associations with the notion of the church or organized Christianity. Hindus, for example, sense that Christians are disrespectful because they keep their shoes on in the presence of God. They often look on Christians as culturally foreign because they will sit on pews rather than on the floor, or use Western
musical forms rather than the indigenous bhajans. They simply do not understand why Christian women will no longer wear bangles or participate in popular cultural festivals.

Secondly, uprooting the converts from Islamic/Hindu culture and planting them in these churches is “unbiblical constraint on conversion and Christian discipleship”.\textsuperscript{344} It builds unwarranted cultural stumbling blocks to the message of the gospel.

C3 model can be called moderate contextualization approach from a Christian point of view as it accommodates “non-religious aspect of the indigenous culture”.\textsuperscript{345} But from the point of view of Muslims C2 and C3 are on the same level with C3 using more extraction strategy. This is because the pre-supposition in this scale is that Islamic cultural forms cannot be cleansed from their cultural meaning therefore it needs to be discarded to avoid syncretism. Consequently there is a conscious attempt to dissect from “all visible elements of Islam like taking part in Ramadan, dietary laws and [involvement] in mosque”.\textsuperscript{346} This model also undermines the goal of founding an indigenous cultural church because it passes a wrong message in the mind of Islamic/Hindu community that the church is against their cultural tradition which can be a setback for mission among these communities. As Richard rightly states that when, “Each convert extracted from his own cultural situation reinforces in the minds of Hindus and Muslims the misunderstanding that Christians are opposed to their cultural traditions. In this sense, one could defend the thesis that each convert won from these faiths at present actually represents a setback to winning large numbers from these communities” (1996:15).

C6 scale cannot be called a contextualization model rather it is a fellowship of “crypto Christians”\textsuperscript{347} in underground houses, who are forced to live in anonymity due to the fear of ostracisation and persecution. Such fellowship can be a short term survival plan; of course they cannot remain in C6 for a long time. In addition, there is no ray of hope to build an indigenous movement in this level. Conversely, it is deemed necessary to have C6 model in those countries

\textsuperscript{344} Jim Leffel. Contextualization bridges to the muslim community. \url{http://www.xenos.org/essays/contextualization-building-bridges-muslim-community}. Date of access: 21 July 2014
\textsuperscript{345} Jim Leffel. Contextualization bridges to the muslim community. \url{http://www.xenos.org/essays/contextualization-building-bridges-muslim-community}. Date of access: 21 July 2014
\textsuperscript{346} Jim Leffel. Contextualization Bridges to the Muslim Community. \url{http://www.xenos.org/essays/contextualization-building-bridges-muslim-community}. Date of access: 21 July 2014
\textsuperscript{347} The world Christian trend published a demographic survey (2001) and identified a group of secret believers who for the fear of persecution and other reason do not want to reveal their faith in Christ publicly but prefer to keep in private (2013:85).
where to practice biblical faith is considered illegal and where underground churches are in the process of evolving.

The C4/5 models are normally regarded as the models of contextualization with the goal to build culturally based indigenous fellowship in Christ. Both scales regard and incorporate the use of Islamic religious forms in Biblical faith and are against the extraction of Muslim/ Hindus from their culture to into a foreign culture.

There are also differences between C4/C5 believers in relation to their self-identity. Believers who belong to C4 call themselves “followers of Isa” and are identified by other believers as “Muslim Background Believers” (MBBs). While C5 believers call themselves “Muslim followers of Isa” and are identified by other Christians as “Muslim Believers” (MBs). The Islamic world doesn’t consider the C4 believers as Muslims but they do consider C5 believer’s as Muslim because they remain “legally, culturally, and religiously within the Muslim Ummah” (Whitehouse, 2005:27). But some Muslims refer to them as “strange kind of Muslims” (Massey, 2000:8). In addition, although both scales encourage the use of Quran in the beginning stages and inorder to maintain their cultural heritage, yet when it comes to baptism C4 baptize their believers when they are mature to identify themselves as Christian but in C5 believers are still devoted to Five Pillars of Islam.348

Hoefer (2001:96) known as the theologian of H5/6 (C5) believers in his book Churchless Christianity, mentions a group of bhaktas (devotees) called Yeshu bhaktas living in rural Chennai (formerly Madras). Today these groups are all over India, especially in Varanasi, known as Khrist bhaktas. The important feature of this group is that they are fully devoted to be disciples/ followers of Christ but do not want to be a part of a visible ecclesiastical structure/ institution (Church) nor are they willing to take baptism and call themselves Christians because of the foreign stigma attached to the term. Rather, they want to remain within their socio-cultural

348 The Five Pillars are as follows:
1. Perform the salat (prayer towards Mecca 5 times a day).
2. Recite the shahada (confession of faith- Allah as God and Muhammad as Allah’s prophet)
3. Fast during the month of Ramadan
4. Give the zakat ( alms)
5. Go on the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) at least once in a lifetime.
background and maintain their cultural identity as Hindus. It is estimated that there are about 156,000 non baptized believers in Christ.

Within the Hindu world view a Hindu is free to choose their *ishta devata*. Thus their faith in Jesus is not a scandal to the Hindu community. Conversely, such groups of followers raise following missiological questions in relation to the nature and place of the church in Indian context, which will be addressed in the following chapters:

1. Can a Hindu/ Muslim accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and still not be united with the visible church?
2. Is baptism necessary?
3. What is the relationship between ecclesiology and soteriology?
4. What aspects of his/her social life the convert should be encouraged to preserve and in what ways s/he could be helped to make those aspects the media for expression of Christian faith and love?
5. The implications of being a Hindu Christian or a Hindu disciple of Christ, especially in the Indian context.

**Summary**

There is no doubt that conversion is the bone of contention in the Indian context. The focus of this chapter was to dentify the missiological challenges that the church in India is facing with regard to conversion. In order to understand these challenges, one needs to understand why the Hindu thinkers and fundamentalist are against conversion and Christianity but not against the teachings of Christ? Without understanding the root of the problem we cannot see the depth of the missiological challenges the church is facing today. Therefore this chapter is divided into two parts, the first part deals with the history of Christianity in India and the second part with the missiological challenges the church is facing with regard to conversion.

In the historical survey it is clear that the early Christians, the St. Thomas Syrian Christian enjoyed a cordial relationship with the Hindu community to the extent that they were never regarded as outsiders or foreigners. This was because the theological vision of the St. Thomas

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The practice of *ishta devata* in Hinduism allows a person to worship a particular, chosen deity without necessarily denying that other gods exist.
Christians had an inclusive, pluralistic and liberal approach towards Hindu culture. Therefore they adapted some of the indigenous forms in worship. But the whole attitude towards Christianity changed with the coming of the Portuguese, who had a presupposition that the Hindu culture is evil and people in India are ignorant. Therefore these evil practices can be purged only by accepting Christianity (Portuguese). Therefore, motivated by the medieval world view of the Roman Catholic Church, “conversion by compulsion”, they destroyed many temples and converted many native Christians through fraudulent means. They even attempted to convert St. Thomas Christians as they regarded their Christianity as evil loaded with cultural forms. Such attitude of the Portuguese led to Christianity being labelled as Parangi Marga (foreign religion) which is still a snag to Christianity in India. The missiological challenge for the church is how can the churches shake away these sneer attachment to [western] Christianity so that it will look indigenous in nature?

Even though Xavier and Nobili’s accomodation approach was an exception and it should be praised – it restricted itself to high tradition accommodation that did not yield much result. But with the coming of British colonial power the hatred towards Christianity increased to its epitome. It is in this era that Christianity was seen as a colonial religion because of the missionary’s nexus with colonial authorities. Even today the Hindu fundamentalist groups point to these periods and accuse Christianity as the religion that destroy “Hindu Rashtra” or is anti nationals. The church today has to address this challenge to show that it is not against Indian nation as accused by the Hindu fundamentals.

Even though the contribution of missionaries during the modern missionary era - with regard to schools education, and hospitals and against social evils are appreciable and praise worth (which even the Hindus acknowledge)- yet the practice of missions has given a different image to Christianity which are as follows:-

1. It was during the modern missionary movement that the mass movement conversion from Dalit took place. Most of these were anti- social movements against the caste hegemony of the high caste Hindu and hoping to receive benefits from the rulers. Therefore, Christianity was accused of being a proselytizing religion.
2. The Dalit who converted to Christianity with the dream of a better life were shocked to see the discrimination that within the church in the name of caste to such an extent where
the church in India, especially south India, has an image of “the church of the upper caste”.

3. The mission approach was to extract the converts from their family and religious background and place them in a completely new setting with no relations with the old. Therefore, the double conversion approach led to quam mentality or mission compound mentality. These images need to be rectified by the church if it has to be effective in India today.

Mass movement also led to anti-conversion laws being passed in some of the major states and continued to be followed by other states. Moreover, it opened the eyes of Hindu thinkers, who have followed the teaching of Christ, to come together against mass conversion and formed Neo-Hindu movements to revitalize Hinduism and to stop these mass movements. The Hindu fundamentalist groups (RSS, BJP, and VHP) are the offshoots of such groups who are presently persecuting Christians and forcefully involved in Ghar Vapsi movements.

The uprising persecution was an alarm call for the churches in India to respond to the missiological challenges in the relation to conversion in Indian society. In other words, how to communicate the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a changing world? Should converts be completely cut off from the culture that s/he belongs to accept Christ Lordship? How should one be involved in contextualization that does not lead to syncretism? How can one be relevant to context and faithful to text (Bible)? How to address the challenges of believers outside the Church? These missiological challenges will be addressed in the following chapters (5&6) and aim to show how a foreign labelled church can truly become an Indian church and be a faithful witness to Indian society.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONVERSION AND THE NATURE OF THE INDIAN CHURCH

5.0 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the preceding chapter (Chapter 4), religious conversion is a sensitive issue which creates significant missiological challenge to the Church in India. It is the “bone of contention, controversy, and confusion in contemporary India” (Frykenberg, 2003:17). The Hindutva group accuses Christian churches for the confusion and controversy in relation to conversion, as they view “the link of Christian conversion with colonial power, ecclesiastical expansion, political manipulation and social disturbance” (Kim, 2003:188). The opinion of Hindutva is, to a certain extent significant because the majority of India’s Christians embraced Christianity during the modern Christian missionary movement, “the movement that came to pass in India under the protective umbrella of colonialism” (Pachuau, 2001:181).

In the light of these developments, how does the church respond to the issue of conversion? Even though there were discussions held on the Indian ecclesiology from pre-independence era, the topic rose to prominence in India particularly during the second half of the twentieth century when the opposition of the Hindu group became evident in their attempt to pressurize the centre and state government to regulate conversion (chapter four) (Kim, 2007: 78). These goaded strong reactions from Christians who argued that professing one’s faith is the fundamental right guaranteed in the Indian Constitution and “the conviction that conversion was at the heart of Christian belief and practice” (Kim, 2007: 78). However, this opposition to conversion also forced Christian theologians and missiologist to re-think the problem of conversion, the place of converts and the place of Christian community in the wider community. In other words Indian Christians are grappling with the question of what it means to be a Church in the midst of a Hindu dominated community. This chapter therefore, focuses on attempts made by Christians (and non-Christians), individuals and movements, in pre-independence and post-independence India, to understand the nature of the church – its function, meaning and form and its role in Indian society and its service to the world.
5.1 The Church’s Image in India

The words identity and image are integrally interrelated; the former refers to the nature of the church or to its self-understanding, while the latter represents the way in which the world around the church looks at her. Even though the church exists for 20 centuries in India, the church is still considered a foreign and alien entity because the churches continue to reflect the evidence of the history of Christian expansion through colonization. This continues to be deeply rooted in the memory of peoples in India even after the end of western colonialism, resulting in “suspicion, disorientation and identity crisis”.

Jeyakumar (2007:20), a noted historian, speaking about the relationship between colonial power and Christian missionaries writes:-

In obedience to the command of the Pope, the Portuguese colonizers got engaged in missionizing their territories in India by a diverse way. The Portuguese administration in Goa offered jobs to Christians only. It was decreed that public offices could be held by Christian alone. So, some of the Indians in those territories embraced Christianity for the sake of government jobs. Christian faith was spread by direct evangelism too. At the same time there was forced conversion too. The Portuguese government prohibited in its territories the public worship of Hindu and Muslims. Moreover only Christians were given the power to own lands and possessions. Others were asked to leave the area or to embrace Christianity. Those who had their ancestral property, preferred to join the church rather than leave the place.

The nexus of Christianity and colonial rulers has given the church an image of foreign institution in the minds of Indian people. Rosales (1992:232) asserts:-

As a social institution the church is perceived as a foreign body in its colonial origins while other world religions are not. The lingering colonial image survives in its traditional ecclesiastical structures and economic dependence on the west. The church is even sometimes seen as an obstacle or threat to national integration and to religious and cultural identity. The church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structures, in its worship, in its western-trained leadership and in its theology.

It is not just the views of the non–Christians alone that the Indian church is foreign in nature, but even the Indian Christians hold the view that, with exception of minor adaptation, the historical churches in India are transposed or exact carbon copy from outside - it is not genuinely rooted in Indian context. For instance, Amaladoss (2005:2), notes “foreign architectural styles; foreign dress patterns for bishops, priests and nuns; foreign rituals of worship; western education imparted in its educational institutions” - all give the Indian church the appearance of western

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churches. Moreover, financial dependence of the churches in Asia on foreign churches is another reason for the foreignness of the India church. Rayan, (1976:266) feels that “Economic dependence often carries with it spiritual dependence and that the dependants begin to copy what the donors think. He further states that such dependence leads to the creation of “ill-fit” programs and projects which mock our cultural and spiritual sensibilities, and present Christianity and the church as foreign and culturally-nationally alienating.”

Even the foreign mission supported only those mission stations which were satellite churches of the foreign missions. As McGavran (2005:109) has pointed out in his book The Bridges of God, the foreign fund instead of being given to to people movement but rather to station churches, churches of mission compound – satellite churches of foreign mission. Thus, financial dependence of the Indian churches lead to the spiritual dependence. However, Smalley disagrees with this opinion and cites the example of Jerusalem Church which had received funds from Europe yet remained indigenous (Smalley, 1978:363). Thus, Smalley points out that the problem lies not in receiving fund but in administering the funds. Most of the funds received were used for huge churches, hospitals, educational institutions whose structure look similar to Western Churches. This administration of funds Smalley (1978:363) believes “have produced local churches which are [the replica] of mother churches of the West.”

The colonial powers and Christian foreign missionaries always maintained a negative attitude towards the traditional religions and cultures due to their superiority mindset (as they were considered civilized). They considered the others as demonic and uncivilized and depicted “people with no culture to inferior culture and their “life styles and their religion was derided as demonic, superstitious and evil” (Vashum, 2008:8). Therefore, cultural conversion was justified and cultural conversion became a prerequisite for conversion to Christianity. This cultural conversion according to Tinker (1993:48-49) resulted in cultural dislocation in four ways.351 Firstly, the converts were completely extracted from their native culture and placed in mission compound. Secondly, once relocated in the mission compound they were forbidden from returning to their families. In some instances if the convert left the compound military assistance were sought to bring them back to the compound for discipline. Thirdly, the converts had

“rigorous regimen of work to support the mission, the missionaries and their obligation to the military government”.

Fourthly, converts had no self-worth as they have to “live under the strict and authoritarian governance of the missionary priests”.

Due to this cultural disorientation of the church, the image of the church among the Indian people is that of *quam* or closed community that “tends to conceive herself as a distinct community- differing in religion and mores from other communities”.

Hayward notes (1966:130):

> This separation had a profound effect on the attitudes of Indian Christians. They now thought of themselves as a distinct *quam* sharply distinguished by religion from the Hindu and Muslim *quams*. In their enforced isolation from much of Indian life they turned naturally to the missionaries for leadership and assistance. Many adopted Western forms of dress and behavior, acquired English or biblical names and in general regarded themselves as having a distinct culture. This isolation also helped to produce an attitude of exclusiveness.

This *quam* outlook becomes part of the Indian Christian self-understanding which gave the Indian church an image of communal and sociological entity, but not an image of the people of Christ. This created hurdles for the cause of evangelization and also led to an unhealthy separation of the church and the world.

Thus, the *status question* is: how can the church in India become truly Indian? Sudarshan, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief said that the “Indian Christians must indianize the church in India by cutting off their relations with the western churches and also by venerating Hindu (Indian) heroes like Rama and Krishna” (quoted in Mathew, 2002:56). Even though one cannot completely agree with the comment of Sudarshan, it points to an ecclesiological challenge that the church in India is facing – the lack of Indian-ness in the church. In such an environment, Christian Indian Clergy, Indian theologians and Indian ecclesiastical bodies have made bold

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354 “Quam is an Urdu term (of Arabic origin) meaning ‘people’ or ‘race’ or ‘nation’. In its common usage in India *quam* signifies people or community. Every Indian is by birth a member of a *quam*, in a society composed of many such communities, owes much of his identity to this membership” (quoted in full from Hayward, 1966:79).
355 Alter, along with Jai Singh and others did an emperical study of the church in north India. In their findings it was found that the church especially in North India exists as a distinct socio-religious community or *quam*. This is because of the prevailing hierarchical caste structure and communalism in the society around it. Their study was published in *The Church as Christian Community: Three Studies of North Indian Churches*. Cf. Hayward (1966).
attempts to reflect and renew efforts at making the church Indian. In the following pages we shall examine some of these attempts in order to place them within the confines and scope of the broader theme of this chapter.

5.2 Nationalist Movements and the Ideal of an Indigenous Church

The growth of the national movement led to the consciousness among Indian Christians that a truly Indian church was needed. The impact of the national movement on the life and thought of the Indian church can never be minimized. The nationalist movement in India, especially led by Gandhi compelled to rethink the notion of Christianity and church in India. Many well-known Christian leaders were in the inner circle of Gandhi. Wilfred (2002:56) opines that the nationalist movement “presented the occasion to rethink the traditional Christian theology and develop new theological frameworks”. Similarly Webster (1996:59) notes that “the critical definitions of Christianity and of Indian Christian identity as foreign, made by many leaders of the Indian renaissance and national movement, had a telling ‘indianizing’ effect upon the educated Protestant elite’s sense of identity”. This nationalist movement not only enhanced the development of indigenous theological expression and spiritualities but also paved the way in

356 One does not deny the fact that from the very beginning of Christianity in India attempts to create an indigenous Indian church was undertaken. There is no lack of attempts either in the western Christian Missions during the second stage of Christianization in India. Names such as Robert de Nobili is a reminder of the great efforts at making the church Indian by becoming a Hindu sannyasi, even though there are critics like Amaladoss who tells us, “He adopted local customs in order to win over the people of his day and to communicate his message, and not necessarily because he appreciated these customs” (Amaladoss & Clooney 2005: 33).

357 The Nationalist Movements (sepoy mutiny of 1857; swadeshi movement from 1905-1908; the non-cooperation movement from Sep. 1920- Feb. 1922; Dandi March or salt satyagraha 12 Mar. 1930 and Quit India Movement started in 1942 by Gandhi) in India organized mass movements emphasizing and raising questions concerning the interests of the people of India. In most of these movements, people were themselves encouraged to take action. These movements were able to “promote a sense of nationalism among the people of the country which ultimately led to independence” (Mujumdar, 1971:286-92). It is believed that the first war of independence (1857), was due in great part to “alleged attempts to convert the soldiers to Christianity by introducing clandestinely Bibles and other Christian literature into the barracks” (Wilfred, 2007:145).

358 Cf. Gandhi’s understanding of Christ and Christianity is scripted in two of his books: The Message of Jesus (1940), and Christian Missions: Their place in India (1940).

359 For instance, Aryanayagam, Verrier Elwin, C. F. Andrews, , Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Ralph Richard Keithan S. K. George, Bharatan Kumarappa, and J. C. Kumarappa were all influenced by Gandhi (Tharamangalam, 2004:238). The impact of the nationalist movement lead by Gandhi on Christian leaders can be seen in the likes of S. K. George (1947:30-33) who stated that it was Gandhi who made Jesus real to him and viewed Satyagraha as Christianity in action. In addition, C. F. Andrews (1929:34-42), saw the ethical teaching of Gandhi’s as “expressing the essence of Christianity” and Gandhi’s love for the oppressed as the presence of Christ. The values displayed in the Gandhian nationalist movement motivated Christian missionaries’ to view Christ with the Indian Nationalists rather than with the Christian missionaries and the British colonial powers (Clifford, 1930:768). Gandhi (1940a:16) strongly argued that there is nothing wrong in Christianity except it alliance with Western civilization which was founded on violence and materialism. Therefore he suggested Indian Christianity to disassociate with them.
some cases for the transferring of power and leadership from the hands of Western missionaries to Indian leaders, and eventually it led to the creation of some indigenous churches. Even though there were many attempts to form indigenous churches in the pre-independence era, yet we will only discuss five indigenous churches - Hindu church of Lord Jesus, National church of India, Culcutta Christo Samaj, Nava vidhan sabha and Hindu Catholic church. The reason for such selection is due to the fact that these are representatives and good examples of indigenous movements that wanted to gain autonomy from missionary control and made unique contributions to remain outside the church which has had a tremendous influence in the post-independence era.

5.2.1 The Hindu Church of Lord Jesus

“The Hindu church of the Lord Jesus” was formed by Shanar caste Christians in 1857 after a schism from the Church Missionary Society in Nazareth, Tinnevelly. The Shanar were abhorrent labourers in the land owned by the high caste people of the region, and they were living in utter poverty (Ludden, 1985:192). As the Shanar had ritually low status automatically they were barred from entry into the temple (Hardgrave, 1969: 57). This ill treatment of the Shanar community led to a mass conversion in search of empowerment and new identity. At the beginning, their mass conversion gave them protection from landlords and the new identity they looked for. However, when people entered the church they encountered discrimination both from the western missionaries and their Hindu neighbours. On the one hand, they were treated as inferior and were spoken of derogatorily by western missionaries and on the other, their Hindu neighbors treated them as a “denationalized and unpatriotic” (Kumaradoss, 1996:37). Eventually, “such inferior characterization of the Shanars” resulted in the foundation of first indigenous

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360 Kaj Baago (1969:1) states that the church was founded in 1858. Moreover, 1857 is significant in the history of India known as sipoy mutiny. It was in this year rebellion started in Northern India by a group of sepoy against the British domination.

361 The Shanar’s were considered as people of no standing by the high caste. For instance, in 1845 when bishop spencer visited Tinnevelley the high caste villagers complained about the missionaries by giving their petition. The Petition stated, “the missionaries make congregation of wicked Shanars ....who always have been our slaves...and teach them the Gospel, the ten commandments and other things”. See Ulrike Schroder. No religion, but ritual: Robert Caldwell and the Tinnevelly Shanar http://www.academia.edu/433088/No_Religion_But_Ritual_Robert_a1dwell_and_the_Tinnevelly_Shanars Date of access: 20 May 2015

362 Robert Cadwell, who has worked among the Shanar community for 10 years published his work, Tinnevelly Shanars (1849), in which he had portrayed the inferior social status of the community which provoked leaders like Sattampillai and others.
church movement under the leadership of Arumainayagam Sattampillai. In other words, the culmination of the protest led to the formation of the church. Nearly 2500 Shanar left the mainstream churches to join “the Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus”. This church was exclusively for Shanar converts.

The major purpose in founding the church was twofold. Firstly, Sattampillai wanted to give a new identity to the Shanar community which he openly affirmed. He wanted the Shanar community to be identified as Nadar (Kumaradoss, 2004:7). Secondly, Sattampillai wanted to prove to the Hindu neighbours that the Shanars, who have converted to Christianity, are not denationalized and unpatriotic. In order to prove their patriotism, Sattampillai and the Shanar community as a whole became critical of western Christianity (by questioning the foreign missions’ authority in Indian church) and also by adopting indigenous practices within the church. Caldwell asserts:-

They [Sattampillai and the members] call themselves in their documents ‘The Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus;’ but among their neighbors they call themselves, and are generally called Nattar, or ‘national party’. In their zeal for caste and Hindu nationality, they rejected from their system everything which appeared to them to savor of a European origin. Hence they abandoned infant baptism and an ordained ministry. Instead of wine they used unfermented juices of grapes in an ordinance which they regard as the Lord’s Supper, observe Saturday instead of Sunday as their Sabbath.

In addition, Sattampillai attempted to establish the lineage between Indian traditions and Jewish traditions and claimed that the Hindus are the descendants of one of the children of Noah (Hardgrave, 1969:65). A church building was erected in the pattern of the Jewish temple. He introduced practices like prostration, sacrifice, the use of frankincense and sitting on the floor.

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364 Shanar are a caste group in Tamil Nadu who were socially and economically deprived group. Based on the claim that Shanar had originally a Kshatriya status, they demanded that they should be called Nadar (warrior). Cf. Hardgrave (1969).
367 Sattampillai opposing the missionary account that stated an inferior position to Shanar went on to “invent and construct a new past to show that Shanars had a glorious royal past” (Kumardoss, 2004:15). He claimed that Shanar were from the royal lineage of northern Rajputs, who were the descendants of Noah (Hardgrave, 1969:89). This even resulted in the hostility of Maravars (the land lords) that lead to riots and disharmony in the society. Those who accept this legendary tale are probably few.
He rewrote the Psalms in Tamil poetic style and his followers began to sing songs in classical tunes with folded hands (Thangaraj, 1971: 65). He called himself Rabbi (Baago, 1969:1).

Due to internal conflicts, that arose when Sattampillai donned high priestly garments and declared that the church should begin to offer animal sacrifice, this church split in 1883 (Thangaraj, 1971:48). Only a small group that remained with Sattampillai disappeared after his death in 1919. The larger group who left Sattampillai is active till today under the name of “The Indian Church of the Ekarashakar” (Only Savior) and has churches at Mukkuperi, Oyyangudi, Kulathukudiruppu, Salaiputhur, Coimbatore, Madras and Salem (Kumaradoss, 2004:11).

It is a remarkable feat in the history of the Indian church that more than a century later the small community of Hindu Christians still exists without any help from outside. But the claim that this can be a successful example of an Indian church can only be acceptable with certain reservation when taking into consideration the existence of the church only among a tiny community. Various reasons can be adduced to this.

Firstly, the new indigenous church lacked a coherent theology based on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This laxity was connected to Sattampillai’s focus in elevating the status of the Shanar community to Nadar (Kshatriya, warrior). Accordingly, he adapted Jewish rites, and idiosyncratic endeavours to confer high caste morals and social norms on Shanar’s. Conversely, these adaptations were oriented towards Brahmanical Hinduism rather than Jewish religion. For instance, the practice of prostration, sacrifice and the use of frankincense are common practices in Brahmanical temple worship. He even introduced sitting on the floor to read Old Testament in accordance with the reading of vedas (Hindu sacred scripture). Moreover offering of sacrificial nourishments for Jesus by offering food or drink is also is akin to Brahmanical worship where the food and drink is offered to god and goddess and later taken back as prasadam (gift) (Nadam, 1890:90).

The liturgical inculturation oriented towards Brahmanism, a common practice among the Indian Church in the form of Ashramic inculturation, is problematic in Indian context. The majority of

Christians in India are Dalit and of poor background, and therefore cannot identify with the high culture of India— they find it “oppressive [to] their own identity and tradition” (Amaladoss, 2005:10-11). In such a context, it is so paradoxical and startling to see Sattampillai himself coming from a lower caste, trying to adapt Brahmanical culture.

Secondly, the church only appealed to a single caste group and the inculturation attempt did not go well within their own members let alone spread among the other Hindus caste.

Thirdly, the church instead of being founded on love was founded on resentment, bitterness and ill feelings towards foreign missionaries, which completely violates the mission based on love and the message of reconciliation.

Even though his breaking way from the mother church is not justifiable on any ground yet, we need to appreciate his vision to empower the Shanar community, has become a reality today. Today, the name Shanar has disappeared and it is universally called Nadar. This community has become one of the most economically and politically advanced communities in South India (Hardgrave, 1969:270). Moreover Sattampillai attempt to have an indigenized leadership and indigenous pattern of worship free from the western hegemony has laid a foundation for others to tread the path towards the formation of indigenous churches.

5.2.2 The National Church of India

“The National Church of India” was founded by an Indian medical doctor Pulney Andy in Madras in 1886. Andy raised his concern for a National church through the two newspapers he published in Madras, The Christian Patriot started in 1890 and the Eastern Star (Baago, 1969:10). The aim of the “the national church of India” was “to have a complete break with western Christianity and its structure of missionary authority in India which it desired to replace with indigenous forms, symbols and indigenous leadership” (Kumaradoss, 2004:15). One of the seminal thinkers who emphasized the importance of indigenous leadership was Carey who in 1805 asserted that: “Another part of our work is the forming of our native brethren to usefulness, fostering every kind of genius, and cherishing every gift and grace in them; in this respect we can scarcely be too lavish of our attention to their improvement. It is only by means of native preachers we can hope for the universal spread of the Gospel through this immense continent” (quoted in Neil, 1964:265).
Andy’s call for indigenous leadership was an appeal towards a self-supporting, self-governing and self-financing united church. This call was a protest against Western sectarianism and paternalism. The time had come, he said, when “we should look about to maintain ourselves instead of idly continuing to depend on the charitable support chiefly contributed by the people of Europe”. He pleaded let us, “Not play the part of the professional beggar any longer” (quoted in Houghton, 1983:184-186). Conversely, Andy did not hesitate to appreciate his missionary friends. After recognizing the good they had done, he asserted, that missionaries “failed to present the claims of Christianity in a way conducive to its development in India” due to their lack of understanding about the complex social and religious practice of Hindus (Baago, 1969:11).

The idea of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating native churches was not the creation of Andy rather it was the dominant missiological motif of his time. The “three Self Principles” was proposed by Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn, in an attempt to replace the colonial hegemony of the mission institutions with indigenous churches and leadership, although neither of them was able to apply it in the field (Wickeri, 1988:36). It was aimed to end “missionary dominance and not national dependence”, i.e. not in the sense of “ending outside giving but outside governance” (Rowell, 2007:33). Metaphorically, Venn viewed the mission structure as “scaffolding” and the indigenous church as “edifice”: “The mission was the scaffolding of world evangelism and the native church the edifice. It was the removal of the scaffolding that proved that the building was complete” (Shenk, 1983:46) This idea of “Three Self Principle” was adopted and expanded upon by John L Nevus, a Presbyterian missionary to China (1854) in 1890. Unlike Venn, Nevus’ concern was dependence on finance that leads to indiscrimination and failure to yield genuine result in the mission fields. Therefore, the concern for domination was replaced by dependence. Thus, Nevius advocated that missions should not pay subsidies and salaries. Venn’s revolutionary principles and Nevus recommended practices became a validation to end foreign control over national churches.

In a par with these ideas, Andy too believed that “Christianity would not make progress in India unless it shed its European garb and adapted itself to the ‘tastes of the Eastern nations’ (quoted in

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369 Henry Venn was the leading secretary of the (Anglican) church missionary society from 1841 to 1872. Rufus Anderson was the senior secretary of American board of commissioners for foreign mission from 1832 to 1866 (Shenk, 1990:28).
Baago, 1969:9). Andy was “convinced that only Indians could successfully present Christianity in an Eastern form to Indians”. The influence of Andy’s thought on indigenous leadership led to the formation of the Indian Missionary Society (IMS) in 1905. The objective of this society was to develop indigenous leadership in native churches with the aim of threefold principles: “Indian Men, Indian Money and Indian Management” (Balsundaran, 2001:69-70).

The National Church of India rejected western creed and confessions as for them it had no value and based their teaching solely on New Testament. In the church there was no administration of the sacraments nor ordination of pastors - even though such a possibility was not completely ruled out. Unlike, “Hindu church of the Lord Jesus” “the national church of India” gave liberty to its members to keep a relationship with former churches and keep their membership with those churches even though they had regular Sunday service (Baago, 1969:8). In the church during Andy’s sermon he repeatedly affirmed that Christ and Christianity was Asian: - “Christ is an Asiatic to the very backbone and it is folly to say that He is a foreigner and His teachings are foreign and unsuited” (quoted in Baago, 1969:9).

Despite the fact that most foreign missionaries supported the idea of self- governing church in India yet they felt that it was not a mature decision at that time. Therefore, they criticized Andy vision of self- governing church as extirpating the imperative doctrine of the church. But this criticism did not stop Andy from appealing to various missionary societies to support his plans for the National Church; however, his appeals were largely overlooked. Despite such disdain, from various Christian circles - Christians from Tinnevelly, Travancore and Bombay (Mumbai) during these period (1894-1895) - broke away from their respective churches and joined the self- governing movement of Andy. It’s sad that the movement did not gain any

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372 Andy tried to establish that Hinduism and Christianity had a common pedigree. His argument is that before the flood there was one religion, one God and one mode of salvation and thus there is a common root between the two religions. When he speaks of Hinduism he always refers to pre- deluge Hinduism which was non – corrupt but was later distorted by Brahmins. Based on this methodology he sought similarities between Hinduism and Judaism too (Kumarados,2004 :20).
374 Becoming indian: towards an indian contextual ecclesiology.
further momentum after the death of Andy in 1909 and it “faded away without trace” by 1920 (Baago, 1969:10).

During its succinct period “the National Church of India” “could only appeal to the high caste converts, especially to the Viswakarma caste-groups from which Andy himself came”. Andy was concerned to affirm the superiority of his caste within the Indian social system and also to debunk the European missionaries’ supremacy over native converts. Thus, by establishing “the national church of India” he was able to contest the “European supremacy on the one hand and Brahmanical supremacy on the other”. As Kumaradoss (2004:22) rightly assess, “upper caste converts of the National Church were keen to retain their caste identity as a part of their cultural milieu so that they would not be treated as outcastes”. Conversely such an exclusive approach to affirm the high caste status by demarcating themselves from the lower caste is against the spirit of Christ’s mission who was known as the friend of the outcaste and also “stands misplaced in their process of indigenization of Christianity in India”. It is illogical on the part of the movement to stimulate domination consciously or unconsciously when they themselves are striving to let loose from the hegemony of European missionaries.

5.2.3 The Calcutta Christo Samaj

In 1877, K.C. Bannerji, along with J.G. Shome, organized the Bengali Christian conference in which they criticized the missionaries of “denationalizing the Indian Christians”. They raised voice against making Indian Christians into a compound of converts and transferring the “theological and ecclesiastical differences of the West to India, thereby dividing the Indian Christians into numerous denominations” (Barber, 1912: 46). Bannerji and Shome contested the allegation that Christians were unpatriotic by affirming that Christians in India were equally nationalistic as their fellow Hindu- “In having become Christians, we have not ceased to be Hindus. We are Hindu Christians, as thoroughly Hindu as Christian. We have embraced
Christianity but we have not discarded our nationality. We are as intensely national as any of our brethren” (quoted in Baago, 1967:67).

This indigenous urge led to the founding of Christo Samaj in 1887 in Calcutta under the chief initiative of K.C. Bannerji and J.G Shome, who were previous members of Anglican Church. As the name suggests, it was to be the Christian parallel to the Brahmo Samaj381 and was organized in similar way. The objective of Christo Samaj was “the propagation of Christian truth, the promotion of Christian union, and the welfare of Indian Christians” (Baago, 1967:65) and it was the hope of its founders to gather all Indian Christians within it, thereby eliminating the denominations (Barber, 1912:46). But the attempt did not succeed due to the opposition from the missionaries and Indian evangelists who were respectively loyal to their denomination and dependent on foreigners for finance. Even though these attempts in the 19th century did not achieve immediate results, at the dawn of the 20th century many church unions took place as recorded in detail by Suresh in his book “cultural and religious heritage of India”:

In 1901 there was a union of Presbyterian Churches related to American and Scottish mission in South India. In 1904 these churches joined with several Presbyterian churches in North India to form Presbyterian Church of India. Moreover, in 1908 there was an interdenominational union of congregational and Presbyterian churches of India and Ceylon to form the South India United Church. Furthermore the most significant unions that took place were church of South India in 1947 (consists of Anglican and Methodist) and Church of North India in 1970 (consist of Baptist Church, Brethren church, Disciple of Christ Anglican, Methodist and Australian conference and United Church of North India) (Suresh, 2004:209-216).

K. C. Benerjea strongly stressed and appealed to the Indian churches the importance of indigenization. He called for the need of the local church “to be removed from the hot-house of European Church organization and planted in genial soil of Indian modes of thought and feeling” (Baago, 1969:4). As part of making the church Indian, Banerjee introduced “Nagarkirtan (dancing and singing processions) taken from the bhakti traditions” in Christo Samaj (Baago, 1969:4).

He blamed the missionaries for the foreignness of Christianity in India, and called upon missionaries through a newspaper called The Bengal Christian Herald382 to “become Hindus in

382 At the age of 25, KC Bannerji started a newspaper called “The Bengal Christian Herald,” later changed its name to “The Indian Christian Herald” (Baago, 1967:67).
order to teach Hindus” and, without ceasing to be Christians, to recognize “the gems of truth in the religions of the country”, so to make it possible for “the converts to become members of an Indian rather than a foreign church” (quoted in Lalchuanliana, 1973:79). He distinguished between “substantive Christianity” and “adjective Christianity”. The former consists of Christian faith as mentioned in the apostolic creed. This cannot be changed or compromised. But the later, consists of “confessional statements and organizational forms developed in the course of time for the purpose of protecting and conserving the basic truths” and therefore can be changed (Baago, 1969:8).

The impact of Banerjea’s distinction between “substantive Christianity” and “adjective Christianity” can be seen at Din Bandhu Ministries (friends of the poor) in Maharashtra, where coconut is used for the Lord’s Supper instead of bread and wine. Sunil Sardar states: “Familiar in many Hindu rituals, the coconut can be used in India as a meaningful spiritual symbol. As coconut is broken during communion, Jesus can be explained as a one time sacrifice for sin for all eternity. The coconut can also be symbolic of His body being broken and His blood shed for each of us. By using coconut instead of traditional bread and Juice, Hindu’s understand Christ’s sacrificial act in a new way” (quoted in Collin, 2007: 161).

These practices raise an important question whether by changing the elements of Eucharist with coconut, has the meaning of Eucharist changed? The obligation of the church to Jesus’ command to “do this in memory of me” has disputably followed two kinds of understanding; one might be called synchronic (transmission) and the other diachronic (translation) approaches. The synchronic approach means the church continues to follow the actions of Jesus in a specific way, the “church understands Jesus to have given and intended them”. For example, Cyprian, argued in one of his letters that “we must do what Jesus did and that deviation from this tradition

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383 The ideals that drove Banerjee and Shome to resist the Christianity of their time were spelled out in a message to the 1888 Culcutta (Kolkata) missionary conference: “Christianity is seen as a foreign religion in India. In order to dissipate this impression they stated that, (1) just as Paul became all things to all men, so missionaries without ceasing to be Christians might become Hindus in order to reach Hindus; (2) they should be associated with a life of poverty as is the idea of guru in India, instead of living in ease and comfort; (3) they should recognize the gems of truth in the religions of the country, and (4) a convert should be allowed to be an Episcopalian without joining the Church of England or a Presbyterian without joining the Church of Scotland (Barber, 1912:50).


385 Cynthia, Botha. Ron Bowing. & Ian Paton. Eucharist food and drink.
is erroneous” (quoted in Robert, 1957:360). This view is held by Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in India. The diachronic approach means the inculturation by which the church acts out actions of Jesus differently in a new context.

Analyzing Jesus’ meal tradition that has Eucharist resonance reveals that there were within the biblical tradition, “diversity of practice both in the New Testament and the early church” (Bradshaw, 2004: 17). For example, in the Emmaus narrative the word artos is used for bread, while Luke uses azumos for the mentioning of the feast of unleavened bread (Lk 22:1) and uses artos for his last supper narrative (Bradshaw, 2004: 18ff). Thus, one cannot say that the use of different elements changes the meaning of Eucharist. In the history of the Christian tradition, those who support the synchronic approach have failed to see that the synchronic approach has also developmental and preservative aspects, which is in itself a diachronic approach. For example, the standard wafer- bread and wine of western liturgy bears little resemblance with the bread and wine of the first century.

Moreover, at Din Bandhu ministries indigenous terms are used to communicate the biblical truth. For example the term for Baptism is Ganga Snan, which resembles the Hindu practice of cleansing rituals in the Ganges. Sunil Sardar notes:

Indian culture already understands the need for cleansing. When it is explained that Jesus has prepared the way for gangasnan or holy bath, they begin to understand in a new way that it is no longer necessary to repeat the cleansing. Believers need only to come once, as Jesus Christ has done cleansing for us by His work on the cross. The Lord has revealed this bridge as a way to bring people to a full knowledge of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us (quoted in Collins, 2007:161).

This effort for inculturation, however, did not produce the desired effects of making the church Indian because it did not appeal to Indians. Rather, the Hindus consider it as a means by the Christian church to beguile the Hindu community into Christianity.

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386 Philip Tovey. The bread and the wine at eucharist. http://ism.yale.edu/sites/defaults/files/files/Inculturation%20thee%20Bread. Pdf Date of access: 1 June 2015
387 For a detailed analysis of these two approaches, see Paul (2002:445-555).
388 Philip Tovey. The bread and the wine at eucharist. http://ism.yale.edu/sites/defaults/files/files/Inculturation%20thee%20Bread. Pdf Date of access: 1 June 2015
Although *Christo Samaj* was founded with great expectations - to form indigenous Christianity yet the dream could not be materialized because many native Christians did not support the move as they were financially dependent upon foreign missionaries. However, they were severely criticized by missionaries and as a result many members who joined the movement left and the church movement dissolved in 1894, within seven years from its inception.

5.2.4 **Nava Vidhan Sabha (Church of the New Dispensation)**

Although Keshub Chunder Sen was both a teacher and a member of the Brahmo *Samaj*, yet he admired the teaching of Christ and had a personal devotion to Christ to such an extent that Sen claimed his “richest experience came from Christ” (Farquhar, 1915:66). Although not baptized he openly confessed that he had an “intensely personal and emotional” relationship with Jesus (Borthwick, 1977:206).

Unlike other Hindu thinkers, Sen was to some extent grateful for the British colonialism in the sense that they have brought Christianity to India. Sen (1979:56) states “It is to British government that we owe our deliverance from oppression and misrule, from darkness and distress from ignorance and superstition”. But at the same time Sen never wanted to identify with the Church and Christianity of his time. Sen states: “I have always disclaimed the Christian name and will not identify myself with the Christian Church, for I set my face completely against the popular doctrine of Christianity” (quoted in Parekh, 1931:149). Sen’s action to not identify with Church and popular doctrine of Christianity seems to be paradoxical with Sen’s gesture of being grateful for Britshers’ for bringing Christianity to India. This is because for Sen, the church in Asia was a foreign entity that was far different from Jesus, who was by birth Asian- “Was not Jesus Christ Asiatic?” Thus Sen asserts, “It is not the Christ of Baptists, nor the Christ of the Methodists, but the Christ sent by God the Christ of love and meekness, of truth and self-sacrifice, who the world delights to honor. It is our Christ, Asia’s Christ... The East gratefully and lovingly welcomes back Jesus Christ.”

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389 This does not mean that he was supportive of colonial rulers rather in a lecture entitled “Asian message to Europe” he refers to colonial presence “as a curse [if it annihilates all that is] “our nationality” and “Europeanize all that is in the east” (Mueller, 1976:103).

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Date of access: 5 June 2015
Here Sen affirms that Christ who is Asian and he is needed in the Asian context. To present Christ to India, Christ needs to be of “Hindu character”. Sen (1979:216) confessed, “If you wish to regenerate us Hindus, present Christ to us in his Hindu character”. Therefore, Sen “repudiate the little Christ of popular theology, and stand up for a greater Christ, a fuller Christ, a more eternal Christ” (Parekh, 1931:160).

Even though Christ was the centre of Sen’s life and thought yet, his understanding of Christ was not based on Christian orthodoxy which affirms Jesus as God incarnate. Rather, he formulated his own doctrine, “the doctrine of divine humanity”. This doctrine denies the divinity of Jesus as it does not hold that Jesus is God incarnate and the unique son of God. However, Sen regards Jesus was more than human (Sen, 1979:230; Pape, 1976:59). Sen stated that to hold Jesus as divine and equal with father was “idolatrous and heretical as the concept of avatara in Hinduism” (quoted in Thomas, 1969:66). At the centre of this doctrine lies Sen’s conviction that God is in Jesus. Sen (1901:61) states, “The incarnation simply means God manifest in humanity, not God made man, but God in man”. But this dwelling of God is not unique to Jesus, rather all of humanity has the potential to have God dwell in them and hence to be “divinely human” and this is something all people can partake of (Sen, 1979:231). Even Gandhi (2007:135 believed, “If God could have sons; all of us were his sons”.

Sen’s doctrine of divine humanity is in contrast to traditional Christianity, which sees incarnation as a unique event and upholds Jesus as both fully divine and fully human. Here, Sen’s doctrine greatly contributes to his theological double religious identity, where he has a relationship with Christ, but not as Christ, the son of God. This could be because of his Hindu background, where he sees incarnation as equivalent with Avataar and therefore makes sense to him theologically. However, this doctrine allows him to uphold Christ for his moral greatness and divine humanity without having to embrace European Christianity and a Westernized Jesus which is not on a par with Hindu thought. In this sense he accommodates Christ into his own religiosity because he claims that this doctrine is a Hindu one. Sen asserts: “You will find on reflection that the doctrine of divine humanity is essentially a Hindu doctrine, and the picture of Christ’s life and character I have drawn is altogether a picture of ideal human life. Surely, the idea of absorption and immersion in the Deity is one of those ideas of Vedantic Hinduism...” (Sen, 1901:386).
Based on the Indian philosophy of Vedanta—especially Advaita Vedanta, which emphasizes the oneness and absorption with the creator - Sen is projecting Jesus as Asiatic. In doing so he is integrating Christian and Hindu doctrines, hence, his own double religious identity without embracing Christian doctrine.

In order to spread his ideas, Sen founded the Church of New Dispensation. According to Richard (1985:38) this new church has been described by some “as a new religion, cult movement or even an attempt at synthesis”. Sen saw himself as divinely appointed and commissioned to be “the leader of the New Dispensation in which all religions are harmonized and in which all men are summoned to enter as their spiritual home” (Farquhar, 1915:55). He attributed his divine inspiration (Adesha), on a par with Moses and Jesus. He used the symbols of “the cross, the Hindu trishul (three-pronged spear) and the Islamic half-moon and star as the emblem of his new indigenous Church” (Boyd, 2005:26-27). He also used the scriptures from these religions on a par with the Bible. The goal of this move was the unification of all mankind in Christ. Sen himself claims, “I do firmly believe that whatsoever is true and good and beautiful is of Christ. … Nay, I would go further, and declare Christ to be the Centre of this broad Church” (quoted in Boyd, 2005:36). He also claimed this church was good for all religion because of the exclusive revelation to Sen, “Let Asia, Europe, Africa and America with divine instruments praise the New Dispensation, and sing the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man”.  

Sen also “developed a system of asceticism, rituals and sacraments, including baptism and a form of communion, in which the elements were rice and water” (Boyd, 2005:26-27). Sen justifies this substitution of rice and water instead of bread and wine in an excerpt called “sacramental ceremony” of New Dispensation: “Are the Hindus to be excluded for partaking of the holy Eucharist? Will thou cut us off because we are rice eaters and teetotalers? That cannot be...Both unto Europe and Asia thou hast said, - eat my flesh and drink my blood. Therefore the Hindu shall eat my flesh in rice and drink thy blood in pure water, so that the scripture might be fulfilled in this land” (Sen, 1979:334).

391 After Sen left Brahmo Samaj because of the debate on wearing “distinguishing caste mark” he founded The Church of New Dispensation (Borthwick, 1977:59).
As Sen’s followers do not drink alcohol water is used and since rice is staple food bread is avoided. Thus Sen believes that “you have a national holy communion, at once Hindu and Christian” (Sen, 1979:281). Such an affirmation is in line with Sen’s conviction that the church must be Indian. However, for Sen to refer to his new dispensation rites as Eucharist is unjustifiable since Sen never liked to be called a Christian and Eucharist is a Christian sacrament. Nevertheless, the insight of Sen’s absorption of Hindu culture inorder to be Indian is appreciable.

The important question at this juncture is whether the substitution of elements in the Lords supper changes the meaning of Eucharist or is it a cultural adaption? In the Christian tradition of the last supper, wine and bread are sometimes replaced with other elements to make it more culturally appealing. But here one should distinguish between “essence” and “accident” (Livingston, 2006:596). Accidents, outward appearance of the elements, can be different according to the cultures in which the Eucharist takes place if the essence of the gospel (the sacrifice, life, thanksgiving, peace etc) can be communicated through the elements of a given culture. Likewise, in “the Church of New Dispensation” the cultural form (bread replaced by rice) can vary while the theological meaning of the Eucharist is maintained. Rice will appeal to the Indian community more than bread as rice is the primary crop harvested in India, especially Eastern India during the spring time, a season of love. This rice farming culture and the Eucharistic element can converge for the Inculturation of Indigenized worship in the following ways:

1. Life: Jesus said “I am the bread of life” (Jn. 6:48) for the whole world (vs.47-51). The bread, therefore, signifies life. In the same manner in Indian harvest context rice is not just a material object but rather life-sustainer element.

2. Peace: Eucharist calls for peace with God and peace with fellow beings as they are part of the Body of Christ. Likewise, harvest festival (rice) is a strong reminder that people need peace to survive and this festival helps to create, recreate and sustain it.

393 For instance, in one of his lectures-“India ask: who is Christ?”, Sen acknowledged - “Iam not a Christian, none of the numerous sects into which the church of Christ is divided would allow my creed to be identified with its own” (Sen,1979:198).

394 The Methodist churches do not use wine in their Eucharist rather they use grape juice. This is because John Wesley the founder of Methodist church had opposed to it. Cf. Ewbank (2009).
3. Thanksgiving: In Eucharist the participant commemorate the act of salvation and in response the church gives thanks. Similarly, rice is used as a medium of thanksgiving in the Indian context.

Moreover, Sen’s attempts to synthesize and adapt the Hindu cultural forms are also evident in the practice of *Hom*. In Hinduism context *Hom* refers to a fire ritual where offering to a deity is made into the fire, as fire itself is personified as deity (Johnson, 2009:144). In the Vedic Hinduism Agni is the supreme mediator of the “religious ceremonies and duties, serving as high priest who carries oblations directly to God from human beings”. The contradiction here is that if the offering is made to deities into the fire and, at the same time, fire itself is a deity then who is the mediator between worshipper and god? Nevertheless, Sen (1979: 336) uses the term Agni for his *Hom* ceremony in the “church of New Dispensation”, where the priest addresses the fire as: “O thou blazing Agni, great are thou, great among the force of creation. We shall honor thee because of thy greatness and majesty. Thou art not God; we do not adore thee. But in thee dwelleth the Lord, the Eternal, and Inextinguishable Flame.”

As stated, fire is a key element in Hindu worship and this has been inculturated in some forms of Indian Christianity, namely at Saccidananda Ashram where they use *aarati* for worship, as mentioned later in this chapter. But what is controversial in Sen’s inculturation is that he retains the use of the name *Agni* to address the fire. It is argued that Sen’s reference to *Agni* “is to a force that can burn sin and temptation” and “not to physical force” (Borthwick, 1977:217). If this is true then it is a redeeming / purging fire, a Christian understanding expressed through *Agni*. But he also refers to “the Buddha driving Mara away” (Sen, 1979:338). This shows that he was trying to borrow whatever suited his theological conviction. For Sen (1901:490) this synthesis shows how the “different rainbow colours are in the light of heaven”. The rainbow colour is a reference to different religion and their approaches to divine. Here we are confronted with the missiological question of contextualization and syncreticism.

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395 In Hinduism Agni is shown in deep red colour and has two faces, both with destructive and beneficient qualities. He has seven arms, three legs and seven tongues. See. [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Agni](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Agni) Date of access: 15 Aug. 2015

396 [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Agni](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Agni) Date of access: 15 Aug. 2015

397 *Aarti* is derived from two Sanskrit words- *Aa* means towards and *rati* means highest love for god. In Hindu ritual as an expression of love towards god a light wick is offered to God. It is used by taking the light camphor flamed (which is waved before murti (idol) and then passed around during puja (worship) to one’s eyes while receiving darsan (seeing) of god (Griffith, 1977:76-77).
In contextualization, the greatest obstacle is the fear of syncretism. Samartha believes, “it is meaningless to talk about the danger of syncretism”, “let not the Indian church waste its time on this topic” (quoted in Robinson, 2004:186). On the one hand, Samartha’s view is correct because any blending and mixing of meanings and concepts of Hinduism and Christianity can be viewed as syncretic and therefore meaningless to talk about syncretism in contextualization. But on the other hand, Samartha’s view cannot be accepted, because in the process of contextualization one has to distinguish between critical synthesis and uncritical syncretism.

Even though Sen places Christ as the indispensable centre of his vision of the New Dispensation, Sen’s ideas have been divorced from the understanding of the gospel – thus, leading to heretical teaching in his claims of a double religious identity: - Firstly, Sen did not hold that Christ was superior to other great human beings, infact, he considered all human beings a manifestation of divine and therefore divine. This resounds like the teaching of Arianism that denied the divinity of Christ. Secondly, Sen held that Christ was not man- God, an implied negation of the Chalcedonian creed held by Christian the church universally. Thirdly, Christ death is not seen as an atonement but an elimination of the self as an inherent part of liberation. This self- sacrifice is not self- negation but a means to achieve divine status. Anyone following self – sacrifice can attain the same status.

Nevertheless, Sen did propagate ideas about Christ and Christ’s relevance to his contemporaries in India. As Borthwick (1977:224) remarks, “Sen was actually a much more effective agent for the spread of Christianity than missionaries, because being an Indian he was not alien and met less resistance. The Brahmo Samaj and New Dispensation under Sen were channels for propagation of Christian ideas in India.”

As an “Asiatic” Sen believed that remembering the root of Jesus’ origin would encourage other people to embrace Christ, so he encouraged (the formation of ) an Indian Church that affirms the oriental origins of Christianity:

Behold, He cometh to us in his loose flowing garment, his dress and features altogether oriental, a perfect Asiatic in everything. Watch his movements and you will find genuine orientalism in all his habits and manners, in his uprising and down-sitting, his going forth and his coming in, his preaching and ministry, his very language, style and tone. Indeed, while reading the Gospel, we cannot but feel that we are quite at home when we are with Jesus, and that he is altogether one of us. Surely Jesus is our Jesus (Sen, 1901:365).
The picture of Christ as an Oriental Christ is an attempt “to interpret the nature of the Church in a way that made sense to people with a Hindu cultural background” (Boyd, 2005:30). Theologically, it is not just “an illustration of the response of a great Hindu who was gripped by Christ,” but also “as a demonstration of Christianity as parangi religion which make it difficult for a Hindu to accept the Christian Church as it is found in India” (Boyd, 2005:37). The church of New Dispensation raises important issues of *Khrisbhaktas* who are draw to Christ and His message but do not want to be baptized and be a part of any church as discussed later in this chapter and chapter six.

5.2.5 **Hindu Catholic Church**

Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907) a self-confessed Hindu-Catholic, a pioneering leader in nonconformist ecclesiology,\(^{398}\) was born into a high-caste Hindu Brahmin family in Bengal as Bhavani Charan Banerji. In his early days, Upadhya was influenced by K C Benerjea, (a Christian nationalist -his uncle) and his father, (a police officer), and this led him to join the nationalist movement. Later on, Upadhyay joined Brahmo Samaj due to the influence of Sen. The most important issue that influenced Upadhyay was Sen’s openness to Christ. As Lipner (1999:24) states, under Sen, “Upadhyay became a Brahmo and embarked a career that was to transform his devotion purely human Christ into the substance of orthodox Christian commitment”. While Upadhyay was captivated by Sen’s openness to Christ yet he went further than Sen. In 1890, while conversing with CMS missionaries he was convinced about the divinity and supremacy of Christ. Thus in the following year (1891) he was baptized.\(^{399}\) Then in the following year he took the membership in the Roman Catholic Church because he believed that the Roman Catholic Church respected and regarded Hinduism and understood well the natural theology.\(^{400}\)

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\(^{398}\)Upadhyay’s contribution to Indian theology goes well beyond ecclesiology, particularly in his explorations of intersections between Christian theology and Hinduism (Boyd 1975; Tennent 2000). Wilfred (1993:19-20) summarizes Upadhyay’s overall contribution, saying he was “a pioneer in exploring creative ways of relating Christian faith with the culture, tradition, philosophy and genius of India”.

\(^{399}\)Though he was baptized by an Anglican bishop, Upadhyay insisted on being baptized outside of a church so as not to be identified with the church of the colonizers. By the end of the same year, he became a Roman Catholic through a conditional baptism in which he was christened *Theophilius*, which he later translated as “Brahmabandhab,” “the friend of Brahman” (Jeyaraj, 2010:59).

Upadhyay “spiritual conversion (also) led to cultural conversion [where he embraced the] ways of western societies” (Baago, 1969:29). But in 1894 he chooses to re-embrace his Hindu culture, and as a part of it Upadhyay “put on the saffron robes of sannyasin” until his death (Baago, 1969:29). Upadhyay believed that as “he could believe as a Catholic, but behave, even think, as a Hindu” (Lipner & George, 1991:35). He openly declared (in 1898) his complex dual identity in his Journal Sophia: “We are Hindu so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholic [and therefore] we are Hindu Catholic” (Upadhyay, 2002:25).

Upadhyay’s label “Hindu –Catholic” is rooted in a firm certitude that Hindu culture and Catholic faith can be reconciled together even though it is a galling statement. Of course this is not the synthesis of two religions as Sen did but an affirmation of dual religious identity. Upadhyay expressed this in terms of dual dharma, namely Samaj dharma and Sadhana dharma (Painadath, 2008:94). For Upadhyay Samaj dharma (the community and cultural aspect) is found in Hinduism and Sadhana dharma (the soteriological aspect) is found in Catholicism (Robinson, 2004:19). It is in view of Sadhana that Upadhyay asserts, “A Hindu, so far as sadhana goes, can belong to any religion” - as the Hindu religion permits its adherents to follow an Ishta devta (quoted in painadath, 2008:94). But with regard to samaj one needs to be a part of the community and do the duties of the community. Therefore, for Upadhyay there is no conflict as far as Hindu- Catholic identity is concerned- one represents the cultural aspect and the other the spiritual aspect. This formulation has ecclesiological implications for Hindus who accepts Christ. If Upadhyay did not see a tension between Hindu identity and Christian identity, so if a Hindu accepted Christ there was no need to renounce their Hindu identity, as a pre-requisite to become a member of church.

But what is fascinating about this dual identity is that Upadhyay chooses to identify himself with a particular Christian tradition, Catholicism:- Is it because Catholicism was the true Christianity in Upadhyay’s view? This is dismissed by Upadhyay when he answered a query by a reader:- “The Catholic church alone knows the mind of Christ” (Upadhyay, 2002:213). This seems to be

401 Dharma is derived from Sanskrit verb dhri, which means “to sustain”. Dharma is the order that sustains the universe. In Hinduism, dharma refers to all forms of order and particularly in religious terms it refers to the moral standard by which human actions are judged. From the second century BC dharma was systematized in the book known as “Laws of Manu” (Smritis or Dharmasatras). Cf. Saraswati (1995).
a startling statement as the Catholic Church itself will not accept such an exclusivist approach. But Upadhyay’s makes it clear what he meant by “knowing the mind of Christ” in another article, “The chief hindrance to Conversion”, where he states that Indian catholics would not refer to themselves as Christians, because “Converts to Catholicism in general cling to their Indian social customs and change only their religion” (Upadhyay, 2002:202). If this is true then the label Hindu- Catholic seems to be a wise decision. If Upadhyay would have called himself a Hindu- Christian, perhaps he could have created confusion regarding the spiritual matters, the term “Christianity” is bit too vague. But by calling himself a Hindu-Catholic he is optimistic that his readers are aware of the fact that Catholicism allowed converts to adhere to their Indian culture during his time.

Though Upadhyay became a member of the Catholic Church, yet he had misgivings about the way the church was expressing her faith. Therefore, Upadhyay felt the need to “clothe Christianity in the garments of Hindu vedantic thought” (Boyd, 2005:64) because he felt that vedantic thought was not “enemy but an ally of Christian faith” (Wilfred, 1993:24). Moreover, Upadhyay felt that Greek philosophy was inadequate for proclaiming Christ to an Indian context—“It is extremely difficult for us to learn to think like the Greeks of the Old or scholastics of the middle age as our brains are moulded in the philosophical cast of our ancient country” (Upadhyay, 2002:24). Therefore, Upadhyay affirmed that, “If Vedanta philosophy can explain the Christian religion in a better way by showing its coordination of parts more explicitly than the graceo- scholastic system, it is certainly desirable that Christianity should be re-stated in terms of Vedanta” (Upadhyay, 1991b: 21).

Upadhyay saw a strong affinity between Catholicism (based on thomistic philosophy) and Vedanta and wanted to build a theology on Advaitic Vedanta for India. Upadhyay vedantic thought was based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas. As Upadhyay (1991b:23) himself categorically states, “Vedanta is in perfect accord with Thomistic philosophy from an ontological point of view”. Upadhyay’s reliance on Thomas is so intense that Lipner (1999:387) charges his theology “largely neo- Thomism in sanskrit disguise”. However, Tennent (2000: 379) sees Upadhyay as the first Indian Christian theologian to attempt “systematically to re-state Christian theology using indigenous vocabulary and thought forms”. Either way, this is a theological attempt on the part of Upadhyay to express his own dual religious identity.
Based on Thomism, Upadhyay’s distinguishes between natural and supernatural Law (Sumithra, 2002: 69). He stressed the Thomistic theory of natural knowledge where God implanted in the hearts of human beings God’s knowledge, independent of scripture or Christ (Tennent, 2000:153), which he termed “primitive theism” (Tennent, 2000:153). This “primitive theism” can be fragmentarily found in other religions (Tennent, 2002:161). For Upadhyay, *Advaita vedanta* was the “primitive theism” (natural revelation) and this was the foundation by which to reveal the supernatural law of Christianity. Therefore, he espoused a synthesis of *Vedanta* and Christian faith by relating the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to the Hindu intuition of *Saccidananda*. In *Advaita*, according to Aleaz (2007:10-11), to speak of *Brahman* as Sat-chitananda means that, “*Brahman* knows Himself and from that self-knowledge proceeds His eternal beatitude. *Brahman* is related of necessity only to the Infinite Image of His own being, mirrored in the ocean of His knowledge. This relation of Being (Sat) to Himself in self-knowledge (Chit) is one of perfect harmony, bliss (Anandam).”

God, according to Upadhyay, is one, eternal and infinite. The eternal being (Brahman), who is uncaused, has a reason for its own existence within itself (Upadhyay, 1991b:21). The eternal being exists on account of its own essence without being related to any other being for its existence. As a result, God is Infinite, because being finite entails a relation between two or more. If God is Infinite, then Upadhyay argues that it (neutral pronoun for God as per Upanishad tradition) must be one too. On this basis Upadhyay concludes: “There is only One Eternal Being who is the cause of all other things” (Upadhyay, 1991b:21). He relies on *Aitareya Upanishad* 1.1.1, to prove his point: “The Self, verily, was (all) this, one only, in the beginning. Nothing else whatsoever winked” (Upadhyay, 1991b:19). Thus *Brahman* is *Sat*, “that which is and cannot be is *Sat*”. This revelation according to Upadhyay has been corrupted by human perversity, but the light is visible in the darkest religion of the world.

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403 *Advaita* is a vedantic name for the doctrine of monism, one of the philosophical schools of *Vedanta*. *Advaita* affirms that there are no “things” but only *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. The basic teachings of Advaita are: There is only one basic reality, which is variously called *Brahman Nirguna* (attributeless) *Brahman Prajna* (consciousness). God in *advaita* is an impersonal, indefinable force. This force cannot be accurately described in words and so any description must be accepted in that notion. The *Nirguna Brahman* has not created the manifestation of the universe, it has become the manifestation, and that too only in appearance. In this becoming, the essential nature of *Brahman* remains unchanged, as Brahman by its very nature is unchanging, this becoming is only an apparent becoming. The individuals unquestioning are therefore not different from *Brahman*. Our sense of being separate psychological entities each with our own separate individual consciousness is an illusion caused by our defective way of thinking. This delusory power of our thinking is termed as *Maya: Aham Brahmasmi* (we are Brahman by another name) (Radhakrishna & Moore, 1957:515). Cf. Radhakrishna & Moore, 1957:508-43.
If Upadhyay unequivocally asserts the oneness of God, then how does he conceive God as triune? He chooses the concept of knowledge and love and states that God is infinite knowledge and love. But it poses a problem: - If God is Infinite Knowledge then what is the object of his Knowledge? Upadhyay responds by stating that the infinite object of God’s knowledge is God’s own self (Upadhyay, 1991c:109). When one knows oneself, the known self has some imprints differentiating it from the knowing self. If the knower and the known have no distinction then that is a puzzle (Upadhyay, 1991c:109-110). The knowing self is the father and the known self is the son (Cit). Here one becomes more than one, and grows into two “I” by virtue of Intelligence (Upadhyay, 1991d: 127-28). Moreover, knowledge makes its object more than what it actually is. When one sees the trees, s/he can conceive an indefinite number of imitation trees modelled after one object of his cognition. Here Brahman, the eternal being is essentially Cit. Brahman produces his self as Sabdabrahman (logos) by beholding. Upadhyay (1991f:189) states: “The infinite eternal God who cognizes his own self reproduced in thought is the father; and the same God who is the begotten image of divinity, who acknowledges the father in reason, is the logos, the son. This is the mystery of the timeless word- colloquy, which sweetens the divine bosom and fills it with joy ineffable.”

If God is love, then what is the manner of communication, as love implies communication? Upadhyay (1991e:134) states that God loves his own self. From God’s colloquy of reason proceeds his spirit of love which delights the divine bosom immeasurably. Thus Brahman is Ananda.

The concept of God as infinite knowledge and love raises further questions:- How can God be the knower and the known at the same time? How can God be loved and lover at the same time? Upadhyay points out that the inner life of God is a mystery and it is a foolish attempt to know the inner life of God by human reason. Upadhyay asserts: “Buffeted in their rationalistic struggle to uplift the veil of mystery which shrouds the infinite being, they have deserted the God of knowledge and love and have set up an impersonal, unknowable, algebraic something, which they call the supreme being” (Upadhyay, 1991c:110).

However, Upadhyia stressed the fact that it is only through Jesus Christ the eternal son who came to the world to give a fore glimpse of the inner life of God, can one have the revelation of God and some idea of inner life of God (Upadhyay, 1897:4).
Even though the comparative attempt on the part of Upadhyay to contextualise the Trinitarian concept to that of Saccidananda is significant, yet it not without criticism. Firstly, there is a methodological critique in relation to the usage of *cit*. In the advaitic philosophy there is no duality between the knower and the known. Rather *cit* is pure consciousness. As Potter (1981:71) states “the consciousness that is Brahman is not relational consciousness between the knower and the known”. Thus Upadhyay’s explanation of *cit* as self-knoweldge in order to preserve the relational nature of the Trinity does pose a problem to the vedantin.

Secondly, the majority of the Hindu populations are followers of popular Hinduism, with numerous gods and goddesses. This is considered by the Vedantin as a lower form of Hinduism. How can the Advaita thought appeal to them? Moreover, Advaita philosophy does not appeal to the tribals and Dalit because they consider the higher form of Hinduism to be oppressive.

Thirdly, the doctrine of Trinity should take into account the biblical witness and be faithful to it (Erickson, 1998: 323). But in Upadhyay’s assertion of the Trinity all biblical reference are lacking. Rather he starts from the advaitic idea of Saccidananda. Moreover, a true Trinitarian theology should start with the unity of God, keeping in mind the monotheistic belief in Jewish Christian tradition (Erickson, 1998:324).

However, Saccidananda as Trinity does open a new window for dialogue with higher class Hindus and it also highlights the convergence between Trinitarian monotheistic faith and the non-dualistic faith of advaita. This convergence however should lead to the biblical revelation of God revealed in Christ.

5.2.6 Evaluation of Indigenous Church

Christianity in India, unlike Hinduism, did not have its historical origin in India. Rather the Indian church has inherited its “history, tradition, institution and doctrine from the West” (Wilfred, 1993:7). This has resulted in foreignness and denominational divisions among Indian Christians. Since the 19th century, as seen in the above section, attempts have been made by Indian Christians, propelled by the nationalistic movements, to develop Indigenous churches to break all denominational barriers, and to reappraise and reimage Christianity in the cultural context of India- by reinterpreting the Gospel and person of Jesus Christ in the context of India. Some of the contributions and critique of these national churches were:
1. These indigenous churches developed a positive attitude towards Hinduism and other Indian religions. As most of these leaders have come from conservative Hindu families, their conversion to Christianity was considered as anti-Hindu and anti-Indian. Therefore the Indian leaders felt the need to bridge the gap between being Hindu Indians and being Indian Christians. As Copley (1997:216) affirms, some of these Indian leaders, alienated by their community and not fully accepted by the Europeans, tried to “to discover a new Indian Christian identity”. They believed that all their past did not need to be fully erased with conversion over against the common practice of their time.

2. The indigenous churches, especially, National Church of India and Christo Samaj stressed the promotion of Christian union. They hoped to gather all Christians under one umbrella and eliminating denominationalism. Even though this was a failed attempt during their time but, later in the beginning of 20th century many Church union were established. Moreover, it is even argued that the focus on denominational unity from the mission fields of India and Africa led to the Ecumenical Movement (Philip, 2005: 212).

3. The indigenous churches are blamed for the Brahminising Indian Christianity. These churches were mainly dominated by high caste Brahmin converts. As a consequence, theology became the given privilege of high caste, replicating the nature of caste system where the high castes were the owners of Hindu theology. Metaphysical and transcendental teaching (as in case of Sen and Upadhyay) of Indian Christian theology based on vedic philosophy (vedas for higher caste) also contributed to this hierarchy based on caste system. Due to this the popular religion of Hindus was neglected. As Caplan (1998:158) suggests, “these thinkers were resolutely focussed on the appraisal of the moral and ethical values in Hindu epic literature, and turned their face against the popular religion of Hindus”. Due to this limitation, the pioneering effort of indigenisation became irrelevant as most of the Christian converts were from lower class.

4. Even though these indigenous churches attempted to express their new faith by synthesizing cultural elements from Hindu religion, these seminal attempts have laid the foundation for an indigenous theology and it served as guidelines for others in the post-independence era.
5.3 Ecclesiological Models in Independence and Post-independence India

During the post-colonial era the significance and relevance of conversion became more perceptible when foreign missionaries were withdrawing and indigenous theological thinking focused more on the building up of a nationalist church. In addition, the strength of fundamental Hinduism in relation to Christianity became evident when they pressured the central and local states to pass regulation against conversion. This led to lots of atrocities being committed against Christians as they viewed Christianity as foreign religion. However, this opposition also forced Christian theologians to re-think the meaning and practice of conversion. As Felix (2003:189) notes, “The incidents of attack on the churches, Christians, religious personnel- condemnable and painful as they are- are also an occasion for the Christian community for a critical self-examination about its rootedness in the soil.”

While analyzing the ecclesiological discussion in India between 1950 and 1975 T.V. Philip (1976:177-87) pointed out “the self-identity of the Church”, “the Church as an open community” and “the unity of the Church” as the three main topics that have come under consideration. These topics on Indian ecclesiology point towards the influence of the early indigenous movements which attempted to make Indian church Indian. In all these three concerns the major issue raised was the form of the Church’s presence in Indian society. Philip (1976:178) emphasized the point that “It is by understanding ourselves as part of the history of the Indian nation and by participating in the divine movement in the life of our people that we shall understand what it means to be a Church in India”. This shift from institution to people, their commitment and participation had become the centre point in discussions after the post-independence among Indian Christian thinkers (Philip, 1983:240). For instance, Philip says: “For Chenchiah and Chakkarai, the Kingdom of God has central place in the Gospel. The Church is the fellowship, of Christians engaged in the transformation of the world towards the new creation. It takes place in the steam of life and is best expressed in the spirit filled fellowships” (Philip, 1983:240).

The major issue in the above discussion on ecclesiology, in the post-independence India is neither the affirmation nor the denial of the church but the question: what form should the church take in India? As a result there have been different distinctive theological models for dealing
with the problem of conversion. No model is complete in itself and they should not be regarded as being in competition with one another. They should be seen as being mutually complementary. The models described in this section are the kingdom model, the secular model, the inculturation model and the liberation model. These models are selected because broadly speaking they represent four different theological strands in response to conversion issue in India. What follows is the analysis of these models in the wider context of the nature of church and its relation with the Indian society at large. In this process different questions will be dealt with- Is the church a stumbling block to the mission in Indian society? Should there be a firm line between who is in and who is outside the church? Is church a counter-cultural community that challenges the norms of the society or is it part and parcel of culture and leads from within?

5.3.1 **Kingdom Model: “Seeking the Raw Fact of Christ”**

Hindu objections to Christian conversion prompted two opposite responses from Indian Christians and missionaries. One section of the Christian community represented by V.S Azariah continued to emphasize that the Church’s mission is evangelization. He stated the church is a “divine society created by God for the continuation of the world of the work that Jesus Christ began” (quoted in Kim, 2008:139). Azariah further asserts, “Jesus came to save men; the church exists to save men too; therefore the church is the divine instrument of evangelism in the world” (quoted in Kim, 2008:140). Azariah’s understanding of the church was pragmatic in nature, where the Christian mission is to create a witnessing community, the local church, which represents Christ in the world (Kim, 2008:140). Here the church-centric mission primary concern is the numerical growth of the church as an institution. In contrast, the metaphor of the church as body of Christ, (as a human divine organism) envisions growth as the very essence of the being of the Church rather than the primary aim or goal. This understanding of the church as a divine human organism offers a vivid perspective of evangelism, where evangelism is a subsidiary work of the church rather the very “mode of its being”.

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404Model here means an idea or a catch-word or phrase to explain the reality of the church. It is not used in sense of scientific or theoretical model.

405Kim Sebastian (2011) has dealt with these models as a response to the issue of conversion and poverty in the Asian context. His view is used as a catalyst in this section to describe the nature of the church in the Indian context in the conversion controversy.

Conversely, in the context of politicisation of mass conversion, the “Rethinking Group” of Madras,\textsuperscript{407}—based at Madras Christian College and consisting of Indian Christian thinkers,\textsuperscript{408}—asserts that the removal of the Christian community from their cultures and the change of religious affiliation were the root problem in Christian mission. They were against the missionary focus of the church as an institution as they felt it was not contextual in nature. Rather, they insisted an alternative model radically different from the church—that is, a centric mission where importance is given to Indian spirituality—“forms of worship and categories of thought” (Appasamy, 1956:102). Many Indian Christian thinkers favoured the idea of seeking the Kingdom. Amongst the most prominent were P. Chenchiah and V. Chakkarai—their ecclesiology in relation to the kingdom of God, continue to influence the Indian theological and ecclesiological thinking, especially their Christocentric theology for the renewal of the church and nation, which is discussed in the following sub-section.

5.3.1.1 Pandipeddi Chenchiah

Chenchiah who was born Hindu, and culturally still a Hindu, found the organized church of his time to be “western and foreign, introspective and quarrelsome more interested in administration than in Christian life” (Chrispal, 1988:30). Chenchiah anticipated that church in India should be a living church rather than a mere religious institution,\textsuperscript{409} and recalled, “As soon as Christianity entered the Roman Empire, Christians exchanged the living Christ for an elaborate ceremonial institution and later for a book, the Bible” (quoted in Thangasamy, 1966:134). Chenchiah (1938:50) saw that the institutional church in India has become “the centre of influence, the source of salvation, the object of loyalty” and thus had “identified with the core (Christ)” to the extent that it has obscured the “original nucleus”. This obscurity of the original nucleus (Christ) happened due to “doctrines and dogmas, worship and ritual, mysteries and ceremonies, [that has]

\textsuperscript{407} The Rethinking Movement received its name from book \textit{Rethinking Christianity in India} (1938) which was prepared in anticipation of the International Missionary Conference held in Tambaram (1939). The book was an actual response to Kraemer’s approach to the theology of religions. It also dealt with the practical problem of the Indian church in relation to the debate on mass conversion, the problem of proselytism, the need for integration of the Hindu Christian communities, the problem of Christian communalism (as seen from a Hindu perspective) and the need for an alternative model for Christian mission. See Devasahayam & Sunarisanam (1938).

\textsuperscript{408} Rethinking group consisted of P. Chenchiah, a lawyer and judge, V Chakkarai, a pioneer in organizing trade unions in south India, A.J Appaswamy, a pastor and later bishop of the church of south India, J. Jesudasan, pioneer of Indian Christian ashrams in India, A.N Sundersanam, editor of Guardian, G.V. Job and others of the group were all committed to Christ and at the same time were deeply influenced by nationalism (Suresh & Usha, 2005:208).

\textsuperscript{409} The institutional view of the church, which reached its climax in the 19th century, was nicknamed as hierarchology by Yves Congar (1964:45).
gathered around till at last the bright nucleus gets enveloped by a huge globe of tradition and testimony” (Chenchiah, 1938:50). Therefore, Chenchiah separated the institutional Christianity from Christ, which he calls- “the raw fact of Christ” (1938:51).

In comparison to other religions “Christianity is no better and no worse” because the church has sacrificed the “the vitality of a movement for the consolidation of a community” as it is with other religion.410 Chenchiah asserts, “A community is primarily “a consolidation,” “a drawing together” which is at the same time “a drawing away from the rest,” while a movement is “a flow,” a flow into a larger life. Christianity was a movement in the apostolic age, but a community in the Roman Empire. As a movement Christians conquered Rome.... Every religious movement lost the spiritual potentialities when once it becomes a community, a sect, a caste” (quoted in Thangasamy, 1966:25).

Based on the distinction of the church as a community and movement, Chenchiah distinguished between two types of Christianity- biological and institutional Christianity. The biological is a creative Christianity that provides “a new body and faculties for the creative operations of the Holy Spirit-- a Christianity that reproduces Christ in the Christian” (quoted in Thangasamy, 1966:25). Conversely, the institutional Christianity is feeble and weak which has compressed life “into a lower notation of church, ideology, organization, state power” (quoted in Thangasamy, 1966:25). It is in the institutional church that religion is smothering life, institution (church), displacing the kingdom of God and letter (Scripture), killing the spirit...they have largely become ends in themselves, hindering rather than conveying the truth of Christ” (quoted in Thangasamy, 1966:25).

Institutionalism and communalism (this is in reference to intolerance of Hindus and excessive zeal of the missionaries) are the two obstacles to evangelism (Chenchiah, 1941:18). Chenchiah firmly believed that communalism will disappear if the church stops recruiting people for church membership. Therefore he made a distinction between conversion and church membership. The reality of his time (which continues till today) was that the church was not satisfied with inner

410 This view is also picked up in our time by the emerging church movement. The movement states that Christendom, as opposed to the movement Jesus initiated has moved from being a dynamic movement to being a religious institution within its attendant structures, priesthood and sacraments. Cf. Dan (2003).
conversion (change of life) but wanted to uproot the converts culturally from their heredity and environment. This approach on the part of the church shows that if one does not join the church the conversion is incomplete and it is the duty of the missionary or evangelist to control and guide the converts. But Chenchiah argues vehemently against such attitudes of the missionaries’ and evangelists. He said: “We feel we ought to control and guide the new life. Cannot we leave it to God? We do not, because we think we convert and therefore we are responsible for the future of the convert. If we realize that God is the agent in conversion, we may be inclined to leave the future in his hands” (Chenchiah, 1941:23). This notion of God as the agent of conversion, rather than missionaries and evangelist, is a biblical truth that the church in India needs to grasp.

Chenchiah (1938:81) was against converts joining the church. In one of his article “Jesus and Non-Christian Faiths” he questioned, “Why should Hindu converts join the church?”(Chenchiah, 1938:81). In response he stated that such notion of joining the church is a “dogmatic interpretation of the missionary” (Kim, 2008: 141) and because the “Christendom have jettisoned the Kingdom of God which occupies so central place in message of Jesus and substituted in its place the church of which the master said so little” (Chenchiah, 1938:81).

For Chenchiah, the kingdom of God was the nucleus and essence of Christianity. He believed that the church had “ousted” and usurp the kingdom. He wrote: “Christianity took a wrong gradient when it left the kingdom of God for the church. Christianity is a failure we made a new religion of it instead of new creation. The church arrested the Kingdom when Peter added 3000 unto them- a fatal day for the kingdom community and a glorious day for the church”.

For Chenchiah the kingdom of God is a new creation with a new principle of life where “a new world order which transcends the old, and is without the basic limitations of sin and death” (quoted in Jathanna, 1981:83) rather than, a society with a cluster of doctrines that has its root in a non-Indian culture. In addition, the kingdom of God “is a new world order expressing a new cosmic power, the Holy Spirit. It still recreates man, world, and heaven. The kingdom of God is a continuation of the world, not merely a larger edition of it” (quoted in Devasahayam & Sudarisanam, 1938:28).

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If the kingdom of God is part of the kingdom then what is the difference? Here one needs to grasp Chenchiah’s understanding of the concept “world”. “World” for Chenchiah is another religion different from Christianity which he believes has the “pre- Christian revelation where one sees the spark of the Kingdom of God because Christ operates secretly in them” (Montenegro, 2007:27). Is Chenchiah proposing a *cosmo-centric* approach to other religion, where this other religion can also bring salvation in the same way as Christianity? Chenchiah response is that the salvific principle, Christ, the ruler of the Kingdom, is only located in Christianity. But in reality, this is the beginning of a long debate between two understanding, “Christo-centric” and “cosmo-centric” approach, that will continue to take the centre place in the in the world of missiology especially in relation to other religion.

The task of the Indian church according to Chenchiah is “to recover the kingdom of God as a vital term of Christianity” (quoted in Philip, 1983:230) where in a typical Indian spirituality one has a direct experience (*anubhava*) with Christ. This *anubhava* cannot take place when the church has taken the exclusive right not only to interpret the gospel but also to be a part of it. He believed the church “distracts our attention from the central fact” (Chenchiah, 1938:55) [experiencing Christ] because it draws attention to itself. Chenchiah wrote: “The calamitous fact is that doctrines, institutions, sacraments, priest and pastors, all join together under the name of the church and take the place of Jesus whom they in doctrine exalt as God” (1938:51). Moreover, “the Christian does not go directly to Jesus, but clings to the church, as the author of his salvation” (Chenchiah, 1938:51).

The Church in Chenchiah’s understanding is a “churchless Christianity”and a non- institutional (non- denominational and community-less) church. The ideal church “with Christ and Holy Spirit abiding with her,[I need ]to plunge into the very depth of Hinduism and come out, not with a patch work of beliefs, but with an enlarged and renovated life” (Philip, 1983:235). As seen with the indigenous church earlier, this ideal church also was a “school of research in Christian genetics which will concentrate more on yoga than on worship and will be an instrument and not an institution”-an ashram model community (quoted in Jathanna, 1981:86).
5.3.1.1.1 Ashram Model Community

Instead of the existence of the church, Chenchia propounded the Hindu understanding of *ashram* for Christian community.\(^{412}\) In *ashram* Chenchia saw a cradle for Indian form of Christianity as it was for Hinduism where it enabled it to grow from its tribal and ethnic character (Chrispal, 1988: 34). Chenchia wrote, “Our spiritual regeneration will come out of an Ashram. Ashrams will be the precursor of the Christian Church in India” (quoted in Philip, 1983:64) as this model has a deep respect and affiliation to Hindu mind and culture.\(^{414}\) By alluding to Indian spirituality and deep reverence for Christ, Chenchia (1941: 105) enumerates five characteristics of the Indian form of Christianity, 1) To worship in spirit and truth; 2) To conceive religion not as a belief but rather as a realization; 3) To live harmoniously with the nature and all human being as Christ lived; 4) Conception of religion as experimentation; 5) Absolute necessity of purity within and without (quoted in Chrispal, 1988:34).

This *ashram* spirituality based on Hindu heritage will enable the Indian Christians to receive a wealth of “emotion, sincerity and higher Christian life” (Chrispal, 1988:35). Especially, Chenchia was referring to the practice of *yoga*,\(^{415}\) which can transform oneself into the likeness of Christ (*Sadhanas*) (Chenchiah 1941:287), which can only be realized in ashram. Thus he saw an in-depth contextualization of Christian spirituality in relation to *yoga* which can help Hindus to realize Christ. He wrote: “The Hindus see only the common place Christianity in us. They do not find that there is anything in Christianity corresponding to the deeper levels of Hindu spiritual experience..., Hindu religious experiences mapped out in Yoga, take man from height to height” (Chenchiah, 1941:267).

\(^{412}\) Ashram is a place, removed from urban life, where spiritual and yogic disciplines are pursued. In Hinduism there are four stages of life: *Bramachari* (student life), *Grihastha* (the householder), *Vanaprastha* (forest dweller; withdrawal from concern of material things) and *Sannyasi* (homeless renouncer; concerned only with *Brahman*, the absolute). *Moksha* (liberation from rebirth) will only be pursued in the last two stages of a person’s life. Applying this aspect Indian Christian have started Christian ashram’s in order to contextualise the gospel. See Raj (2000:334-353).

\(^{413}\) Robert de Nobili was the first to introduce the ashram model followed by Brahmabandhab, K.T Paul and N.V Tilak. But it gained momentum from the time of IMC meeting at Tambaran when Chenchia and the rethinking group included a chapter in their book *Rethinking Christianity in India* (1938) as the main thesis.

\(^{414}\) Well known Hindu thinkers who were influential in their time and even today through their philosophy have all used the ashramic model “for their own modern pursuits of education, national freedom and renaissance of Hinduism” (Chrispal, 1988: 34).

\(^{415}\) The origin of *yoga* is a pre- Vedic Indian tradition that deals with physical, mental and spiritual practice which is prevalent in Hinduism. But today June 21 is celebrated annually as the International day of yoga since its inception in 2015. The proposal for this was laid by the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi at United Nations assembly, who is also a core RSS cadre. His main intention is also to create a Hindu Rashtra.
Here again he saw Christian faith in terms of spirituality not in terms of repudiating one’s socio-cultural life for becoming a member of the Church. That is a religion-less Christianity: “There will be no baptisms, no confessions of faith - no creedal profession ... (The Hindu) will slowly and in different degrees come under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, without change of labels or nomenclature. ... The change will be in the realm of spirit - not in the region of nama (name) and *rupa* (form)” (quoted in Job, 1938: 190).

Chenchiah believed that ashram can become a crux of evangelism not in the sense of conversions but as a means of imparting the mind and heart of Christ. Here no outside creed and communal engrafting takes place rather the converts (in relation to Christ) will give the form and figure to Christ. In such a close *anubhava* of Christ, the transformation will take place and this transformation will be witnessed by the other religious people and thus they will be attracted and enquire about Christian faith. Thus, absence of all formalities in *ashram* will enable people to find true spirituality and will lead to the likeness of Christ. But does this self-giving of form and figure to Christ lead to transformation or syncretism? In response Chenchiah states, that on the one hand syncretism is inevitable where different varieties meet. On the other hand, syncretism reveals experiences which are different and this difference will draw together a common redemptive effort. In this context, Chenchiah views Christ as the cause of syncretism at the “depth of humanity” (quoted in Chrispal, 1989: 36).

5.3.1.2 **Vengal Chakkarai**

Vengal Chakkarai, a colleague of Chenchiah and a member of Rethinking group, was a Hindu convert, and was captivated more by the Person of Christ than by Christianity. He wrote, “In my own case, it was the mysterious nature of Christ that arrested my attention; his retiring to the mountain to pray, his sudden silences, his sadness, his detachment from the world” (Chakkarai, 1932:31). Chakkarai could easily relate with Christ as a *Rishi* or *Sadhu*. Within the Hindu world view *Rishi’s* or *sadhu’s* detach from the world and spend time in meditation. But Chakkarai states that Jesus is more superior to *Rishi or Guru* due to Jesus’ “mysterious grandeur” and “the glory [reflected] in the face of Jesus”. It is this aspect of Jesus that mesmerized Chakkarai (Chakkarai, 1932:130).
Like Chenchiah, Chakkarai also detached himself from the institutional church and gave it a minor place in theology. He writes: “In my humble life, the Lord Christ has been always first and last and the Church nowhere. That the spirit of Christ should dwell in our hearts richly in all wisdom is of more serious interest than that we should organize an efficient Church with all the accessories which have been developed in the struggles and trials of centuries of Christianity” (Chakkarai, 1917:241).

Chakkarai rejected the concept of the visible church as it was not instituted by Jesus or a part of Christian revelation; rather it was the western idea of church. He asserted that the institutionalized church is “the tents put up by our Western friends; but they can never be our permanent habitation” (quoted in Chenchiah, 1938:119). Instead, he emphasised that Indian Christians should seek the kingdom of God which the Lord “announced and for which He gave His life” (quoted in Chenchiah, 1938:119). He never negated the positive elements of the institutionalized church but he could not identify these elements in the “revelation of Christ Himself” since they are not eternal and not of “divine essence” (Kim, 2011:83).

Similar to Chenchiah, Chakkarai also stressed that the kingdom of God is the beginning and end of the gospel, which was the central focus of Jesus. Therefore, in India if people of other faiths needs to experience Christ it cannot be objectified through church - because in Indian spirituality God is the ultimate reality, nothing can be “indispensable to his perfection or plenitude” (Teasdale, 2003:85). In such understanding, the church “will never be the fundamental preoccupation of the religious strivings of Indian Christians” neither today nor in the days to come (quoted in Philip, 1976:155). Thus, Christ is to be known through a personal experience as in the case of the Samaritan lady without the church. Chakkarai writes, “we are required to know him or rather be known of him without intermediation of any system, much less a system that is foreign to us ... (it) would be a substitute for the Truth, as it is in Him” (quoted in Devasahayam & Sudarisanam, 1938:107). In addition, he stated that such substitute shows lack of faith in the Lord, “When the divine idea of unity in Him fades away, the human idea of Church unity takes place” (quoted in Philip, 1976:164). Thus, in order directly experience Christ

\[\text{\textsuperscript{416}}\] For Chakkarai the institutionalized church was the seen as the extension of incarnation and this was for him hegelianism -The hegelian understanding of church as the extension of incarnation was later propounded by John Nevin. “It meant that the Church is the historical continuation of the life of Jesus Christ in the world. It stressed that by the incarnation of the Son of God, a divine supernatural order of existence was introduced into the world, which was not in it as part of its own constitution before” (Nevin, 1966:55).
Chakkarai formed “The South India Christo Samaj”, an expression of national Christianity. But this was not the only form of church in Indian context rather; there are other centres outside the church. Here we see the antecedents of “Christ-centred fellowships” formulated by M. M. Thomas. Chakkarai believed that life in the Lord is not expressed through one particular way but rather through many forms. Thus in Rethinking Christianity he wrote:

> Here in India the Christian community is the Body of Christ. A common life will animate it; the churches, the evangelists, the gurus and schools will be organs through which this common life will manifest itself.... The Holy Spirit does not imitate but inspires. ... It is not in the externals of its organization ... but, in its witness to the Spirit of Christ, as the voice of one in the wilderness, calling ever unto men, hurrying on, to pause and to reflect, to repent and be reborn; protesting as an alien force against the world’s life, its culture and civilization, and its power of Babel; it is a witness to the faith and as the faithful among the faithless . . . that the Church is the Body of the Lord, His vicar, the moving shadow and representative on earth of those realities that live in the external realm (Devasahayam & Sudarisanam, 1938:108).

Here we see a tension in Chakkarai’s understanding of the church. On the one hand, he categorically states that the church is not the revelation of Christ but, on the other hand, he states that it is the body of the Lord and His vicar. If the church is not the revelation of Christ how can it be the body and vicar of the Lord? For Chakkarai, the institutionalized church was not the revelation of Christ as it was a conception, a historical product of the west. Therefore, he condemns the captivity of the Indian church “to western ecclesiasticism, to western theology with its creeds, confessions and liturgy, western money and personnel and western political imperialism” (quoted in Philip, 1976:159). This Chakkarai calls as “safe slavery where one can toil without thought” and remain slumber under the burden of traditionalism of the west (quoted in Philip, 1976: 159).

Such thought provoking ecclesiological understanding did not receive much applause in Chakkarai’ time rather, he was blamed for negating the church as western product (Samartha, 1974:131). Nevertheless, Chakkarai’s contribution to ecclesiological thinking can be seen from three perspectives. Firstly, to liberate the Indian church from the clutches of foreignness, both culturally and politically, this was an important step towards making the church Indian and to alarm the already alienated church of his time. Moreover, his understanding of the church as a place beyond some cultic practice, motivated towards social action in the world, encouraged the young Indian Christians to be part and parcel of the national movement (Chakkarai, 1932: 242). Secondly, Chakkarai was not interested in Indianisation as a mere change of external forms or
translation of western contents to Indian thought. Rather, he pointed to the fact that one can realize Christ within the Indian spiritual tradition and therefore, contextualization was the very being of the church. This was a natural way of expressing life by the Indian Christian community. Thirdly, his major contribution was that there are other forms of fellowship outside the church who are the bhaktas of Christ, which is part of the Body of Christ. It is only through them that one can “permeate and regenerate the existing society with Christ’s experience.”

Conversely, there are some important negative aspects of Chakkarai’s understanding of church. Firstly, the dichotomizing of individual experience and communitarian experience is unbiblical and unchristian. Christian spirituality is shared experience (koinonia) rather than erimos (solitary) spirituality of the Indian tradition. In addition, how can such spirituality create fellowship with Christ outside Church, if the communitarian aspect is not stressed? Secondly, Chakkarai failed to address the importance of denominational unity which was becoming a stumbling block for the proclamation of the gospel. Instead, he tried to do away with the concept of church itself, which metaphorically meant throwing the baby with the water. Thirdly, the complete dichotomy between the kingdom of God and the church is unbiblical. Of course the kingdom and the church cannot be identified but that does not mean it is separable. As Ladd (1993: 117) asserts:

> While there is an inseparable relationship between the Kingdom and the church, they are not identified. The Kingdom is God’s reign and the realm in which the blessings of his reign are experienced; the church is the fellowship of those who have experienced God’s reign and entered into the enjoyment of its blessings. The kingdom creates the church, works through the church and is proclaimed in the world by the church. There can be no kingdom without a church- those who have acknowledged God’s rule – and there can be no church without God’s kingdom; they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and fellowship of men and women.

In the above statement one can see five specific aspects in the relationship between the kingdoms: the church is not the kingdom, the kingdom creates the church, the church gives witness to the kingdom, the church acts as the instrument of the kingdom; and the church acts as a custodian of the kingdom. Therefore to do away completely with the church is unbiblical.

Nevertheless, Chenchiah and Chakkarai’s understanding of kingdom was even supported by some foreign missionaries like, C.F. Andrews, E. Stanley Jones and A.G. Hogg. In the problematic context of mass conversion and its political implications in India all of them said that “the solution [to the crisis of conversion] was seeking the kingdom of God, in the sense of
promoting Christian values in Indian society” even though “their approaches and theologies were quite different” (Kim, 2011: 83).

5.3.2 **Secular Model: “Christ Centred Fellowship”**

Towards and after independence, as seen in the earlier discussions the major disquiet especially among the Indian Protestant theologians was connected with the “relationship between the Christian community and the Hindu community particularly the question of whether converts should leave the Hindu community and join the Christian community, and what joining the church entailed” (Kim, 2008 :81).

Parekh, a Hindu convert was a prime critic of the church on the issue of conversion. Even though he was baptised he refused to join the visible church - he felt that the institutionalised church has become a *kaum*, a socio- political entity that is governed by its own rules rather than being a spiritual fellowship, reflecting kingdom values. While writing to Indian social reformer’s editor Parkeh (1919:240) states:

> My main contention is that the present method of evangelism has resulted in the creation of a Christian community which is entirely proletarianised, denationalised, anglicised and materialised: that in as much as the missionaries have kept their caste or varna pure it is unjust to the higher castes of the Hindus: that in as much as this community would have separate political privileges, it would end in organizing in India what is nothing less than an anti- Hindu counter state which would be ruinous to the best interests of both the Indian civilization and the kingdom of God: about that all this is absolutely contrary to the command of St. Paul and of the Lord Jesus Christ...

Parekh’s sharp criticism arose in the context of mass conversion and mass baptism where the form of churches, a new hybrid of Christianity, took the western cultural mores and separated itself from cultural roots of the land of the converts’ birth. In addition, the act of baptism after conversion, as a religious rite, also encouraged the person to leave one’s religious community and enter the other. For Parekh this seems to be a rite of passage to earn membership in a anglicised, westernised and materialised community which was aiming to increase its numbers for the sake of “political strength and bargaining power” (Parekh, 1974:184). He called such practice as the cheapening of baptism and compared such numerical growth as increase in “Pharisaism and betrayal of Christ” (Parekh, 1953:390). This practice of the church has led to see baptism as “unessential to faith and harmful to the spiritual life of such disciple” (Parekh, 1924:324).
It seems derogative that Parekh viewed the church of his time as a socio-political entity. The reason behind this is that the protestant Christian mission identified Christianity with the western culture and conversion to Christianity was a transfer from one’s culture to western culture - this developed a “mission compound mentality” (kaum), which separated the Christian church from its neighbourhood. There were less converts from higher castes, as that of Parekh, as the majority of the converts came from lower castes. The lower castes perceived conversion as liberation from caste bondage, and for this reason Dalit and tribals were influenced to convert to Christianity.

During the mass conversion many Christians suggested that the “goal of Christianity was to increase the numerical strength” (Forrester, 1975:8). This perception led to a negative label being affixed on Christianity, namely, politicisation of conversion. Criticism was raised against Christian churches, “an attempt was made to gain political clout” (Beaglehole, 1967:63) by increasing the number of Christsians through conversion of backward classes. This accusation is reflected in the Niyogi report, mentioned in Chapter four, which is still used as a target against Christian churches by the Sangh parivar.

The accusation against Christians for politicising conversion was justified by the statement issued by the churches in the Catholic Leader in response to abolishing separate electorates for depressed class:

Under a system of separate electorates, the Christian members could have counted on the support of the depressed classes. Now they have definitely decided to merge themselves with the Hindu, the Christian members will be isolated. We shall cut ourselves more and more adrift from the ruling community and the position and prestige enjoyed by us may be severely impaired. Now that the condition have changed so radically would it not be wiser to change our policy and seek to influence the majority community by a system of joint electorate... (quoted in Oddi, 1998:142)?

The socio-political implication of conversion has given the Indian church an image of a social community with a political intention, instead of a fellowship of faith or the People of God. The term “people of God” is used in first Peter, written largely to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are a people of God; once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).
Peter here applies the prerogative of the Sinai covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel to the Gentile Christians\(^{417}\) of his time, who were feeling that they were aliens and persecuted by their neighbours (1 Pet. 2:12). Exodus 19:4-6 reads: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priest and a holy nation.”

The People of God, when used without qualification can lead to a monopolistic and egotistical attitude that was very vivid in the spirit of the missionary enterprise. But when used with the qualification of special covenant relationship (Exod. 19:3-6), it denotes responsibility rather than privilege (Anderson, 1966:58). Thornhill (1988: 20) asserts that “the election does not mean being called forth from the rest to have privilege of being different; it means being called forth from the rest to have privilege of existing for the rest”. God did not call Israel to be an exclusive separateness; he called them to be light to the nations. Israelites have lived in complete obedience to the ethical demands of the covenant. By this covenant, “Israelites have come to form a single family, a communion of life because they were bound to the same God, bound among themselves, bound of life to be shared and lived together” (Burns, 1983:159).

Based on the reflection of the people of God, there is an explicit distinction between those who are and those who are not God’s people of the Covenant. But this distinction is not valid between the members of the church, who are the whole people of God in communion. In Indian context, those who got converted due to material gain (the lower castes) forgot their duties and responsibilities and became suddenly conscious of their rights and privileges. A similar scenario led to the creation of the Latin and Syrian churches. The Latin Church was represented by the

\(^{417}\) In the past scholars have argued that on the basis of the Old Testament character, (1 Pet. 3:6,20), the number of Old Testament quotations (1 Pet. 1:24-25; 2:6-8; 3:10-12) and allusions to the Old Testament (1 Pet. 1:16; 2:3,7-10; 3:14; 4:18; 5:5) being referred in first Peter, this epistle was written to diaspora Jews. However this is not so because some of the readers could have been God fearers or proselytes prior to faith in Christ and therefore have been familiar with the Old Testament (Kostenberger, 1998:200). However, there are many references that points towards a Gentile audience as the recipient of the epistle. For e.g. Peter mentions that they were in ignorance (1 Pet. 1:14), an unlikely address to the fellow Jews, they have become daughters of Sarah (1 Pet. 3:6), a title that suits better Gentile women than Jewish women who enjoyed that status. The strongest indication for a Gentile Christian audience can be seen in chapter 4:3:- “you have already spent enough time doing what the Gentile like to do, living in licentiousness, passion, drunkenness, revels carousing and lawless idolatry”. Even though, the Old testament prophets have charged the Jewish people of doing what the Gentiles like to do, yet addressing the diaspora Jews as “lawless idolatry” is unwarranted because if they had been involved in such activities they would have given up Jewish religious identity (Schnabel, 2004:1521)
lower caste and the Syrian church represented by the higher caste. This division is a bane to the witness of Christ because the church who criticised the caste division in Hinduism has become an agent to practice the caste system. This is used as an accusation against the church by the people of other faiths.

The new status as people of God have made the Gentile Christians aliens and exiles in their own community (1Pet. 2:11) like their forefather Abraham who lived as a foreigner in the promised land (Heb 11:9-10). Though they have not changed their location, yet they have become strangers in the community, which is the characteristic of being the people of God. Schnabel (2004:1522) notes: “The missionary task is difficult because of their identity as Christians- ‘strangeness and alieness’. The cause of this strangeness and alieness of Christians in their relation to society at large is their identity as people of God. The internal distance from society (as deliberately different behavior and as experienced rejection) is characteristic.”

This raises fundamental questions about the nature of the church and its mission: - how should Christians live as the people of God in a non-Christian society as that of India, with a different life style?

Peter exhorts that the new identity as people of God should be reflected by their lives; witnessed by conduct (1Pet. 2:1; 13-17; 3:1-9). The challenge to the new conduct is addressed to the whole church and is not restricted in any way. Amidst persecution they are not to flee from the world but to participate in the world and be witnesses through their conduct. Kostenberger (1998:206) comments: “Peter believes that the Christian life style, if it is a consistently holy life style, has unique qualities that will render the gospel proclamation attractive”. This type of witness is crucial in Indian society where direct forms of evangelism are becoming difficult.

It is this conduct that was missing in Parkeh’s time which led him to criticise the church as a socio-political entity aiming to increase its numbers through baptism. This does not mean that Parekh was against baptism, infact he suggested that baptism is important to “Christian discipleship and is commanded by Christ” (Parekh, 1924: 325). He himself had taken baptism and stresses that is a novel experience: “For some mysterious reason I took baptism after which I had wonderful peace in my heart which prevails today even after 40-42 years. It was a novel
experience for me and I have seen and heard it happen to very few people. Receiving this peace [after baptism] must have been the result of some immense grace of God” (Parekh, 1974:154).

Parekh (1924:326) viewed baptism “as an unequivocal and open confession of the discipleship to Christ”, where the disciples receive authority to declare the name of Jesus to others. However, he was critical towards the practice of baptism as a rite, where the converts joins a community by extraction from one’s community of birth and kin without having a commitment to Christian discipleship.

During Parekh’s time the Church failed as the people of God and this led Parekh to insist that the church in India should be “Hindu Church of Christ”. This alone can be “the only possible Church of Christ in Hindustan” (Thomas, 1969:58) which will remain faithful to Christ and context. Parekh’s attempt to synthesis and bring harmony between Hinduism and Christianity led to controversy, (as was the case with earlier attempts) and debate with Azariah who denied such attempts of “pure spiritualisation of baptism and Christian life” (Kim, 2008: 89). Furthermore, these attempts did not lead to a positive stage of Indian theological construction,” (Boyd, 1974:21). Nevertheless, Parekh thoughts had a considerable influence on people like Kaj Baago and M.M. Thomas – who adopted new approaches to conversion and it had a considerable influence in Indian church missiology (Boyd, 1974:21).

Baago in an article in the International Review of Mission, entitled “The post colonial crisis of mission (1966)”, contested that the most important duty of the church in the post-colonial context is to re-think and re-evaluate her position and attitude towards other religions especially on the problem of conversion (Baago, 1966:322-32). Baago raised certain questions with regard to the validity of conversion in India. Baago asserts that:

- The question which is asked now is not: “Where and how and through what means should men be converted to Christianity?”, but rather: “Shall they [people of other faiths] be converted at all?” and “Do they have to be incorporated into church organisations which are utterly alien to their religious traditions?” “Do they have to call themselves Christians- a word which to them signifies a follower of the Western religion?” “Should they necessarily adopt the Christian traditions, customs and rites which often have their root in Western culture more than in the Gospel? Are all these things conditions for belonging to Christ (quoted in Kim, 2008:89)?

In several articles his response to these questions was non-affirmative. He stressed that it was unnecessary for Hindus to take baptism and join an institutional church as the present church has
no resemblance with the kingdom of God as described in the New Testament. Baago wrote, “It might very well be that these two have nothing to do with each other” (Baago, 1967: 219). He distinguished between “Christianity as a religion and the gospel message- Christ” (Baago, 1967:219). 418 In addition, he stated that “Neither the Bible nor the teachings of the Church are the truth. The truth is a person, Jesus Christ himself... You only become a Christian if Christ makes himself known to you and creates faith in you. The Christian religion is not the truth; He is the truth” (Baago, 1966b: 14). Therefore, moving away from traditional mission approach Baggo (1966a:331-32) suggest that:

The missionary task of today cannot, therefore, be to draw men out of their religions into another religion, but rather to leave Christianity [Institutionalised Church] and go inside Hinduism and Buddhism, accepting these religions as one's own, in so far as they do not conflict with Christ, and regarding them as the presupposition, the background and the framework of the Christian gospel in Asia. Such a mission will not lead to the progress of Christianity or the organized Church, but it might lead to the creation of Hindu Christianity or Buddhist Christianity.

In spite of the fact that in the past there has been an attempt to integrate Hinduism and Christianity (as in case of Upadhyay, Sen and others) yet, Baago’s mission approach was not to find synthesis between Hinduism and Christianity but rather to convert to Hinduism or other native religion. This is because Baago did not see any solution taking place through the synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity, as the institutionalized church has inherited its identity from the colonial past and therefore it is an illegitimate vessel to hold the gospel. Therefore, this gospel – Christ (norm of Christian faith) who is not bound by culture or religion- (including Christianity) - should be allowed to grow in within Hinduism (Kim, 2008:90). 419

The challenged posed by Baago regarding converting to Hinduism received various responses from different quarters, especially among several well- known Indian Christian leaders. Among these the noteworthy response came from the interaction between Thomas and Lesslie Newbigin which was termed as the “Thomas-Newbigin debate” (Hunsberger, 1998a:176) - untill today this debate “remains the most sustained and theologically reflective discussion to date” (Tennent, 2005:173).

418 In his several writings even Jones, a contemporary of Baago makes a distinction between Christ and Christianity (Jones, 1925, 13-14; 1979:242-45).
419 Baago gave a detail analysis of mission history and Christianity to show that Christ and his gospel are not bound by Christianity (Baago, 1966).
Regarding Baago’s question “Does a Hindu have to become a Christian in order to belong to Christ?”, Newbigin responded that the problem with Baago’s question is that he has filled the term “Christian” with a lot of “colonial baggage” thus obscuring the word of its biblical meaning (Newbigin, 1969:106). The biblical meaning for conversion and the aim of Church’s mission involves “calling of men and women to be converted, to follow Jesus, and to be part of his community” (quoted in Hunsberger, 1998a: 159). Newbigin further states that “the New Testament knows nothing of a relationship with Christ which is purely mental and spiritual, unembodied in any of the structures of human realtionship” (Newbigin, 1969:106). Therefore for Newbigin (1969:107), “True conversion involves both a new creation from above, which is not merely the act of extension of the existing community, and also a relationship with the existing community of believers. The real question is: What is the relation between these two?” To show this relationship, Newbigin (1969:104) cites the example of Gentile conversion as disputed in Jerusalem Council (Acts15) and states that “while there was no question of making the Gentile converts mere extensions of Judaism, they were certainly incorporated into a visible and definite community” or in other words, the new converts should not only confess “ the finality of the relavlation of God in Jesus Christ, but also (understand)the necessity of this community( church) as part of the response to that revelation” (Newbigin, 1969:107).

It is in the context of Newbigin’s affirmation that Church’s mission involves conversion and participation in Christian fellowship along with Baago’s denial of the necessity of church that Thomas enters the debate. Thomas (1971:38) implicated both of them of “confusing and mixing” two different questions and introduced the core question in mission ecclesiology- what form should church in India take? Thomas (1971:13) states that the church in India has become “an exclusive Christian caste or closed communal group instead of being an open, outgoing, fellowship in the larger society”. Therefore, for Thomas the new humanity (produced by faith in Christ) is not bound by the church rather it transcends the church boundaries and develops a visible fellowship of the believers. This visible community according to Thomas is “Christ-centered fellowship of all believers” which “transcendence the Church [boundaries] over
religious communities, which makes possible the Church’s taking form in all religious communities” (Krass, 1972:70).

For this fellowship to take root in all religious communities, Thomas urged the Christian mission to get rid of the traditional understanding of conversion based on “pietistic individualism”, which led to the isolation of the church from others and break open its communal structures to participate in the people’s struggle for the “realisation of humanity” (1966:356 59). This will enhance the church to build a fellowship with the community by overcoming the forms of church that is “based on creeds and theology to become an open fellowship able to witness, in all religious and secular communities, to Christ as the bearer of both true human life and salvation” (Kim, 2011:91).

The combination of Christian self-identity and secular solidarity will lead to building a Christ-centred fellowship where conversion will not be practiced in the traditional mission but, “Conversion to Christ does not necessarily imply conversion to Christian community isolated from communities in which they live but rather ... it implies the building up of a Christ-centered fellowship of faith within society, culture and religion in which they live, transforming their structures and values from within” (Thomas, 1971:74).

“Christ-centred secular fellowship” which transforms the evil structures and leads to humanization was seen as the “manifestation of the new reality of the Kingdom at work in the world of men in world history” (Thomas, 1971:17). Therefore, the mission of the church should also take into account all “religious and secular movements which express man’s (sic) search for the spiritual foundations for a fuller and richer human life” (Thomas, 1971:11). In such context, the Indian understanding of Jesus will be the “Divine Head of Humanity” through whom the Holy Spirit brings humanity into a sonship relationship with the Father, ultimately uniting all

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420 Thomas’ position that the new humanity in Christ transcends the church is rooted in “his interpretation of the dialectical theology” of Karl Barth and Hendrick Kraemer. He maintains that “Barth’s Christ centric relativization of all religion’s as the most fruitful theological starting point to interpret religions”. But he gives significant interpretations. “Barth should have recognized that because Christ transcends the Christian religion while affirming it, he is free to do the same with other religions. Because “Christ relativizes all religions he cannot be confined to any religions” (quoted in Knitter, 1985:111).

421 This was in line with the WCC understanding of salvation and humanisation as discussed in the Upssala assembly (1968). The assembly challenged its member churches to take this issue: “We belong to a humanity that cries passionately and articulately for full human life. Yet the very humanity of man and his societies is threatened by a greater variety of destructive force than ever. And the acutest of moral problems of all hinges upon the question: What is man” (quoted in Sumithra, 1992:77)?
their struggles for humanization. Thus, for Thomas, “salvation itself could be defined as humanization in a total and eschatological sense” (Thomas, 1971:18-19).

Thomas understanding of secular fellowship did not mean to make the gospel secular. Rather, without being communal, 422 nor losing one’s spirituality or being completely absorbed to Hinduism, the secularization of the Christian community will narrow down the gap with the wider Hindu community (Thomas, 1972a:88). This secular fellowship is viewed by some theologians like Kim, as unrealistic in the context of Dalit converts. Kim (2011:93) states that, Dalit do not identify with the Hindu community, therefore if they are denied the sense of community, this will lead to the denial of religious identity which they gained through Christianity. Moreover, it raises a further issue: is salvation only the transformation of this life, the salvation which is realized here and now? How does one view the theology of the cross in relation to salvation from sin that is at work behind all dehumanizing forces?

Thomas viewed the cross in relation to sin, which is both personal and structural:

It was desire to be like God that led to the fall of Adam and eve. Man knew he was not the maker of the universe and master of destiny; that he was helpless without God, dependent on God, finite and a creature. But man wanted to be like God- self- sufficient, independent, and infinite; he wanted to be creator, the centre round which the whole universe revolved. And it was this rebellion of man against his own finite creature- hood- this anxiety to be self – sufficient and independent-in other words to be God, to have the world revolving round his self at its centre- it was this spiritual pride that marred the divine image that he was. This was then is original sin – man’s declaration of independence of God or man’s desire to become God; his denial of the Lordship of God; making his own goodness ultimate- this is the original sin of man (Thomas, 2002:22).

Here Thomas interprets sin in an individualistic sense, “as a rebellion of finite human self against God” with implications for the wider community. When human being takes the driving seat of his own life instead of God, he automatically takes control over his neighbour. Consequently, instead of respecting the other he tries to exploit the other for “self- gratification” which leads to “conflict, division and slavery” (Thomas, 1960:55). In addition, “evil works not only through the individual person but also through the exploitative social structure which humiliates mankind” (Thomas, 1974:4). The redemption of individual sin will not ultimately lead to the redemption of

422 Thomas (1971:14) states that Christian communalism is the explicit idea of excluding the other, which ultimately takes the dimension of eliminating those who do not agree with our perception. This he states was the spirit of missionary movements that followed a Crusading spirit of Semitic Messianism. The crusading spirit pervades the modern political and social ideologies such as capitalism, communism, and fascism, has its roots in the Semitic religions, however, the underlying spirit in Indian ethos is non-interference in the religions of others.
corporate sin. For that to take place there is a need for corporate salvation in the resurrected Christ. Thus salvation includes liberation from structures: “Sin has a corporate expression in the dehumanizing spiritual force of corporate life, the demon of principalities and powers. The victory of Christ should mean victory over them, and salvation in Christ must find manifestation in power over the forces, as power for humanization of our structures of collective existence” (Thomas, 1976:6).

Therefore, for Thomas cross is a “decisive historical event in which God drives out the Prince of this world” (Thomas, 1976:19). Through the cross Jesus overcame sin and took victory over all structures of evil (that includes death). Therefore the cross becomes the “identification of God with the victims of history” and consequently becomes the basis of Christian identification with victims of oppression:

Why does the church come into the picture? Because God of Jesus Christ is in solidarity with the victims of oppression, the crucifixion of Christ event in history reveals God identifying himself with the suffering people, the victim of oppression and structures of evil. It is the event of the cross and the resurrection that Christian faith sees the transformation of human life beginning and moving towards the kingdom of God. The resurrection means that the forces of death and evil which find expression in the oppression of humanity have been and will be finally overcome (Thomas, 1984:19).

The resurrection of Jesus becomes the basis for the church to participate and identify with human struggles, and be assured that “God is in control and his purposes for us are good and eternal” (Thomas, 1972:28). The central aspect of the resurrection was the bodily resurrection which points to the fact that, “If Christ rose in the body, the redemption he wrought was not merely of my spirit and soul, but one of the whole body, mind and soul, and the whole of relationship to nature and men” (Thomas, 1953:158). Therefore, salvation is not to be interpreted in “purely spiritual and individualistic terms; rather it is concerned with the wholeness of human being, and creation” (Thomas, 1953:159).

Even though, Thomas emphasized salvation both in individualistic and corporate terms, he leans more towards the corporate idea of salvation due to its relevance to India’s society. In Indian spirituality, *karma marga* (Path of Knowledge)\(^{423}\) denotes a path towards union with the ultimate reality (*moksha*) in correspondence with one’s action in the world. Similarly, Thomas also viewed one’s actions as a path to the salvation offered in Christ, which Boyd calls “enriched

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\(^{423}\) In Hindu tradition there are commonly three paths to salvation, *jnana marga* (path of knowledge), *bhakti marga* (path of devotion) and *karma marga* (See. Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1989:101-145).
Nevertheless, an integral approach to mission that considers salvation, humanization and faithfulness to scripture needs to be ascertained.

Thomas’s idea of secular fellowship became the central focus at the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Bangkok, where a document entitled “Salvation Today,” redefined salvation in terms of participating in the struggles of social justice. Emilio Castro (1973:139) wrote:

We found that the concern for the growth of the Church is related to the concern for social justice and cultural authenticity; that Christian participation in struggles for social justice, especially in actions favoring the powerless of the world is not a deviation from the main concern of the Christian faith but precisely the relevant manifestation of it in today’s world. We discovered that in situations like Vietnam, the priority for salvation was peace and that the only way for Christians to act credibly was to fight for peace. In other situations we discovered that salvation was present in the search for independence, or for reconciliation. In no case did this or that particular priorities exhaust the possibilities or the content of the Christian message of salvation, but without that priority the Gospel would be destroyed.

The conference brought forth the holistic nature of salvation which is expressed in concrete terms. The document affirmed:

In the struggle for economic justice against the exploitation of people by people; in the struggle for human dignity against the political oppression of human beings; in the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person; and in the struggle of hope against despair in personal life. In the process of salvation we must relate the four dimensions to each other. Conference minutes stated that, “there is no economic justice without political freedom and no political freedom without economic justice. There is no justice without human dignity, no solidarity without hope, no hope without justice, dignity and solidarity”.

The change in the soteriological paradigm led to a shift from a church centric mission to world centred view of mission in the subsequent ecumenical meeting. At the fifth assembly of the WCC held in Nairobi (1975) the theme of the conference, “Confessing Christ today” stressed the fact that mission takes place in the “context of struggle with resistance to evil and sin by overcoming division which exist in the social world in various forms” (quoted in Ballyes,1996:490). At the CWME meeting at Melbourne (1980), the theme “Your Kingdom come” was a call for all the churches to “enter into an historical struggle for total transformation of creation”. From this conference onwards the goal of mission was kingdom centred and “preferential option for the poor” became the “new missionary yardstick”.

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In contrast, the Evangelicals stressed the personal aspect of salvation rather than the structural aspect. They were also discomfit with the new developments that were taking place in the ecumenical thinking, which gave rise to conflicts and controversies between the two groups. Scherer (1987:21) comments, “Uppsala foreshadowed the growing rift with evangelicals, epitomized in Donald McGravan’s question, ‘Will Uppsala betray two billion?’” It also anticipated the debate of mission priorities in the 1970’s...” McGravan response was one among many response from the evangelical side who viewed WCC apprehensively leading to a evangelical congress under the leadership of Billy Graham, entitled “One Race, One Gospel, One Task” in Berlin (1966). Although, at the congress the evangelicals differed on other issues, Nevertheless, they were all united in making an “urgent appeal to the world church to return to the dynamic zeal for world evangelization that characterized Edinburgh” (Hedlund, 1993:185). Fenton (1966:477) notes:

But in one area, our position is unequivocal- in our commitment to the Gospel, as we understand it, and the task of evangelization. We may occasionally err in making our charges of neo-universalism and syncretism against individuals and organizations. We ourselves may fail to present the gospel in its biblical fullness. But we want no one to misunderstand our basic position: we are committed to a gospel which has at its heart a demand for, and a provision of, an experience of new birth – an experience offered to all, and effective for those who receive the good news in Christ. And we remain convinced that, whatever the social implications of the gospel, our primary task is to take this redeeming message of personal salvation to every creature, and to use every legitimate means for the evangelization of the world in our generation. Hence there was in the congress a strong emphasis on evangelism and a readiness to explore new ways of communicating our message to our day. We are ready to face up to our obligations to express the love of Christ in a great variety of ways, but we know that at the heart of all our effort, there must be an invitation to all men to be reconciled to God, and not merely an attempt to announce to them that they already are reconciled.

In the same year another congress in Wheaton (1966) reflected the urgency on the part of the evangelical conviction for evangelization. It was a congress on world evangelism rather than “world congress on evangelism”, where Bill Graham reiterated that “we have one task- the penetration with the gospel of the entire world in our generation”.

Amidst these two different strands of conflicting views on the mission of the church, an “international congress for world evangelization” took place in Lausanne (1974). This was a major congress for the evangelicals where they were challenged to rethink their theological

position in relation to mission. This is very much evident from the Lausanne covenant. The Lausanne covenant affirmed:

We affirm that God is both the creator and judge of all men (sic). We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout the human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind (sic) is made in the image of God, every person regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age has intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man (sic) is not reconciliation with God, or social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of Christian duty. For both are necessary expression of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without work is dead (quoted in Scherer & Bevans, 1992:253).

The Lausanne Covenant was a crucial step to narrow down the gulf between the Evangelicals and Ecumenical’s - although the Evangelicals acknowledged the socio-political involvement; they still prioritized evangelism as an essential aspect of the church’s mission. This “two mandate approach” (Yates, 1994:197) became the centre point of discussion in future Evangelical and Ecumenical meetings and, it is the priority of evangelism over social gospel that distinguishes the Evangelicals from the Ecumenicals.

Although Thomas’s proposition of a “secular fellowship outside the church” brought a change in the approach of mission among Evangelicals and Ecumenical’s yet, in the coming years as Hunsberger (1998a:177) rightly said, the debate proper soon dissipated” without resolving the main issue, that is, “to find a more proper form for the Church in India” (Thomas, 1971: 60).

However the debate revised with the the publication of Hoefer’s “Churchless Christianity” (1991), which reflects the data of people from rural and urban Chennai, who remain within the community of birth and at the same time are disciples of Christ. Hoefer’s refers to such devotees of Christ not as Christian but as Jesu bhaktas or Khrist bhaktas – they are non-baptized followers of Jesus and hesitate to join a visible church not because they are scared to confess

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427 Hoefer conducted a survey of three Lutheran and Five CSI dioceses to get a feedback of Jesu Bhaktas. This study identified 246 believers of whom 84 of them Hoefer met personally (Hoefer, 2001:259).
Christ publicly but they do not want to be attached to a foreign entity that has no resemblance with the culture of their birth (Hoefer, 2001:106-107).

In the subsequent years, H.L Richard and Timothy C Tennent took the debate further - both western missiologist who have spent considerable amount of time in India studying Indian Christianity and culture. Richard approved the notion of Churchless Christianity to the extent that his review entitled “Christ-Followers in India Flourishing but outside the Church” became the eleventh chapter of its 2001 edition (Richard, 2001:257-264). In comparison to Hoefer, who never denied the necessity of the church, Richard goes further in asserting that Churchless believers do not need the institutionalized church where Christ is captivated (as Boyd calls the Latin captivity of the Church) rather they “need to be guarded against a great deal of trouble that Christians will cause them .. .But they certainly need help” (Richard, 2001:263). Although, Richard blamed Hoefer to be traditionally attached to the church yet Richard himself is unclear what he meant by the “Churchless Christianity needs the help of institutionalized church”. Did the Gentile Christianity need the Jerusalem Church? Of course, they needed sensitive apostles (as in Jerusalem council) who will guard them from other troublesome Christians. Of course Richard like Hoefer is attached to traditional church.

In contrast, Tennent’s evangelical assesment\footnote{See, Timothy C. Tennent, The challenge of churchless Christianity. http://www.reclaimingthemin.org/papers/ets/2005/Tennent/Tennent.pdf Date of access:17July 2015} is simiilar to Newbigin’s argument of “higher ecclesiology”\footnote{Timothy C. Tennent, The challenge of churchless Christianity.}—“a visible fellowship is central to God’s plan of salvation in Christ; but God’s plan of salvation is not limited to the visible community”.\footnote{Timothy C. Tennent, The challenge of churchless Christianity.} Tennent elucidates his support of higher ecclesiology on the basis of the doctrine of Christ and on the church traditions. From the doctrine of Christ he states that it “demands that all believers, in all times, in all parts of the globe must seek whenever possible to form themselves into visible communities of faith”.\footnote{Timothy C. Tennent, The challenge of churchless Christianity.} These visible communities according to Tennent may have to face persecution as was the case of the primitive church, but the only “option they did not have was to forsake the assembling of themselves together- because biblical conversion, by definition, implies community”.\footnote{Timothy C. Tennent, The challenge of churchless Christianity.} Correspondingly, Tennent, states that “from an historical perspective, the practice of unbaptized believers in Christ
who are not under the authority of Church is not accepted as normative ecclesiology”.

Thus, if churchless Christianity is to be accepted, it clearly represents a departure from the historic doctrine of ecclesiology as espoused by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Christians”.

Of course confessing Christ entails community, however, Tennent does not state what form such communities should take and where it should be located. But one thing is clear - confessing Christ does not imply leaving one’s cultural heritage and be a part of a foreign community.

In 2007 Richard re-evaluated the Thomas-Newbigin dialogue and responded back in a sarcastic manner. He states, “Newbigin’s objections are only what one would expect from a committed ecumenical proponent of Episcopal Church government” (2007: 193). In addition, he accuses Newbigin of “missing the point” (Richard, 2007:191) in the debate because in actuality Newbigin was agreeing to Thomas’ basic proposals, “to develop within all the various communities of Hindu India the disciples of Christ” (Richard, 2007: 193). But here Richard has misread Newbigin because Newbigin was always for a “visible community” of believers in Christ and he would endorse Richard’s ecclesiology rather than Thomas proposal of an “overtly docetic ecclesiology- a conception of Church which is not properly grounded in real life sociological realities” (Hunsberger, 1998b:115). This sociological reality according to Newbigin is the formation of community or being a part of community based on solidarity:

Presumably, the acceptance of Jesus as central and decisive creates some kind of solidarity among those who have this acceptance in common. If it did not do so, it would mean nothing. The question is what is the nature of this solidarity? It has always been understood to include the practice of meeting together to celebrate with words, songs and formal actions the common faith in Jesus. A man who is religiously, culturally and socially a part of Hindu community is Hindu (Newbigin, 1972:78).

What Newbigin states here makes sense because in this context - a Hindu disciples of Christ will at some point “override his obligation as a Hindu” and this will be visible in forms- whether it be religious, social or cultural form (Thomas, 1977:121). Thus, the discussion instead of being conclusive it raises lots of questions in relation to the Hindu disciples of Christ, who remain

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433 Timothy C. Tennent, The challenge of churchless Christianity.

434 The reason for his response was based on the extensive review of ethnographic data collected by Anthropological survey of India on communities in India that enabled Richard to redefine “the present state of Christianity in India in relation to community based Indian society” Cf. Richard (2007: 186-188).
within their own community of birth without joining a visible church. The debate refuses to die out.

5.3.3 **Inculturation Model: Hindu- Catholic Synthesis**

The freedom attained by the colonial gave an impetus to the Protestant churches to return to their own culture and redefine its mission in relation to conversion. However, the Catholics in India found it hard to share the “theological premise” of secular fellowship outside the church, due to the traditional understanding of the doctrine of “no salvation outside the church” (Kim, 2011: 94). But from the second half of the 20th century onwards (Post- Vatican II), the Catholic Church understanding of conversion was strongly influenced by two challenging approaches to the contextualization of the gospel - the inculturation and liberation model (Bosch, 1991:420-21).

In the open atmosphere of the Vatican II, the Catholic theologian Raimon Pannikar made an attempt to find a meeting point with Hinduism by publishing a book entitled “Unknown Christ of Hinduism” (Kim, 2011:97). His thesis was that Christ is the meeting point, Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, and he is already present in Hinduism. Thus the only duty of the Christian mission is to unveil this Christ. In this context conversion does not imply “Change over another culture, another tradition or another religion, but a changing in, a changing into a new life, a new existence, a new creation, which is precisely the old one- and not another-but transformed, lifted up, risen again” (Panikar, 1964:18).

Here Pannikar is affirming that Hinduism is normative way of salvation as Christianity, provided it acknowledges the unknown Christ of Hinduism. Therefore, such unveiling of Christ within Hinduism makes conversion unnecessary. Pannikar’s proposal seems validated only if the Hindu accepts the need for Christ as mediator. Furthermore, Pannikar’s statement of the “Unknown Christ of Hinduism” and the revelation/ unveiling of Christ is the duty of Christian mission, Pannikar approves the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism. This will not be accepted by the Hindu thinkers who from the ancient time have insisted that Christianity “needs to listen to the voice of ancient saints of this land, and all true wisdom of her stage” (Kotgarh, 1919:254). Nevertheless, Pannikar attempts of legitimizing Hinduism as the way of salvation have paved the

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435 Although Vatican II never used the word Inculturation the idea was scattered throughout its documents where it speaks of “inculturation of gospel in local cultures” (quoted in Dhavamony, 1995:8).
way among the Catholic theologian to move from “Indian Christianity to Hindu Christianity” (Kim, 2011: 96).

“Hindu Christianity” as the term indicates is the synthesis of two religions - an attempt to solve the problem of conversion in India. This attempt was led by Hans Staffner, an Austrian Jesuit, who looked for “complementarities in the two faiths that do not conflict with the vital belief and practice of either” (Kim, 2011: 96-97). Staffner, following Upadhyay’s approach of samaj dharma and sadhana dharma was convinced that “conversion was a purely spiritual event and that therefore changing one’s community should not be any part of it” (quoted in Kim, 2011:97). He argued, Hinduism falls under samaj dharma (that is customs and moores oriented) therefore its membership is not based on certain beliefs and creeds rather they follow Ishta devta concept in which they are free to choose their deities. Christianity (here Catholic faith) falls under sadhana dharma (that is, faith in God and creed oriented) but, at the same time is open to accommodate customs and culture (Kim, 2011:98). Thus, both Christianity and Hinduism can be synthesised and at the same time be complementary to each other. In such a context conversion is illegitimate since “adherents of each can embrace rather than renounce the essence of the other’s religious tradition while remaining in their own community” (Kim, 2011:98).

However Staffner’s attempt of inculturation fails to answer - whether Hindu disciples who follow ishta devta as Jesus, (who judges all culture) will find the genuine conversion that the gospel demands? Moreover, such distinction between samaj dharma and sadhana dharma is contrary to the Hindu tradition of dharma which demands to accept the duties of Hinduism and follow its rituals. For instance, when Upadhyay ate beef, prohibited by Hinduism (samaj dharma), he had to undergo prayashchitta (atonement) as per Hindu ritual (sadhna dharma). Upadhyay states, “I was taken back by a strange pronouncement from the lips of swami. ‘We must make prayashchitta, must eat little cow dung’, he said quietly with a smile playing on his face” (Animananda, 1947:200-201). In another instance Upadhyay conducted Saraswati pooja (a type of idol worship) in the school which he was running. Thus, Upadhyay’s view that he was a Hindu with regard to his way of life and a Christian as per the practice and quest for salvation cannot be justified - because idol worship is against God’s demand in the Bible. If these two dharmas cannot be separated then the conversion becomes necessary.
In the 1970’s the Hindu- Catholic theology became more influential and led to the beginning of ashramic movements - a Hindu way of life, among the Catholics as well as Protestants in different parts of the country. This is called a “mystico- monastic model where non- Christian spirituality are incorporated into Christian life” (Ishanad, 1999:132). The main objective of the Catholic ashram was the synthesis of Hindu and Christian inculturated spirituality as seen in the Shantivanam ashram founded by Swami Abhishiktananda and Father Jules Monchanin at Kulithalai in 1950. Shantivanam ashram, was “a Christian ashram where both a contemplative ideal and a total indianization could be realized, striking a creative balance between the Indian heritage and Christian tradition” (Kalliath, 1996:50). This includes meditation (yoga) and worship, developing interreligious dialogues, inculturation process (in the area of art, dance, and music). In addition in ashram a strict vegetarian diet was followed along with saffron robes (worn by sannyasi -monk who led a life of renunciation) as the dress code –this signifies renunciation and awakening. Even the name of the individual was changed to Indian name to signify the goal of pursuit. For instance, Father Jules Monchanin became Parama Arubi Anandam (Bliss of the Supreme Formless One) and Henry Le Saux took the name Abhishiktananda (Bliss of the Anointed One) (Kalliath, 1998:205). Ashram also emphasized Guru Spirituality, where through Jesus the only one Guru “graces the ashramites in their various sadhana of realization” (Vijaya, 2010:73).

In addition, the ashram level was not only introduced to individual Catholic thinkers, but also ecclesiastical body of the Catholic Church. This is seen in the first all India Liturgical meeting (AILM), promoted inculturation with the objective of developing “Indian liturgy and a common rite” (Vijaya, 2010:69). This was aimed at two levels, namely “adaptation at external level and adaptation at the deeper level” (Vijaya, 2010: 69). At the “adaptation at external level” it was aimed to translate the liturgy into vernacular languages based on the Twelve-Point Plan proposed by AILM. Although this was an optional attempt but later these twelve points were

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436 In the Indian Protestant circles the first ashram was founded by N.V. Tilak, a renowned poet, in Satara in 1917 (Taylor, 1974:284). This was followed by Dr. S. Jesudason and Dr. E. Forrester-Paton known as pioneers of Christian ashram, who founded Christukula ashram at Tirupattur in Tamilnadu in 1921. In 1931 Jack C. Winslow (1891-1970) founded Christa Seva Sangha (Amaladoss, 1981:374; Collins, 2006:125).

437 The 12 point plan suggested using certain postures during liturgy as aarti as a form of welcome or worship, anjali hasta, hands folded in prayer, incorporating different devices such as oil lamps as well as different gestures such as touching objects to one’s forehead instead of kissing them, removing footwear while entering a sacred place-a more Indian way in the Christian worship life. See, Amarlorpavadass (1978).
accepted by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India in March 1969 (Vijaya, 2010:70). “Adaptation at a deeper level,” included adaptation in the area of Sacraments, Feasts and Votive Masses. These include “incorporation of the nuances of Hindu *samskaras* (rituals of initiation) with the Christian Sacraments” along with “integration of Christian Feasts with Hindu Festivals” and “the use of non-biblical Scriptures” (Vijaya, 2010: 71). The goal behind such deeper level of adaptation is that Christianity can be integrated with the social religion of Hinduism in a complementary relationship in order to create a Hindu-Catholic synthesis. This implies that the mission of the church is to allow Christianity to grow within Hinduism so that there is no need for conversion.

The ashramic inculturation as shown above was criticized from liberationist. Especially the Dalit, questioned the ashramic inculturation for ignoring the aspiration of the Dalit to build a new society (Barnes, 2001:67-70). As Amaladoss (1998:12) puts it: “People who are committed to the poor see life in ashrams, practicing Indian methods of prayer and spirituality as running away from the challenge of the gospel which is proclaimed to the poor and the outcasts.” In addition, the ashramic inculturation attempt is considered as Brahmanisation of Christianity (Amarlorpavadass, 1978:63). Prabhu (1999: 79) states, “Ashramic inculturation is mere dressing up of the gospel in the local garment that is irrelevant to the religiosity of the poor, but to the brahminical spirituality”. Thus, Amaladoss (1998: 10-11) asserts, such inculturation based on brahmanical spirituality is irrelevant and is “oppressive to the Dalit identity and tradition.”

Moreover, the Hindu community perceives the Ashramic inculturation as a conversion mechanism to lure Hindus into Christianity. For instance, Sita Ram Goel (1994:167) who was in close affinity with Abhishiktananda Society has accused the work of Abhishiktananda as proselytization under a cloak of *ashram*. Moreover, he blamed the inculturation attempts as another assault on Hinduism where “deliberate and calculated designs are made to implant Christian meaning of Christ in Hindu culture” (Goel, 1994:13). Therefore, he calls Catholic *ashrams* as “swindlers” and accuses them of the “spiritual genocide of Hindu *dharma*” (Goel, 1994:167). The accusation does not mean that the Catholic *ashrams* are involved in conversion but the term Catholic *ashram* is contradictory. *Ashram* is autonomous but the prefix Catholic denotes its relation with colonial institutions. Not only that but most of the *ashrams* are initiated and funded by religious congregations.
Although the *ashram* movement aimed at being faithful to the Indian culture yet it failed to appeal to Hindu people. In reality, there are more westerners being attracted to Catholic *ashram* than Indians. Another area of concern is that the leadership in the Catholic ashram changes according to the term of office, so the people who are committed to the *ashram* life are replaced by those who show no interest. This does not apply to Hindu ashram where it is a vow taken for life to be in *ashram* and serve the community. Therefore, in such context, it is important that in the Catholic *ashram* the transfer of leaders or members should be based on one’s personal choice rather than based on a time period. Furthermore, the *ashram* movement does not give emphasis to the proclamation of the gospel rather it abhors the very idea of preaching the gospel as it leads to conversion. Therefore, it gives importance to dialogue of life. *Ashram*’s dialogue stresses conversion towards God of both partners of dialogue rather than conversion of the person to Christ.

5.3.4 **Liberation Model: Church as a Tool of Justice**

The liberation theology of Catholic theologians shifted the definition of conversion in Indian context as a “protest against social injustice or the church’s turning to the world to be part of the people’s struggle was evident” (Kim, 2013: 130).\(^{438}\) This liberationist understanding of conversion according to Mathew (1982:1032-33) is termed as “politicization of religion”, where religion is used as an “instrument for changing the power balance,” especially in countries like India as “part of the proliferation of an ideology which questions the status quo” and as a “structural question” (quoted in Kim, 2013:130).

The “politicization of religion” is an important aspect when one takes into consideration the sociology of conversion in India, especially the Dalit conversion to Christianity during the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\)century. When Caldwell first arrived in South India in 1838, he witnessed that people from lower caste (pariah community) accepted Christianity as a desire of protection from oppression” (quoted in Dirks, 2001:134-35). Christianity provided them better future in relation to education and medical assistance. For many converts missionaries provided defense from

\(^{438}\) Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Roman Catholic priest first used the term Liberation theology in 1973. In the context misery of the poor in Latin America Gutierrez asked a qualitative question (how many are experiencing fullness of life?) about salvation rather than quantitative question (how many are converted?). Thus for him “conversion to God” includes “conversion to neighbor”. As Gutierrez (1988:205) writes, “Our conversion to the Lord implies this conversion to the neighbor. To be converted is to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely to the process of the liberation of the poor and oppressed”. 

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superior caste and therefore conversion implied an alliance with a strong institution. A similar view is poised by Rowena Robinson (2003:70-90), when talking about Christian conversion in India. She states, “In many cases, though, it is likely that things worked differently: patron-client relations were employed to bring about conversion. The village leaders were converted and they in turn influenced the other caste groups, which were bound to them by ties of socio-economic dependence”. In other words Wilfred (2007:149) calls this conversion as “conversion of convenience” and the foreign missionaries called these converts as “Rice Christian”. Thus, Manickam (1977:103) asserts that the main reasons for conversion were a “rediscovered sense of dignity and a search for a better socio-economic status.”

Dalit “conversion of convenience” can be used by others as a judgmental yardstick to question the genuinity of their conversion. Here Wilfred “challenges us to go beyond such a dualistic anthropology and spirituality” by stating that “why is conversion for spiritual illumination superior to what is done for one’s survival” (quoted in Giri, 2014:401). Thus he notes that these “rice Christians are those who have converted for getting rice for their belly” (quoted in Giri, 2014:401). Here the material aspect of conversion for survival becomes the motive for conversion rather than the spiritual experience. In such a context conversion is not “Turning of our minds to some salvific events of the past and subscribing to some ideological system connected with it, nor a question of the church trying to win more members to her fold from other religious groups to assure them a place in heaven, but a response of commitment to the voice of God speaking through the yearnings and aspirations of the million of our countrymen, through their misery and wants” (Wilfred, 1983:68).

Conversion reduced to “structural question” will legitimate the claims of the Hindu fundamentalist groups who have been accusing the church of converting the Dalit by fraudulent means. In addition, it also justifies the accusation of the reform movements like Brahmo samaj and other neo-Hindu movements that such structural conversion lacks spiritual motives, and it is used as a tool by Christians who want to increase Christian political power and destabilize Hinduism. Furthermore, structural understanding of conversion will put Christians and Hindus in on the same boat - where both communities support the sociological interpretation which

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439 Dalit and Adivasis who converted for rice (material benefits) were called rice-Christians by the foreign missionaries. See Wilfred, (2005:307-25); Azariah & Whitehead, (1930:24).
confirms that Dalit lack their own spirituality as they are only motivated by the desire of material benefit and social upliftment - a “conversion of opportunism” (Kim, 2011:107). In such interpretation Dalit are again deprived of a holistic conversion that includes, “both sociological and spiritual, both temporal and eschatological dimensions” (Kim, 2011:107).

**Summary**

In this chapter we have discussed the nature and place of the church in Indian society from the perspective of conversion (see Chapter 4). Even though Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself (going back at least to the 4th century BC, if not earlier) it is very often considered as the brain child of western colonialism and a foreign religion. This foreignness is neither due to the fact that Christianity was introduced into the region from outside nor due to the fact that it professes a different faith. For instance Parsee’s (followers of Zoroastrianism who entered India in 10th century.) is not considered a foreign religion, while Christianity is. India has always cherished and accepted diversity. The main reason why Christianity is considered foreign is due to its *kaum* mentality that has kept local churches aloof from the mainstream life of the people. This *Kaum* mentality is build on the “people of God” concept where the church understood the whole notion from the point of view of its privilege rather than its responsibility to be “salt of the earth”. Thus, from the colonial time onwards the converts had to reject all those which were dear to him/ her and take on the missionary’s culture.

It was the giving up of everything on the part of the converts and joining the closed community of the church that has labelled the church a foreign institution. In addition, denominational differences as a product of western history have stigmatized the image of the church in India. Moreover, there was discrimination against Indian Christians within the church, as most of the converts were from a Dalit background.

The foreignness of the church along with the denominational difference among the Indian Christian propelled towards the foundation of indigenous Churches in pre- independence India. This eventually led to the transfer of power from foreign missionaries to local churches and also cultivated a desire for unity. But the crucial question among these indigenous churches was how far the church should involve itself in the mainstream development of national life. Thus
different Indian Christian experiments in Church organization took place as described in the chapter.

In these early movements there were a few, but not always successful attempts to encourage some indigenous forms of worship during the period from 1870 to 1910. One of the reasons for not being successful was that the inculturation process was Brahmanical in nature, whereas the converts were from the lower class, and thus it did not appeal to them. Despite the little success they have initiated the process of becoming Indian. These indigenous attempts have provided insights which are fragmentary and not very systematic but at the same time are the earliest steps in the process of becoming Indian. These serve as guidelines and directions for later growth in this process, especially in the post-independence India.

In post -independence India there were more attempts on the part of the indigenous movements to domesticate Christianity, especially to reinterpret the Christ event in the context of India and in the light of Indian religious and cultural traditions. Here, one needs to note that all the Indian thinkers tried to differentiate between church (institutionalized) and Christ. What prompted such a distinction?

Firstly, it was the growth of a national movement and consciousness of belonging to the Indian Church that began to take root among the Indian Christians, where they understood that in the Indian context many were willing to accept Christ but not the (institutional, Western) church. Therefore, the message of Christ needs not be rejected, if mission is taken out of the colonial context and planted in the Indian soil. Secondly, the gospel needs to be communicated effectively in the context of the hearer’s so that non-Christians would appreciate and understand the gospel. Thirdly, a theological development that took place post- Tambaram (1938), namely the insight that God was operating in some way in the world outside the Church led to the rejection of the institutional church as seen in Chenchiah and Chakkarai.

Some of the ways in which these Christian thinkers tried to “become Indian” were by integrating cultural and ritual elements from Indian religions, presenting the gospel through Hindu philosophical and religious concepts, creating indigenous liturgies for worship, making efforts to overcome denominational differences and providing Indian leadership, etc. Such attempts
opened up a positive attitude towards Hinduism and other religions which was a radical shift from western missionaries’ approach who regarded nothing good in the native religions.

Even though these attempts of Indian Christian thinkers are appreciable, there are some issues that need to be corrected in these attempts. Firstly, the theology was developed by high caste Hindus from the perspective of a great tradition, and therefore their theology related only to the higher caste. Such theologies baptized Indian Christianity with Hindu caste theories under the umbrella of Indigenization. These Indian theologies did not appeal to the converts from the lower caste as it compromised the Hindu caste system proposed by the Hindu traditions and also these thoughts came from those belonging to the oppressor class. In addition such theologies failed to take into consideration the cultures and religions of the poor and missed the opportunity to become a voice for the voiceless. As a result, the pioneering efforts of indigenization remain irrelevant to most Indian Christians who come from the lower castes.

Secondly, the challenge of the Indian ecclesiology is the composite nature of India; consequently, any indigenous attempts applicable to one context, within Indian will be foreign to other. Therefore, no forms or models can be considered normative ecclesiology but rather ecclesiologies are always in the making. This is a challenge for any Indian indigenizing.

Thirdly, after all these inculturation attempts the church in Indian is still considered foreign. The reason is that the elite community is still leading the inculturation. But this change and inculturation should begin as a result of spontaneous expression of faith lived at grass root level. This is the reason why a new way of being the church is emerging from among the people themselves- a grassroots development. One such movement is Khrist bhaktas; a movement accepted and proclaimed by the people with people from all walks of life belongs to this group. They are disciples of Christ but do not identify with institutional churches nor take baptism as it will ostracize them from their community of birth. One of the positive contributions of this movement is that one does not need to be uprooted from the religious and cultural heritage by accepting Christ. Moreover, this movement is accepted by the people at large as the movement has increased enormously in very short span of time. Furthermore, the movement is a multi-caste composition. They come from all sections of society- a community formed in name of Christ not based on caste.
However, this movement also raises ecclesiological questions in relation to mission- the question of dual identity, the relationship between soteriology and ecclesiology, the importance of baptism, the public profession and incorporation into the visible community -the church. Therefore, the next chapter will explore this movement by taking into consideration these missional ecclesiological questions to see whether this movement can be an alternative model of an Indian form of church as it appeals to all sections of the society.
CHAPTER 6

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE KRIST BHAKTA MOVEMENT:
A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH IN INDIA AMIDST THE CONVERSION CONTROVERSY

6.0 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, there is a debate going on in the mind of the Indian community and even within church circles, as to whether conversion has a place in India. The history of Christian conversion from Hinduism - where conversion is seen more as a social act rather than a spiritual act (Chapter 4) - the protest has less to do with the notion of conversion (believing); rather, with the notion of belonging (Chapter 5). When converts affiliate themselves with a religious structure that is foreign and opposed to national life and culture, it gives rise to the kind of conflicts that we see in India today. The new wine of believing requires contextual wineskins where belonging could take place. Thus, the real issue is not conversion as such (understood in the social sense) but the foreignness of the church in Indian society.

This perception of the church as a foreign institution is also accepted by the Indian Christians (Mattam, 1996:103). Thus, some individuals and later the church as a whole, have tried to give the church an “Indian grab” as discussed in Chapter 5. Even though the attempts are appreciable, the existing attempts at inculturation have not been fruitful because the church in Indian is still viewed as a foreign institution and all inculturation attempts are seen suspiciously as a way to destroy the Hindu culture by the Hindutva. Moreover, most of the inculturation attempts were Brahmanical in nature, which did not appeal to the Dalit, who are the majority in India. These efforts came from above, from the elite of the church; not from below, as a spontaneous expression of faith lived at grass root level (Dupius, 1998:31). Therefore, there is a need for a model that is suitable for the present - day context that will be true to the Bible and true to the Indian mind.

Among the people of India, we find a movement called the Khrist bhaktas (devotees of Jesus). This movement is accepted, followed and proclaimed by people from all walks of life. It is a growing movement as people do not have to be uprooted from their cultural heritage after accepting Christ. Moreover, all caste groups are represented in the Khrist bhaktas movement, which is centred in Christ. However, they do not identify with institutional churches and do not
take baptism, as this will ostracize them from their community. In such a context, can we presume that this movement could be an alternative solution to the issue of foreignness of the church in India and to the issue of conversion? In order to answer this question the current chapter analyses the Khrist bhaktas movement and considers whether this can be the norm for the Indian church.

6.1 Khrist Bhaktas in India: - Confessing Christ Culturally

The Khrist bhaktas movement is the result of satsangs\(^{440}\) held in the Matridham\(^{441}\) ashram in Varanasi,\(^{442}\) Uttar Pradesh, the cultural and religious capital of India.\(^{443}\) In the early period the satsangs were conducted by Chotebai and Anil Dev. Chotebai, a member of the royal family in Kanpur, who had to leave his family due to his conversion to Christ, and went to live at the ecumenical ashram managed by the Capuchins in Bareli. Later on, Chotebai became the youth regional secretary and director of the youth center in Uttar Pradesh. Along with Chotebai, Anil Dev worked as assistant for faith formation in the youth centre. Both of them conducted charismatic retreats for youth in Uttar Pradesh in 1981-82 (Kuttiyanakal, 2014: 121-122).

Later on, Anil Dev was promoted to director of the communication centre, managed by IMS congregation, and worked along with Fr. Anand - who was in charge of the Catholic information centre. Both these centres were located at Matridham ashram. Anil Dev and Fr. Anand conducted several charismatic retreats all over north India. In October 1993 a one week retreat for Catholic adherents was conducted at Matridham ashram and as a result of this retreat they

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\(^{440}\) Satsang is a Sanskrit word “Sat” means “truth” and “Sang” means “encounter”, therefore satsang means “an encounter with Truth”. It is a traditional practice in Hinduism where people sit in the presence of an enlightened being to receive teachings and blessings. In practice it is a lecture with questions and answers, accompanied by music. Anon., [http://www.sriprembaba.org/satsang-en/introduction](http://www.sriprembaba.org/satsang-en/introduction) Date of access: 13 April 2016


\(^{442}\) Varanasi, for ages is known as Kashi, a citadel of Hindu faith. The word Kashi comes from a Sanskrit word Kash, which means light. With its religio-culturo-educational significance, Varanasi still remains the light of India attracting millions of pilgrims and tourist from all over the world cf. Kaminsky& Roger (2011).

\(^{443}\) I have depended upon Kuttiyanikkal (2014) empirical research (a dissertation) to understand the background of Khrist Bhakta movement. [https://pure.uvt.nl/portal/files/9989%20633/Kuttiya%20nikkal_Khrist_07_02_2014_em_b_tot_07_02_2016.pdf](https://pure.uvt.nl/portal/files/9989%20633/Kuttiya%20nikkal_Khrist_07_02_2014_em_b_tot_07_02_2016.pdf) Date of access: 21 May 2016
decided to conduct a charismatic convention. In this convention a large number of priests, nuns, Catholic lay people, Protestant and Evangelicals attended the meeting. Many experienced the power of God and were filled with the Holy Spirit. As a result of this convention, every second Saturday at the ashram night vigil began to take place from November 1993 to September 1994.

At these night vigils many sick and poor people were brought by the representative to the ashram for the prayers. Many of them got healed and as the news of the healings spread to the neighbouring villages many non-Christians started to attend the meeting. From September 1994 onwards a monthly day long satsang began in which 3000 people from as far as 150km came to attend the satsang. The movement spread to nine districts of Uttar Pradesh\(^{444}\) and five districts of Bihar\(^{445}\) (Kuttiyanakal, 2014: 124). In 1997 for the first time a convention was held in open field where 10000 people attended and this convention became an “annual hallmark of the movement” (Kuttiyanakal, 2014: 124). Presently there are 50000-60000 Khrist bhaktas in and around Varanasi and also in other parts of India. Most of the bhaktas are rural folk, yet a good number of urban and suburban people are also among the devotees. The majority of bhaktas are from Hindu background but there are also some Muslim bhaktas. Initially the greatest response was from Dalit communities but as the movement grew, members from higher caste groups became the majority. Father Anil Dev, who is the Guru of the ashram, calls these believers “Khrist Bhaktas”. He states that “these bhaktas profess their faith in Christ Jesus and accept Jesus as savior but refuses baptism and to be attached to a church” (quoted in Kuttiyanikkal, 2014:117). This attitude of denial by the Khrist bhaktas is because of the stigma attached with Christianity during the colonial period.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the colonial process of evangelization had two phases: firstly, one must uproot oneself from one’s culture and secondly, one needs to accept Christ by adopting to the missionary culture. As Karokaran (2003:33-34) states:

[In accepting Christ] first, converts were washed clean of their old identity of their parent religion, culture and society. Second faith in Jesus was imparted but not through a neutral medium. It was imposed through concrete medium of missionary culture, social and religious identity. In the colonial model of evangelization, this process was not simply that a believer in Jesus had to die to his old self, and put on Jesus Christ (Rom 6), but he/she had to recast in

\(^{444}\) The nine districts are:-Banaras, Allahabad, Azamgad, Jaunpur, Gahzipur, Ballia, Badohim, Mrzapur and Chandauli (Kuttiyanakal, 2014: 124).

\(^{445}\) The five districts are:-Bhabua, Mohania, Bhojpur, Rohtas and Patna (Kuttiyanakal, 2014: 124).
The identity of the missionary, i.e., in the latter's culture, social genius and religious orientations (Karokaran, 2000:33-34)

The conversion approach that concentrated on the extraction of converts from his/her culture to missionary culture resulted in the converts being labelled or addressed as “anti-national, viz, dhammadantar yani rastranataran, (changing religion means changing nationality)” (Bauman, 2008:2). This is because in the Indian context conversion is viewed differently from the biblical understanding of metanoia. Metanoia is a complete change; turn around from world to God due to a personal encounter (sakshartkara) with Christ, the ultimate reality. But in Indian context, the notion of conversion is termed as dharma-Parivartana (change of religion). Etymologically, the word dharma means “that which upholds” as the earth supports all that is over and under it. Therefore, in the general sense dharma means religion but the narrow sense it means Purusharthas, where it refers to duties (social and moral) that regulate life. The change in one of the components of purushartha brings about radical change in the others, thus disturbing the equilibrium. This has detrimental consequences for the person, family, community and society.

In such a context of conflict in world views on conversion (between Hinduism and Christianity), bhaktas who come to Khrist bhakta movement do not feel the pressure of ostracism as they are not uprooted from Hindu culture. They believe strongly that they do not have to leave their birth community to become disciples of Christ. Rather they can stay in their Hindu community practicing Indian culture (bhakti tradition) and at the same time give allegiance to Christ and him alone. As Swami Muktanand (2007) rightly states:

To become a Christian means that one has to leave one’s birth community. It also means that one has to reject one’s culture. However it is not a necessity that to be a follower of Christ one has to become a Christian. This false teaching has come from the Europeans who saw the Hindustani [Indian] life as demonic and convinced people that in order to become a follower of Christ one has to reject the Hindustani life style and adopt a European lifestyle. A Hindu follower of Jesus also known as Khrist bhakta stays in his Hindu community practicing his Hindustani culture and giving allegiance to Christ and Him alone.448

In the Indian context, the term Christian is used in a derogatory way and is associated with the western culture. The Hindu’s perceive the church as completely alien to the Indian culture due to

446 In the 19th century it was presumed that there must be some words in every language that corresponds to the sense in which the word religion is used. As a result the word dharma was mistranslated as religion, which led to the in traceable misunderstanding between Indians and English speaking westerners (Nash, 2004:12).
447 There are four Purusharthas: Dharma (duties), Artha (livelihood), Kama (pleasure and procreation); Moksha (final liberation).
448 http://margdarshan.blogspot.ae/2007/10/hindu-devotee-of-yeshu.html Date of access: 3 June 2016
its connection with the colonial powers and western institution. Moreover, they also consider Christianity as a westernizing institution as the converts become westernized and denationalized by abandoning the social and cultural values of India (Pathak, 1967:244). In this sense, the Hindus perceive Christianity as threat to the existence of the Indian nation- “This is a silent invasion of India, invasion not by the armies but by hard cash, less obvious but more invidious and therefore worthy of condemnation” (Kamath, 2008:8). Therefore, Christianity (in the western) sense has to be rejected in totality. It is in such a milieu – that the Khrist bhaktas movement becomes pivotal as it is incarnated and integrated in the life of the Indian society. The bhaktas can remain in their own Hindu culture and practice their new- found faith in Christ.

However, the dual identity of the Khrist bhaktas raises important questions – does one has to use or accept the name “Christian” to become a follower of Christ? Does one need to be uprooted from the Hindu culture to become a follower of Christ? Can one remain in the Hindu culture and still be a disciple of Jesus?

6.1.1 Bible and Dual Identity

From a biblical perspective, the term Christianity is not a biblical term.\footnote{The term Christianity (Christianismos) was coined by Ignatius of Antioch as a counter to the term Judaism (Ioudaismos) (Harlow, 2012: 391). Ignatius writes, “Therefore let us become his disciples and learn to live according to Christianity. For one, who is called by any name other than this, is not of God” (Young, 2013:205).} Even in the Bible the term Christian is used only three times (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1Pt 4:16). It is a sneer word employed by the outsiders (Romans, Greeks and Jews) and does not appear to be the primary form of self-definition until perhaps the second century (Lieu 2004:259). But even then, “it did not determine the content of the label nor decide who could claim it” (Lieu, 2004: 267). Thus, it is hard to identify the Christian identity in early Christianity. Rather there are pluriform Christianities, such as Matthean, Johanaine and Pauline and each of these “produces a different model of identity and structure” (Lieu, 2002:176).

From the pages of the New Testament one may get the feeling that Christianity in the early century was a “unified coherent religious movement” (Desjardins, 1991:65). But in reality, Christianity was extremely diverse during this period. Almost all the scholars share the view that all the Evangelists wrote their gospel to a “localized community in its own, quite specific context
and character” (Esler, 1998:235).\(^{450}\) Therefore the so called Matthean, Johannine community and other communities should not be viewed as one church, but distinct churches that are “homogeneous in composition and circumstances” (Elser, 1998:236). Burridge (1998:143) rightly concluded in his writing on “gospel genre and audiences” that the Gospels were designed to be read by specific groups. Burridge asserts, “It is reasonable to assume that Matthew has as his target audience of Christians from a Jewish background who have a regard for Mosaic Law and who suffered antagonism or persecution from other Jews... On the other hand, Luke is more likely to be aiming to explain Jesus life and teaching for a Gentile market niche.”

In order to conform to their own distinctive identity and context, Mathew and Luke have even altered Mark’s version on a number of occasions by even changing the words, omitting some sections and adding some materials which Mark would have missed or played down (Elser, 1998: 241-42). This is very much evident in the case of validity over Torah, where Markan Jesus attacks the Jewish dietary laws by declaring all food as clean (7:19), the Matthean Jesus endorses the legitimacy of the whole Torah (5:17-19) (Sim, 2001:3). Thus, “we may infer from this and other similar evidences in these gospels that Mark wrote for a Christian community that did not observe the Torah, while Matthew wrote for one that did” (Sim, 2001:3).

The Johannine community was an isolated community separated from Jewish faith and other Christian folds. The Johannine scholars believe that the Gospel of John was written in the context of a conflict between the Jewish leadership and synagogue.\(^{451}\) Therefore, the gospel should be interpreted from the perspective of Judaism and Jewish Christianity. Even the internal evidence of the Gospel is axiomatic to this scholarly opinion where one sees the negative

\(^{450}\) There are some scholars like Bauckham’s, Barton and Hengel who are critical of reconstructing the communities of the Evangelists based on Gospel-they call this approach “historical fantasy”, which is not supported by detailed analysis. Conversely, they suggest reading the Gospel as narratives about Jesus of Nazareth which were written to all Christians and not to any specific Christian community at that time (Bauckham, 1997:20; Barton, 2001:180-181). The problem with these approaches is that they fail to show the reason why there are great divergences between the Gospels, including the unique sources they used? The answer for this would be that Evangelists shaped their gospel in the view of their communities in which they lived. The use of local tradition in each gospel leans to support these view (See Sim, 1998:123-139).

\(^{451}\) For e.g. Ashton J (2007); Dunn (1990) & Dahl (1986) are all in favour of this view. On the other hand scholars like Reinhartz (2002) argue that the antagonistic approach towards Jews in the fourth Gospel does not show detachment from the Judaism as there are internal evidence within the Gospel for an favourable approach to the Jews:- proclamation to Jews (Jn 4:22), Jesus revealed to Israel (Jn 1:31) and to Nathanael the Israelite (Jn 1:47). But Martyn (2003) who puts forth the view of antagonism stressed the fact that the Johannine community were expelled from the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 12:24; 16:2), which was compelled on them. But the beginning stages they were compatible to confess Jesus along with “continued membership in the synagogue and therefore it did not consider socially distinct entity” (2003:46-47).
portrayal of Jews in the Gospel of John.\textsuperscript{452} “The isolated nature of the community is also evident from group’s own self- awareness” (Brown, 1982:88). The beloved disciple becomes the “idealized one” and the representative of the community identity, and he even enables them to more accurately identify with and understand Jesus (Brown, 1982:88).

However, in the early centuries, the non-negotiable basis of the Christian identity was centred on their belief in Christ. This understanding may explain King Agrippa’s statement when he asked Paul if he was trying to make him Christian (Acts 26:28), Paul did not make use of the word “Christian” but pointed to Christ (Acts 26:20-23). From this context we understand that our mission is not to preach Christianity (as identified with western culture) but Christ.

The Jewish identity of Jesus and his early followers have a valid implication for the concept of dual identity, a silent feature among the \textit{Khrist bhaktas}. Jesus was not only Word made flesh (Jn 1:14) but he was a Jew, a Galilean Jew. This profound statement indicates that Word (Jesus) found human expression in a Jewish culture (Legrand, 2000:75). His life, action, thought and teaching was rooted in Jewish culture in such a way that it can be qualified as what Legrand (2000:111) calls “native belonging”. Careful analysis of the Synoptic Gospels shows that Jesus was an observant Jew who did not oppose any significant aspects of the Torah. He was circumcised (Lk 2:21), he attended the synagogue (Lk 4:16), observed Sabbath (Mk 2:27-28), went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Lk 3:41ff) and often celebrated Jewish festivals (Jn 10:22) and affirmed the \textit{shema} (Mk 12:28-34). Nevertheless, the Synoptic Gospels show that Jesus exhibited in his life and ministry the values of the Kingdom of God which rose above and beyond his own culture. Jesus “through ordinary stories, languages and by images of people’s own lives, spoke of the kingdom that was open to all the people- outcasts of the society, the socially, cultural and economically powerless and oppressed people- who could accept it” (Singh, 1985:117). His proclamation emphasized an “eschatological social reversal” in which the down trodden people from all walks of the society were welcomed and the rich oppressors were rejected (Mt 5:3; Mk 10:23; Lk 6:20). This “eschatological social reversal” was against the typical religious values prevalent among the Jewish religious establishment of Jesus’ time that debarred the poor as

\textsuperscript{452} For e.g. Jn 5:16 states that, “So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him”. Moreover, in Jn 7:13 it states that, “But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.” Furthermore, 9:22 indicates that the Jewish authorities have warned that those who confessed the name of Jesus would be ostracized from the synagogue.
nobody in the society. Moreover, Jesus accepted and associated with the outcaste, against the norm of the official Jewish establishment. As Schnelle (2009:108) rightly observed “Jesus draws no boundaries within Israel: he sets the marginalized in the center- the poor , the women who have suffered discrimination, children , tax collectors, prostitutes; he integrates the sick, the ritually unclean, the leper, those possessed by demons, and even Samaritans into the holy people of God.”

Jesus made challenging statements that completely shook the existing Jewish ethos: “verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matt 21:31). He not only stated made statement but he also radically accepted the socially ostracized by having table fellowship with them - thereby rejecting the unwarranted unjust social structure (Matt 11:18-19; Mk 2:15-17). Even Jesus stood against the oppressive culture of his time especially in relation with the halakhic matters,453 (Matt 12:1-14; Mk 2:18-22; Matt 23:1ff). In contrast, Jesus laid down two important Kingdom principles: love and equality. Jesus message was counter cultural.

The early disciples in the Book of Acts maintained both their new found faith in the risen Christ and their inherited Jewish beliefs and practices. This dual identity could be maintained with ease due to the continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament belief in God: the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. It is one continuous and unfolding revelation of the same God. The dual identity was demonstrated through their gathering both in the temple courts and in their homes (another place of worship), “Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere heart” (Acts 2:46). Even though the disciples’ community distinguished from the wider Jewish community in a number of ways, meeting in the temple allowed the disciple community to affirm their Jewish origin and maintain their relationship with the wider Jewish community. As Twelftree (2009:138) rightly points out: “The strongest impression Luke has left on his readers is that he does not consider that the followers of Jesus were, at least initially, isolated from the worship life of the Jews. Rather in his narrative, the followers of Jesus were

453 The term is derived from Hebrew word halakah which means “go” or “walk”. In relation to the Jewish law it refers to the way in which a “Jew is directed to behave in everyday living.” Quoted from Staff. MJL.Halacha: the laws of jewish life http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/halakhah-the-laws-of-jewish-life Date of access: 15 June 2016
faithfully and thoroughly committed Jews in their prayer habits, in worshipping as a devout Jews and, in so far as they were able, in being part of the twice – daily Tamid services in the temple”. Thus, the ethos of the Jerusalem community remained Jewish.

Apparently, such dual identity did not cause any “theological qualms” until some people came from Judea to Antioch with the teaching that salvation is impossible until circumcision is done (see Acts 15) (Peter, 2015: s.a.). Here for the first time the problem of being a Jew and Christian was raised. The actual controversy that precipitated the Jerusalem council was whether Gentiles believers had to be circumcised, as Jewish proselytes, and keep the Mosaic law in order to be saved (Acts 15:1,5).

In response, Peter declared the radical shifting of traditional thinking (circumcision necessary) that God has already set in motion:

7. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them:” Brothers you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.
8. He did not discriminate between us and them; he purified their hearts by faith.
9. Now then why do you try to test God by putting on the neck of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestor have been able to bear?
10. No we believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are saved, just as we are. (Acts 15:7-11)

Peter at the Jerusalem council is referring to his experience at Cornelius house, the centurion on the Italian cohort. Peter who was residing at Joppa for some time with Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:43) is given three times a vision to eat the unclean animals. In response Peter said-“By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean” (Acts 10:14). In contrast to Peter’s conviction God said: - “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15). The key question is what has God made clean? Was it the unclean food? The kosher law previously given by him (Lev.11), or was it Gentiles or was it both? There is no general consensus among the scholars, as to whether the vision should be taken literally as an

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454 Any attempt to define the Jewish identity other than circumcision was considered by Jews as opposing God and therefore a for ostracising from covenant community. This exclusiveness developed as a result of the heritage of the Maccabean revolt (Strong, 2004:198).

455 This is a paradoxical statement because Peter is staying with and enjoying the hospitality of a tanner, who deals with dead bodies, who is perpetually unclean as per Leviticus 11:39-40 where it states that anyone who touches the carcass of even a clean animal is pronounced unclean. Does this not go against Peter’s conviction stated in Act 10:14? It seems that his stay with the Jewish tanner over a period of time connote that he has already come to the position that the cleanliness law does not apply to Jew and to those who associate with them (Talbert, 2005:92).
abolishment of dietary laws or figuratively. But from the text we can garner that the vision was not to be taken literally as abolishing the law regarding foods given in the Old Testament due to the following:

1. After seeing the vision thrice Peter was still doubting what the vision might be (10:17) and pondering its meaning (10:19) when the spirit instructed to go with the messengers of Cornelius. Therefore, the vision concerned “men not menu” (Rudolph, 2011:48).

2. Nearly after a decade of Christ’s death, although questioned by the Judean brothers for eating at the Cornelius house, Peter had still not eaten anything common or unclean nor had he eaten anything unclean in the house of Cornelius. Here one needs to note that Peter’s defence against Judean brother’s accusation does not include any defence for eating unclean food rather he explains the purpose of his visit to the Gentiles (uncircumcised), which was to preach the gospel and baptize them as per the guidance of Spirit as stated in chapter 11:12- “the Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them”. He even produced six witnesses in his defence.

More than abolishing of the dietary law the important aspect of this vision was the coming together of the Jews and Gentile through the death of Jesus on the cross ( Eph. 3:6). This was so shocking for Peter and the early church who believed that the Gentiles should become first Jew (i.e circumcised) in order to become Christians. Here Peter and the early church were undergoing the initial shock of the impending “snapping off the umbilical cord from its mother”- the Jewish context (George, 2015:7). As Ariarajah (1987:16-17) points out:

Peter learns perhaps for the first time, that the religious laws set by religious traditions are not the boundaries with which God operates. Such religious laws are often necessary and they help provide identity, coherence and meaning for particular religious communities and historical necessities that a profound understanding of God and God’s relationship with

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456 Kinzer (2005:69) and Brown (2011:206) notes that the “vision should not be taken at face value” rather interpreted figuratively (Cf. Jer 1:13; Ezek. 37:1-14; Zec 5:5-11; Amos 8). Conversely, Bock (2007:389) states that offensive commandments in the Old Testament were taken literally as that of Ezekiel (4:12) and in other instances (Gen. 22:1-2; Hosea 1:2-3; Isa. 20:2-3).

457 Three times more than required by the Jewish law (Deut. 19:15).

458 Historically, many (see for e.g. Calvin, 1585:322; Henry, 1994:1706; Bruce, 1988:206 & Stein, 2011:106) have interpreted this vision to mean that both the unclean food and Gentiles have been pronounced clean by the death of the cross. But as stated above, for me this passage is more about dealing with the coming together of the Gentiles and Jews alike by abolishing the human made tradition of halakkah (oral written social Jewish customs). Of course I do adhere to the fact that in the New covenant every food was clean (Rom 14:20; I Cor 10:27) provided it does not cause the other believers to stumble (Rom 14:21).
humanity. The real problem begins when the laws are given universal validity and are held as defining the boundaries of God’s own activity.

Here Peter underwent a conversion – a conversion within (of course this was not without ongoing conflict as see in Gal 2:11-14), to meet Cornelius and tell him about Jesus Christ:-“you are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for; I came without raising any objection” (Acts 10:28-29). What is important to note here is that no law forbade the Jews to interact with the Gentiles rather it was the purity regulation that forbade the interaction (Slee, 2003:28).

To Peter’s astonishment “Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the word” at Cornelius house. This experience of Peter was challenged by the circumcised believers at Jerusalem (Acts11:2). In response Peter said, “If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way (Acts 11:17)?” When the circumcised believers heard this they had “no further objection and praised God saying so then even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life”(Acts 11:18). Thus, the conversion of Peter leads to the conversion of a community of circumcised believers. Here Peter and the Jewish brethren understood that “it was not Gentiles and lack of their circumcision that made the community unclean” (Van Engen, 2004:136). This was in line with Jesus’ mission to include into disciples’ community those deemed unclean.459

The empirical evidence of the Holy Spirit – the outpouring of Spirit at Cornelius house and the signs and wonders wrought by the hand of Paul and Barnabas, along with the scriptural evidence (Acts 15:11 cf Jer 12; Isa. 45; Zech. 2:11;) were the deciding factors that God is committed to allowing non-Jews to become part of his people without a change in birth community. Similarly, the Khrist bhaktas can live out their discipleship to Christ within their socio-cultural context (Staffner, 1955:174).

459 Jesus in his ministry abandons the convention that, to maintain holiness one has to not dine with the unclean people rather he freely associates with them. When talking about etiquette and outlook of his disciples he vouched more on mercy rather than outward cleaniness (Lk 6:36). By this approach Jesus was questioning the Pharisaic understanding of holiness that Pharisees have used to protect and defend special status and identity (Well, 2000:234). Moreover, Jesus demonstrated that holiness is to be understood as the “power to overcome uncleanness” rather than “separation from uncleanness” (Toews, 1986:23).
However, in the history of Christian mission in India as discussed in Chapter 4, the missionaries introduced western Christianity along with the teaching of Christ. Due to this approach converts were uprooted from their culture as it was understood to be demonic (Forrester, 2010:36-39). This developed a *quam* mentality, where the converts adopted the life style of the West (Greaves, 1910:43) and secluded themselves from their culture group. Here the missionaries did not take the *purushartha* aspect into consideration where conversion is regarded not as a spiritual act alone but rather a social act in Hindu religion (Stafner, 1987:63). This uprooting of converts from their socio-cultural and religious tradition is objected by Hindus.

Although, many people in the west perceive culture and religion as two different spheres, in India these two realities overlap significantly and are important resources in the formation of the Indian identity. Saraswati states that one cannot separate culture from religion because in India religion and culture are intertwined so much that religion has entered the fabric of the culture. Culture cannot be retained if religion is destroyed.\textsuperscript{460}

In such a context, the *Khrist bhaktas* have accepted Christ within their cultural universe but they never call themselves Christians. They rather call themselves “*bhaktas*”, in line with the *bhakti* (devotion) tradition. This *bhakti* tradition is prevalent among the Hindus in Varanasi and it is in this perspective one needs to see the *Khrist bhakta* movement. The major emphasis of the *bhakti* tradition is on complete and affectionate loyalty to a personal deity – this contrasts with Brahmanical spirituality which demands feudal loyalties by caste, guilds and ritualistic aspects of organized Brahmanism (Sharma, 2003: 41-43). Thus, the *bhakti* tradition is a God-centred rather than human-centred religious expression within Hinduism (Sharma, 2003: 60). In the *Khrist bhakta* movement the *bhaktas* perceive their worship of Jesus as *bhakti* to the Lord Jesus Christ who has replaced their previous deities by remaining in their Hindu culture. They openly profess that “I am a Hindu and a *bhakta* of Christ but not a Christian”. In the *bhakti* tradition, to focus worship on a particular *ishta devata*\textsuperscript{461} (chosen deity) is not a scandal for someone in their community; even is means to worship Jesus exclusively.

\textsuperscript{460}Saraswathi, Dayahanda. \url{http://www.swamij.com/conversion-violence.htm} Date of access: 25 June 2016

\textsuperscript{461} *Ishta devata* denotes aspects of God (a form of a chosen deity) which a follower of *bhakti* tradition chooses for worship and contemplate (Smith, 2008:154).
The name of *Ishta Devata* is a *Mantra* (sacred utterance) in *bhakti* tradition. In the same manner the *Khrist bhakta* say the name of Jesus and utter the following:\(^{462}\):

मेरा दिया को जला ताकि प्रभु का नाम मुझे रहे

(keep the lamp burning so the Lord’s name remain)

मेरे मंदिर में बस मेरे मंदिर में बस

( Remain in my temple , remain in my temple)

सुबह और शाम मेरा आत्मा येशु नाम पुकारे

(In the morning and in the evening my soul sings your name, Jesus)

प्रभु येशु आपका नाम

( Lord Jesus your name)

मेरे आत्मा में आपका नाम रहे

(let your name remain in my Soul)

The *bhakta* considers this *ishta devata* as their only *Muktidata*, giver of Mukti, liberator, deliverer- a term in this context connotes saviour. In the theistic Hindu and *Khrist bhakta* context it signifies *samsara\(^{463}\)* but it also bears this worldly association (deliverance from sickness, evil spirits, etc). This dual aspect of *mukti* - liberation from *samsara* and deliverance from evil spirits – are a common desire for the life for religious Hindus. Most *Khrist bhaktas* are attracted to this movement due to the testimonies of healings.\(^{464}\) But once they are a part of the movement they

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\(^{462}\) The Jesus Mantra is quoted in full taken from Duerksen (2011:186).

\(^{463}\) According to *vedas* (knowledge- Hindu scripture) the *atman* (soul) is bound in cycle of life, death and rebirth due to the desire of the world and when all the desire for mundane ceases, then the chain is broken and the person attains moksha (liberation). The avidya (ignorant) undergo 84 lakh of species of birth not knowing the essence of things. This is the concept of *samsara*. Cf. Snell (2007).

\(^{464}\) Many testimonies of the *bhaktas* are shared among other people as a part of the witness. Testimonies of healing from Jaundices, relief from kidney stones, cancer, bodily inflammation, mental illness are among a few. Many of
believe that Christ as muktidata will give them santan ki Jeevan (eternal life) - a final liberation from samsara. Therefore the bhaktas offer thanksgiving prayer for the hope of liberation:-

सत गुरु येशु
( True and Good teacher Jesus)
तेरे शिक्षा के लिये धन्यावाद
(Thank you for your teaching)

मुझे समज दे की में आपके बातो को मानु
(Grant me that I may learn to obey your teachings)

मुझे जीवन की रह पर चला
(Guide me on your life- giving path)

मेरे दिल में आकर मुझे आपके भक्त बना
(Come into my heart and make me your Bhakta)

धन्यावाद तेरे अनंत प्रेम के लिए
(Thank you Lord for your eternal love)\textsuperscript{465}

Even though the bhaktas profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour but they do not belong officially as members of any church. They remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This is not because they are against the concept of church rather they argue that since some words such as Christian, church, Christianity and baptism are associated with western culture, Christianity is regarded as a western religion, invasive and imperialistic (see Chapter 5). Moreover for some, Christian baptism is equated with church membership and it may cut off new believers from their families (Hoefer, 2001:164). It is this “other” (as sociologists call it), something radically different from themselves that makes the Hindu

\textsuperscript{465} The thanksgiving prayer is quoted in full taken from Duerksen (2011:186).
disillusioned with Church (Riggins, 1997:3). This phenomenon raises an important ecclesiological question: Can a person believe in the Lordship of Christ and not be united with the visible church? When baptism is perceived as estranging the recipients from their community, should one advocate baptism? These two questions will be dealt in the following paragraphs.

6.2 Ecclesiology and Khrist Bhakta

When we delve into the ecclesiology of Khrist bhaktas we are entering into an “uncharted territory” which is infused with many features and dimensions that reflect various ecclesiological implications of the movement. However, these features can be subsided into two fold dimensions, namely, “ashram model and charismatic model”. But these models are blended and are generally termed as “ashram based charismatic model” (Kuttiyaniikkal, 2014: 245). “Ashram based charismatic model” is the combination of elements from Hinduism and Christianity. The model of ashram has come from Hinduism, namely the Matridham ashram that has become an important centre. The ashram is the place where the devotees gather for fellowship. The ashram for the devotees represents holiness, unity and abode of Jesus, where devotees have the darshan (vision) of Yeshu. The life in the ashram begins with meditation at 5.30 AM and with singing of Bhajans followed by ashram seva (cleaning the ashram). Then there is perpetual adoration that takes place at darshan bhavan (on Sunday the adoration is called mandir), where devotees spend time in prayer and intercession (Vardan). They write their needs and put it in a box at the darshan Bhavan. There is even a hut called upasana Kutir (prayer hut) where devotees can spend all day in solitude and fasting. The ashram also conducts a three day monthly retreats for devotees. In these retreats, especially on the second Saturday, there is distribution of prasada (mostly one piece of bread) to the devotees as a symbol of peace (Kuttiyaniikkal, 2014:246- 248).

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466 James Scherer (1964:30-74) identifies three main distortions of the missionary enterprise of the Church: - The Political displacement of apostolic motives( here the political and spiritual aspects of the corpus christianum advance together), the cultural displacement (mission was sharing the cultural superiority and thus converts uprooted from their culture) and ecclesiasticism the displacement of apostolic motives (here mission becomes the propagation of a particular church or denomination with its dogmas, order, ministry and ritual (ecclesia plantanda) .

467 The word prasada means “that which gives peace”. In Hinduism during any form of worship the devotees offer food to the Lord. Along with these foods bael leaves, flowers and Tulasi (basil leaves) are given as prasada form the deity.
It is not important for the devotees to come to the ashram for fellowship, rather they can attend the village prayer meetings. Attending meetings at ashram (membership at the ashram) is a non-issue and what is important is participation in different degrees (this can be even at their village gatherings). This alludes to the concept of open church proposed by Thomas and Rayan forty year ago (Philip, 1975: 179). However, the idea of open church was actually proposed by Rahner (1974:94), who stated that “there are many people who do not belong to the church in terms of members” even though “they have positive attitude and relationship with the church”. Therefore, “it is difficult to decide who is inside and who is outside” (quoted in Kuttianikkal, 2014: 246). The unique context of the Khrst bhaktas, also pleads for considering them as belonging to church in a unique way. Wilfred (1991:237) sees this belonging to the community of discipleship in continuity with the discipleship presented in the Gospels. He says:

Not all followers belonged to Jesus’ community in the same way. There was the larger crowd that followed him everywhere he went, enchanted by his teachings, his authority etc (Matt 4:23-25). There were 72 disciples and the twelve. In addition, even among the twelve some were closer to Jesus than the other were. The Sermon on the Mount and the sermon on the plain were not addressed exclusively to the disciples but to the whole crowd as well. The content form of missionary instructions are given to the twelve (Lk 9:1-6) were same as those given to the seventy two (Lk 10:1-16)

In the context of the Matridham ashram, we see the formation of a koinonia in Christ- a communion of people belonging to different caste groups who confess Christ as Lord. Once people come to the ashram, all are considered equal in the movement. This is an important aspect because the manner in which the bhaktas express their relationship to each other becomes relevant to Indian ecclesiology. In the Indian context the competition among the different denomination always confuses the Indian mind. As Radhakrishnan apply said “We start claiming that Christianity is the only true religion and then affirm that Protestantism is the only true sect of Christianity, Episcopalianism is the only true Protestantism, the High church the only true Episcopal Protestant Christian religion and our particular standpoint the only true representation of the High church view” (quoted in Bharati, 2001:42).

It is true that within every denomination, members carry along the denominational stigma. Due to such stigma, denominations become a stumbling block to mission as “Christians witnessed to
their division rather than to the unity in Christ” (Schmidt, 1999:1). In such context the hope for the Indian church is to die to “churchianity” and resurrect as body of Christ:

Only when congregation and denomination are willing to die can there be resurrection and renewal of church in our day. We have tried gimmicks, personal evangelism and social action. We have tried intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. We have rearranged institutional furniture. We have created special groups for evangelism and social action. We have continually added and added but not repented of what we are now. God calls us not to increase our activity but to cease from sin. Our divisions are sinful as our wasted resources of money and manpower. Above all, has been the towering pride in the structures we have built to reach into the heavens. From this can only come death, we might welcome if it means the resurrected life of a chastened life (Schmidt, 1999:55).

But instead of dying to the denominational spirit, the Indian church defends organized churchianity in the name of 
koinonia. In the New Testament koinonia is not used in the sense of defending the organized structure but it is used in the context of social and economic relationship among the early believers. As Wright (1983:98) rightly point out:

Fellowship is usual translation of the Greek Koinonia, which is itself a part of a rich complex of words. A study of the root koinon- in the New Testament reveals that a substantial number of occurrences of the words formed or compounded from it either signify, or are in the contexts which relate to, actual social and economic relationship between [believers]. They denote a practical, often costly, sharing, which is far cry from watery togetherness which commonly passes as fellowship (quoted in Bharati, 2001:47).

The fellowship aspect stressed in the New Testament is evident among the Khrist bhaktas. Even though, the primary focus is on regular gatherings to worship Jesus, the aguas (leaders) actively seek to foster a sense of community and commitment to each other. Moreover, it is natural for these groups to have a sense of community as they are primarily comprised of family groups who see satsang as an extension of their family and worship. Moreover, it is natural for these bhaktas to gather for prayer, to share meals together, to go on outreach and to bring food to the poor in their community. This shows signs of functioning theologically as a mandali (fellowship) – as community (Duerksen, 2012: 165).

These Khrist bhaktas fellowships in many ways conform to what we may call the biblical expression of house churches, both a fellowship and a place of meeting (Raj, 2014:143-144). In the New Testament, the Christian community is called the house of God (Heb 3:6; 1Pt. 4:17; 1 Tim 3:15). Kittel (1974:119-120) rightly points that oikos in New Testament denote “the house as a group in the structure of the Christian community”:

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468 Quoted in Bharati (2001:43)
469 Quoted in Bharati (2001:44)
Primitive Christianity structured its congregation in families, groups and houses. The house was both a fellowship and a place of meeting. Thus we read of the house of Stephanas in 1Cor.1:16, the house of Philemon in Philemon 2, the house of Cornelius in Acts 11:4, the house of Lydia in Acts 16:15, the house of prison governor in Acts 16:31,34. Acts 18:8 also refers to the faith of Crispus and his whole house. In this regard we see expressly in Acts 2:46 that they broke bread by house (Kat’ oikon), and the summary in Acts 5:42 says that they taught and proclaimed good news in the temple and in houses (Kat’ oikon) (Kittel, 1974:120).

As division between Judaism and early Christianity became more apparent, Christians left the temple and synagogues and regularly met in homes of certain believers (Osiek & David, 1997:14). Paul’s reference to churches (ekklesia) is most likely connected to house churches (as evident in 1 Timothy 3:15), where Paul describes the Ephesian church as the “household of God”. Here household refers to the social unit with various members responsible for one another. To be a household meant identity, security and a sense of belonging (Osiek & David, 1997:251).

The early church used the inter-related social system of oikos as the basis for communicating the gospel. These social systems consist of common kinship, common community and common interests, which according to anthropologist are the universal units of society worldwide (Mandelbaum, 1991:146). Thus, the basic thrust of the New Testament evangelism was not individualistic but communal which is quite clear as we study the book of Acts (10; 2, 11:14; 16:5, 31-33; 18:7, 8; 20:20). In contrast to the New Testament, the Indian churches teach and practice a more individualistic (conversion of individual) approach (an extension of western missionary practice) forgetting the fact that the strength of the Indian societies lies in the extended and joint family, “the joint family in Indian society is altogether a different type of institution, which has evolved out of cultural and ethical traditions and prerogatives” (Aghamkar, 1994:2). The idea of individualism is a contradiction in itself. As Kasdrof (1980: 104-05) rightly pointed out:

> Just as physical world does not exist of, nor can it be explained by, isolated atoms, so society cannot exist of individuals in isolation. If we apply this principle to the church of believers as the body of Christ, which exist as a real, visible, sociological entity in larger society, then we may say that the individual as such does not and cannot exist at all, save in responsible relationships, and that the very concept of believing individuals implies and includes that of believing community.

Individualism shaped the Indian churches today so strongly that the churches perceived to consist simply of “saved” or “converted” individuals, thus leading to a mission compound mentality and negating the communal and social responsibility (Kasdrof, 1980:104). This Christian separation is based on the wrong interpretation of 2 Corinthians 6:17 (cf. Isa. 52:11),
“come out of them and be separate, says the Lord, touch no unclean things and I will receive you”, is used to justify time and again the churches’ action to separate from culture and community (Barnett, 1997:342). The fundamental question that one needs to ask according to Pennington (2015:131) is “Did Jesus or Paul who wrote this verse follow the extreme separation interpretation of Isaiah 52:11 which it quotes?”470 The answer is emphatically no! Jesus often criticized the Pharisees who defined themselves with “extreme extraction and separation” (Bromiley, 1986:1246). In fact the very name Pharisee meant “Separatist” in Aramaic (Bauer, et al. 2000:853). Despite the Pharisees opposition, Jesus did not detach himself from the outcastes and sinners rather he engaged with them to the extent that he was called a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19; Lk 7:34).

When we turn to Pauline texts and Paul’s example, it is clear that he did not introduce in these texts the pharisaic attitude of separation which some suggest is found in the Corinthian text. This idea of exclusiveness is sometimes drawn from the Old Testament quotation in 2 Corinthians 6:16b-18 (Martin, 1986:192). Moreover, such a Pharisaiic attitude is incongruent with Paul’s whole life, ministry and manner of life that exemplified a total opposition to any policy of total withdrawal for fear of contamination from unbelievers” (Martin, 1986:192). Moreover, isolationism of a Pharisaiic sort would logically mean departure from the world as Paul had previously written in 1 Cor. 5:9, 10, as an argument against such a wrong Pharisaiic attitude- “I Wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world”. In other words it is the “position of absurdity” (Hughes, 1977:244).

Because of the wrong interpretation of the scriptures, the churches have created a kaum mentality where the converts have been uprooted from their family and cultural context, which the Khrist bhaktas term is “Kabbadi evangelism” (Bharati 2004:27).471 These are what Stott (1989:14) calls “evangelistic raids”, where Christains occasionally “raid into enemy territories and then completely withdraws across the moat, into one’s Christian castle, pull up the drawbridge, and even close one’s ears to the plea of those who batter on the gate”.

470 http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/32_3_PDFs/IJFM_32_3-Pennington.pdf date of access: 19 July 2016
471 Kabbadi is an Indian game in which members of one team, while holding their breath, leave their safe haven and try to touch members of the other team, running back to their side after exhausting their breath.
Due to such approach many Indians and *Khrist bhaktas* blame the Christian church for encouraging social disintegration through individual conversion, as pointed out by Redpath (1965:128): “Do you know where we have gone wrong, and why have we brought down upon us the scorn of an unbelieving world? We have laid down mechanical rules and lifted a whole row of things that are taboo. Life is far too complex for that. You cannot lift certain things and make separation from them a mark of Christian discipleship. It is not living simply living contrary to the world; putting yourself labelled ‘separated’ and making everyone mad at you.”

The greatest tragedy is when Christian converts are discouraged from participating in their own family functions and common festivals, which enhances family bonds. Rokhaya (1996:31) describes these practices:

Non-Christian festivals and rituals are only talked about in terms of temptation. During *Dasera, Diwali* and national holidays, churches organize events in order to prevent people from going home and being tempted or forced to participate in rituals. While [Indians] from all corners of the country and even from abroad travel home, Christians gather within the four safe walls of their churches. When people fail to abstain from rituals, for instance when they cut their hair or wear white clothes after a family member has died; they are not allowed to enter the church (quoted in Dane, 2004:143).

The reluctant attitude of the church towards festivals and rituals is due to the fact that when the gospel encountered Indian cultures a process called *ecclesiogenesis* - did not really take place. This has resulted in converts converting to the “ways of missionary, thus becoming strangers in their own land and ill fitted to reach their own people” resulting in the foreignness of the church (Dybdhall, 1992:16). Moreover, most of the attempts of contextualization in Indian society to discard the foreignness of the church and to create an Indian church failed due to the Brahmanisation of Christianity that overlooked the culture and religions of the poor. The Brahmanisation of Christianity happened due to the misconception that Indian culture is a single culture and that is Brahmanical. But the truth is India is indeed a melting pot of many cultures. Indian culture should be seen as “a shroud for a host of sub-cultures with different layers within each of them” (Varaprasadam, 1986: 43). In the sameway the nation is made up of various cultural, language ethnic groups, the Christian community in India is also made up of many

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473 The Indian population is radically different consisting of six main racial types: the Nagrito, the proto- Australoids or Austrics, the Mongoloids, the Mediterranean or Dravidian, the western Brachycephals and the Nordic Aryans.
cultural, ethnic, language and social groups. Instead of understanding this crucial challenge of divergent cultures in Indian situation “for at least the last two hundred years, Indian Christian theology occupied itself with the challenging process of recollecting and re-appropriating its religious and cultural legacy mainly in terms of Hindu traditions” [Brahmanical] (Clarke, 1985: 18). Similarly, Wilfred (1990:503) also states that the problem lies in the lack of “an anthropologically and culturally founded ecclesiology”. Thus, any further attempt of inculturation in this line “is bound to be irrelevant to the majority of Christians in India because many Dalit and tribals not only do not identity with such high culture but also find it oppressive of their own identity and tradition” (Amaladoss, 1990:10-11). In such a context, what is needed is a “living – incarnated spirituality” as Bharati, a Khrist bhakta said, “the living Christ in His original form sent by God lived by our Lord, witnessed by His disciples and promoted by his Bhaktas in the early centuries”(Bharati, 2004:3). This “living -incarnated spirituality”, is what is reflected today in the Khrist bhakta movements where the movement expansion is from below not from above. The Khrist bhakta movement attempts to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish the movement in ways to make sense of people within their local cultural context, thus allowing the bhaktas to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. Therefore, they appropriate the faith into their cultural matrix. For example, contrary to the church attitude to discourage people from celebrating their cultural festival, the bhaktas take part in festivals just as they used to do it before becoming Khrist bhakta. But the majority of bhaktas do not do puja (homage, reverence) to Hindu gods any longer. Rather bhaktas join the village community in the outward part of celebration of festivals and offer puja to Christ or light a diya (oil lamp) in front of the picture of Christ. Thus, the bhaktas by being allowed to express their faiths within their culutral backgrounds are relieved from the pressure of losing their religious and cultural affiliations after becoming part of Khrist bhakta community. Moreover, as bhaktas

There are about 3000 castes, large and small. Caste consciousness is still strong especially in the hinter- lands of Indian villages. Cf. Venugopal (1998:463-467).

The Christian can b categorize into six main divisions; Syrian Christian of Kerala, the Konkan and the West coast Christians, the Latin rite of South India, Converts of North India (Dalit), The adivasi converts of North India and finally North Eastern Tribals (Varaprasadam,1989: 42-43).

The Indian church really failed to see the aspirations of the majority of the Dalit and counter cultural traditions (Jainism and Buddhism) who were repudiating the orthodox Brahmanism because it has nothing to deliver to the cause of common people and preach the language of the common people. Instead, they were attracted towards Bhakti traditions that interpreted religion in terms of love and devotion, rather than knowledge and affirming the equality of all human persons. The bhaktas of these traditions saw no meaning in devotion to the any god or goddess divorced from neighbourly love and practice of justice. Cf.Wilfred, 1993:229-231.
are not forced to leave their culture, names, food habits, more people are willing to join the movement. These approaches of the movement have proven the Hindu fundamentalists wrong as they alleged that the *ashram* of *Khrist bhakta* was converting people. Thus, the dream of several Indians who wanted to follow Christ without becoming westernized seems to become fulfilled in this movement.

Even though contextualizing the gospel has been one of the features of *Khrist bhakta* movement, yet in such cultural assimilation syncretism is also happening. For example, some of the *bhaktas* participate in religious festivals such as *Shivratri* or *Janmashtmi*. They also follow religious ceremonies related to *jat karm* (birth), *upanayan* (sacred thread ceremony), *shaddi* or *vivah* (marriage) and *antim sanskaar* (funeral rites). In such a context one needs to ask where the boundary between contextualization and syncretism is or in other words where does contextualization end and syncretism begin. As already discussed in chapter 4 this is not an easy question to answer due to the fine gap between contextualization and syncretism. Because of its close associations, it is difficult to name something as syncretistic even when it is vividly present in what is being described. Moreover, in the history of mission (in the Indian context) the process of contextualization of the church is not immune to syncretism. That is why Hollenweger (1999:49) (quoting Leonardo Boff) considers Christianity “a syncretism par excellence” and similarly Sanneh (2008:26) considers Christianity as a “translated religion whose teaching was received and framed in the term of its host culture”. Furthermore, what many would consider syncretism is in many instances what other would call contextualization. As Corwin (2004:282) rightly pointed out, “its contextualization when I do it, but syncretism when you do it”. This is one of the reasons why we have so many definitions of contextualization and syncretism. But does this mean that we should avoid this important question -“how far is too far” in contextualization? What is the gauge to determine the right degree of contextualization? (What need to be adapted and what need to be judged?) How can gospel and theology be related to a culture without becoming relativized in the process? In short how can we avoid; becoming syncretism” (Gundry, 1979:12)?

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476 *Shivratri* is a festival dedicated to lord *Siva*, and *Janmashtmi* is celebrated as the birthday of lord *Krishna* and are celebrated with much pomp.

477 This is evident for example in the contextualized approach of Syrian Christian community that maintained the caste rules and Hindu manner of social intercourse as discussed in Chapter 3.

478 To define contextualization is not easy because it barely appears distinct from “what other believes as shades of syncretism” (Hesselgravee, 2005:244).
The situation of the children of Israel in Canaan was similar to that of Khrist bhaktas. Even though they worshipped Yahweh, the Israelites often turned to Canaanite deities. Through out the Monarchy period there is this tension between Yahweh’s exclusive worship (a message of prophets) and Baal fertility cult”. During this period cultural assimilation was accepted in many levels. The word el that is used often as the title for the God of Israel is used in the Canaanite religion as the proper name for the highest god. For instance, in the Canaanite myth “Boghazky”, there is “mention of El as the creator of heavens and earth- a title given to none other in the pantheons” (Mullen, 1980:12). It is most often used with compound words in terms of place and themes. But this does not mean that El was used in the Old Testament in the similar manner as that of Canaanites. The Israelites appropriated the word El and gave it a new meaning. The Israelites use of El in plural form (Elohim) in the sense of “plural of majesty, honor or fullness”. That is, He is the God in the fullest sense of the word i.e. ELOHIM of elohim (Deut 10:17; Ps 136:2). This shows that the borrowed sources were used in sharp conflict with the religious environment. As Glasser (1989:39) states: “The Old Testament writers not only contextualized but reconceptualiized their borrowed sources, so that the distinctive elements of Old Testament faiths were preserved in sharpest conflict with the largest religious environment in which Old Testament literature emerged”.

Moreover, in the Old Testament the numerous references to Baal (Jud. 2:11-13; 3:7; 2 King 11:18; 2 Chr 28:4), the baals and names compounded with Baal (Jerubaal (Jud 7:1), Meribaal (1 Chr 8; 34), Eshbaal (1 Chr 8:33) and Ishbaal (2 Sam 23:8) suggest that Baal worship had a significant impact on the Israelites.

The activities of God accommodated through Canaanite cultural forms and names do not approve all aspects of its religion and practices but rather it was to show that Yahweh is the true God. Wright (1991:39) rightly states: “The purpose of God’s particular action in history of Israel is ultimately that God, as the saving and covenant God Yahweh, should be known fully and worshipped exclusively by those who as yet imperfectly known him as El. The end result of

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481 For example El Elyon (Gen 14:18) El Shaddai (Gen 17:1) El Olam (Gen 21:23).
what God began through Israel was of significance for Canaanites precisely because it critiqued and rejected Canaanite religion.”

But Israel instead of understanding that such tolerance does not equate with legitimization in practice and theology, Israel began to absorb Canaanite religious practice into the religion of Yahweh (1 King 18:21; 2 King 17: 15-17). Israelites recognized Yahweh as the supreme God but, at times, in dealing with the practical issues (rain, agricultural blessing) they turned to local Canaanite deities just like Khrist bhaktas (Hess, 1991:7). The impact of Baal continued to be felt in the following eight centuries as they kept on idolizing Baal. Especially in the book of Hosea, we can glean that Israel steeped deep into syncretism by worshipping foreign gods (Baal) along with Yahweh (Hosea 1:2, 11:1-7). Hosea reminds Israelites- that they have not learned the lesson from their forefathers who were destroyed by the plague at Baal- Peor (9:10). In such a syncretic environment as elaborated in chapter 2, the role of the prophets was to challenge the Israelites to return (Shub) to covenant obedience with Yahweh by forsaking all allegiances to foreign gods.

In the New Testament, Engell (1983:93) states, “Christ is the classic example of contextualization of God’s message” because through incarnation God “perfectly contextualized his communication”. Similarly Nicholls (1987:101) states that “the incarnation is the ultimate paradigm of translation of text into context”. Even the Gospel writers contextualized their message. As Hesselgrave (1989:8) states:

> Each of the four gospels, for example, reflects the cultural orientation of its author and is clearly addressed to a particular audience. Matthew’s Jewish orientation is reflected in his emphasis on messianic propheesy, kingship the divine titles of Jesus, and the Aramaisms that characterize his Jewish- Greek language. Luke on the other hand, reflects a distinctly Hellenistic mindset. This can be seen in his use of what has been described as good koine Greek with rich and varied vocabulary enhanced by numerous Semitisms.

The contextualization of the Gospel writers to the context of the hearers reflects their creative genius. Even Paul’s Aeropagus speech was influenced by the pagan audience of Greco- Roman philosophy (refer chapter 2). In comparison to the other speeches in Acts, Paul changed the style of presenting the gospel yet he clearly testified about the non- negotiable truths that the gospel reveals. Therefore, Paul’s contextualization “did not tone down the antithesis between Christianity and non – Christian religion” (Schnabel, 2008:184). Rather, he directly engages with
the culture and challenges the way they live and demands that the gospel calls for a new way of living. In 1 Corinthian 9:19-23 Paul explains the purpose of contextualization:

19. Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.
20. To the Jew I became a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.
21. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ law), so as to win those not having the law.
22. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.
23. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its blessings.

In the above passage, Paul clearly shows the purpose of his contextual ministry, “win as many as possible” (v19), or “save some”- “for the sake of the gospel” (v.22, 23). Therefore, any contextualization approach that “lose sight of this aim is to turn contextualization into any empty intellectual exercise” (Dybdahl, 1992:15). The message centred on Christ’s life, death resurrection and call to discipleship should not be diluted (Hiebert, 1985:103). Van Rheenen reminds us that Paul teaches in Colossians to stay centred on Christ as a “check on syncretism” (2006, 13). In order to contextualize the message one should not forget the message of the cross. At the centre of the gospel is the seriousness of sin and the efficacy of the gospel. Therefore, if our interaction with culture neglects the engagement with sin which separates us from God, then our contextualization becomes a vogue approach.

Although Khrist bhakta movement enables bhaktas to be rooted in the community of birth and confess Christ as Lord yet due to the ambiguity of the movement it also enables the individuals to participate and practice without any restrictions in religious and social ceremonies which leads to syncretism as shown above. In such situation how does biblical understanding of conversion enable bhaktas to remain centred in Christ?

The biblical approach to contextualization calls for a sound commitment to Christ and also to a continuous process of growth as a disciple of Christ. Bhaktas at the early stages of their encounter with the God of the bible may not be able to understand what the essential aspects of biblical discipleship are and, therefore, at this stage “will automatically express (their new found faith) whatever allegiance they have in their cultural way” (Kraft, 2008:143). Therefore, syncretism cannot be ruled out at this stage. At this stage as Hiebert (1994:127) states the decisive question is whether the person has made Christ the Lord of their life and not how much
the person knows about Christ. Consequently, Bharati, a *Khrist bhakta* himself calls for tolerance rather than putting demands on *bhaktas*. He states, “allow them to make their own decisions. They may go wrong initially, but if they make mistakes we can correct them gently by pointing it out under the light of scripture” (Bharati, 2001: 23). Similarly, an insider movement disciple of Christ also echoed Bharti view- “We cannot rule out syncretism at the beginning of a new believer’s life”.

The narrative of Naaman as stated in chapter 2 supports this view. Naaman who has just become a believer of Yahweh after the miraculous healing of leprosy by dipping in Jordan seven times makes confession - that implies a radical change in his worldview which leads to a new religious commitment: “I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel…your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord” (v. 15b & 17b). The confession narrative indicates Naaman denouncing the existence of any other god except, YHWH. He declares that the Lord, who resides in Israel, is the true God. It is precisely due to this awareness that he does not want to offer sacrifice to any other gods. But the request that follows to “bow down at Rimmon’s temple” seems controversial. Scholars differ in their interpretation regarding this request (see Chapter 2). The context suggests that “because of his loyalty to king and not to Rimmon, as his overfull speech tries to make clear, his request does not undercut his monotheism” (Nelson, 1987: 179). In addition, Naaman has already confessed not to worship any of his former gods (v.15), it is more reasonable to interpret Naaman’s petition in the context of his duties to the king. Naaman sees no way out of this dilemma.

The response of Elijah “Go in peace”, rather than scolding indicates approval for the request of Naaman which alludes to the truth that “God does not reject those in the process of purification just because they are not pure” (Luzbetak, 1988:369). Recognizing Jesus as saviour is sign that the word of God as seed has been planted and it will take time to bear fruit.

But the problem occurs when the *bhaktas* continue to live within their old religious belief and practices and interpret the gospel message on the basis of their old world views which leads to

continuous syncretism. It is here that the Khrist bhakta movement has to be challenged because biblical conversion has a direction that is towards Christ and Bible, which Hiebert (1994: 122) calls as “centred set”. A centred set is “created by defining a centre or reference point and relationship of things to that centre” (Heibert, 1994:122). It has well defined boundaries based on its relationship to its centre. Therefore, moving in the wrong direction, “away from the fuller knowledge of God” (Hiebert, 2006:44) leads to syncretism as it happening with many bhaktas after years of accepting Christ as Ishta devta. This happens because the movement is ambiguously undefined and therefore, individuals can hold on to any principle and practices. In addition, the fellowship at the ashram is not compulsory and the teaching at ashram is based on re-telling gospel stories in such a manner that does not challenge the bhaktas worldviews. As a result of inadequate discipleship the bhaktas do not “experience completeness in Christ that is both culturally appropriate and biblically faithful” (Sanou, 2013: 137). Moreover, as bhaktas are placed within the cultural context surrounded by antagonistic family members - who tenaciously hold to their Hindu worldview put pressure on the bhaktas, who are not being trained in the Christian discipleship and consequently succumb to pressure and compromise their faith and even backslide.

In such a context, the vision of the leaders of the Khrist bhakta movement need to change as the direction of the movement depends on the attitude of the leaders involved in the movement. Presently, Anil Dev the leader of the movement wants the bhaktas “to grow and be of their own” as he feels that this movement is “spirit based and laity based movement” (Kuttiyanikkal, 2014:148). But here lies the danger of the movement where bhaktas are given freedom to interpret their faith in Christ in their cultural context as it seems convenient for them – this leads them away from the centre. Therefore, it is imperative for the leaders of the movement along with aguas (guide) to come together, as in the case of the Jerusalem council, and give clear guidelines to the bhaktas as to what are the essentials of the Christian faith. The implications of the Jerusalem council’s decision (see section 6.1) makes it is clear that the new believers in Christ do not have to follow the customs of the older believing community. In Khrist bhaktas context it means not to follow the western expressions of Christianity. That is, faith in Christ is devoid of “cultural conversion to western Christianity” (Kraft, 1979:339). But at the same time the council affirms that rejecting idolatry is non-negotiable. The application of the principle may vary according to the context as we see for instance in Corinth (1Cor. 8-10) in relation to food
offered to idols. But this does not mean that the non-negotiable became negotiable as is clear from Paul’s exhortation “flee from Idolatry” (1Cor. 10:14). Therefore, for Khrist bhaktas to remain centred in Christ the essential of Christian faith need to be taught to bhaktas as they confess Christ culturally or in other words to be faithful to Christ and relevant to Context.

6.2.1 Khrist Bhaktas and Fellowship with Other Christian Churches

Some may ask to what extend does the Khrist bhakta movements fellowship with the wider Christian following community? It is true that many of the bhakta movements do not actively seek to fellowship with other Christian community. Such a stand towards other Christians is seen as problematic and leads to the objection that these movements are not truly or fully church. Indeed, Tennent (2005:174) has emphasized that Khrist bhaktas should be challenged to identify with the wider church because he states that “our very doctrine of Christ demands all believers, in all times, in all parts of the globe must seek – whenever possible – to form themselves into visible communities of faith. Biblical conversion, by definition implies community”. But in this critique of Khrist bhaktas we should be careful not to hold a standard higher than we hold to our own churches and denomination (Tennent, 2005:175) because the history of Christianity is reflected with examples of schisms and differences. Moreover, even in the New Testament and in the history of the church there is not a clear revealed structure of this community (Church).\textsuperscript{484}

In the biblical times wherever the gospel encountered with people, the people have responded to the gospel by living within their communities. At the same time they have transformed their existing structures and institutionsto give expression to the form of their churches. Unfortunately, “the glorious gospel which began in Palestine as a relationship with a person, when it moved to Greece became a philosophy, then on to Rome and became an institution, spread all over Europe and became a culture and then moved to North America and became an enterprise” (Kamalesan, 1980:4). Furthermore, when the gospel reached India, it became so heavily enveloped with church structures that it was assumed by those who brought the gospel that these structures were divine, immutable and normative for others. But the Khrist bhaktas are aware that “If Hinduism

\textsuperscript{484} The research on the Jesus movements depicts clearly a picture that goes against the generally accepted view of a monolithic picture of a church or a normative form of a unified community of followers (Cf. Hengel, 1980:71-101; Campbell, 2006:104-119).
and other religions survived without structures of authority, it is an indication that Church in India could fulfill its mission with minimum structures” (Van Leeuwen, 1984:21).

But does this mean that the *Khrist bhakta* movements should always remain a proto-church with no adequate ecclesial form? Culturally it seems valid but can it be theologically true? According to Newbigin, the study of the New Testament regarding the church very clearly shows “nothing of a relationship with Christ which is purely mental and spiritual, unembodied in any of the structures of human relationship” (quoted in Hunsberger, 1998: 112). The very use of the term *ekklesia* by Jesus (Matt 16:18), in the pluralistic multi-religious context of Caesarea Philippi, is not only a spiritual expression alone but also an expression of visible community. Jesus’ use of the term *ekklesia* is very puzzling - Jesus never used terms in Hebrew language that were commonly used for the gathering of believers to worship and especially the absence of the word synagogue is significant. Moreover, the significance is further heightened by the fact that the term was a non-religious term used in the classical Greek for political public gathering. *485* Jesus use of the term *ekklesia* is filled with a distinctive Christian meaning. It was this Christian meaning that put Christians at odds with the established culture of the day. The Roman government already had its governing bodies. So Christians by calling church *ekklesia* were in effect, setting themselves over against those established social institutions. Jesus Christ, not the Roman emperor, was Lord – a political statement as well as a religious statement. The early church could have avoided the use of *ekklesia* and escape persecution but they clearly linked the confession of the Christian faith (you are Christ the son of the living God (Matt 16:16) with that of a visible community (after Peter’s confession, Jesus said “I will build my Church” Matt 16:18). Therefore, to “untether Christian conversion from visible Christian community is to separate what God has joined together”.*486*

*485* A semantic study of the Greek word *ekklesia* refers to “public assembly”. As Kittel (1965:516) comment the term *ekklesia* is “not a *cultus privatius* rather *cultus publicus*” (Public gathering). In the classical Greek the term *ekklesia* refers to an assembly regularly convened for political purpose. In Greek city the citizen were called forth by the trumpet of *kerux* (herald) summoning them to *ekklesia* (assembly). Moreover, in the Septuagint the term *ekklesia* is used to translate the Hebrew term *qahal* which can refer to meeting for civil affairs (1 King 2:3), for war (Num 22:4) and most significantly gathering for religious purpose (Deut. 9:10; Joel 2:16). Furthermore, in the New Testament the term “church of God” refers to meeting in home (Rom 16:5), in a particular city (1 Cor 1:2), in a region (Acts 9:31) or in a continent like Asia (1 Cor 16:19). See Craig (1992) & Carson (1996).

*Khrist bhakta* movement formed an evangelizing community that displays actively the presence of the Spirit and is based on Christ. This shows that some form of church is being created – “Christ centred fellowship”. Winter (2003:136) calls this Christ centred fellowship as the “third reformation”. Even though this Christ centred fellowship is an excellent opportunity for presenting an alternative model of being church in India, yet the fluidity nature of the movement is of great concerns and this need to be addressed. As there are no initiation ceremonies no rules or institution to sustain the movement, it can easily break up. To be a believer in any religion it is important to acknowledge an allegiance and to declare an identity, even if the person is not clear of the full content of his/ her belief (Ruel, 2005:62). As Stark (2003:263) comments: “ Every movement needs some kind of boundaries and rules to sustain it to exclude potential free riders and doubters, although these rules must not be sufficiently low not to drive away those who are willing to take faith seriously.”

This is true in case of *Khrist bhakta movement* on the one hand, the movement is growing day by day yet, but the other hand, many devotees are deserting. A reason is that the movement sometimes becomes the haven for short time sojourners. Thus, it is important in the future for these movements to investigate the abandonment of the devotees. History reveals that not many movements have generated energy to outlive the initial enthusiasm as was the case of “Hindu Church of Lord Jesus Christ”, “National Church of India”, “Culcutta christo samaj”, etc. So it is a challenge for the movement to make sure that it does not die out as other new religious movements. Keeping this in mind the urgent need for the movement is to develop discipleship teaching, maturation in their faith and leadership for the next generation. They also need theologization in their contextual approach, so not to fall into syncretism. In such scenario, the institutional church should extend support to *Khrist bhakta* movement– as helper and guide and allow the movement to walk the rest of their way with Christ - who will transform their culture and construct their identity.

To predict the future of such Christ centred movements is difficult for two reasons. Firstly, history tells us that movements that have begun, they either ceased to be movements or become

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487 The other two reformation happened when the church moved away from mono- cultural framework of Judaism to the acceptance of Gentile believers and also when church broke away from the ecclesiastical structure of Roman Catholicism to articulate a different ecclesiology (Winter, 2003:136-137).
institutions. David Bosch calls it “sociological law” (1991:52). Christianity did not begin as a religion but as a movement of people who confessed Jesus as Lord. But later on, it ceased to be a movement as it became institutionalized. And when it became institutionalized, as White calls “imperial religion,” then it lost most of its vigour from when it was simply a movement without church building and persecuted movement. As Bosch (1991:53) comments:

When this happened [change from movement to institution] it also lost much of its verve. It white – hot conviction, poured into the heart of first adherents, cooled down and became crystallized codes, solidified institutions, petrified dogmas. The prophet became the priest of the establishment, charisma became the office, love became routine. The horizon is no longer the boundaries of local parish. The impetuous missionary torrent of early years was tamed into still- flowing rivulet and eventually into a stationary pond.

This is also true of the institutional church in India. In the process of guarding its boundaries the church became more regulative than dynamic, thus creating distrust among the Indian community. The distrust of the church as a social institution created contempt for the religion among the Indian society. Conversely, the movements that remained ceased to be movements and became part of history.

Secondly, the leader of the Khrist bhakta movements and all Christ centred movements say that these movements are the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore it is hard to envisage what the future holds for them- “the wind blows where it pleases, you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going” (Jn 3:8).

Nevertheless, we envisage that these Christ centred movements will become organic bodies - where life produces its own organism and everything comes from within. But at the same time, these Christ centred churches will be distinct from the Khrist bhakta movement – when the bhaktas will acknowledge the person of Christ and follow the principles of Christ. In Indian history, reformed Hindu thinkers also accepted Christ as Guru but they failed to acknowledge him as Lord and to follow his principles. This is also the reality of the Khrist bhakta movement - the bhaktas are vacillating between these two aspects and as a result many backslide. It is here that the institutional church can help these bhaktas to discover the biblical Jesus and acknowledge him as “Christ the son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Of course this will lead to persecution, which is inherent to allegiance to Christ, just as the Jesus movement faced in the

first century. Moreover, the Indian church should critically reflect on its continual renewal and be alternative community of cooperate living of Christian life in “unity in diversity”.

6.3 Yeshu Bhakta Movement and Baptism

As mentioned above Yeshu bhaktas believe in Christ as Iswhara (God) and as the only savior but they do not find it necessary to undergo baptism in order to be a disciple of Christ. Moreover, the leaders of Yeshu bhaktas do not preach baptism but faith in Christ. This raises some of the following missiological questions. Why are bhaktas not receiving Baptism? Can the devotees become disciples of Christ without taking baptism? Could there be a church where baptism is not considered essential but faith in Christ is sufficient to serve as a model of ecclesia in the Indian context?

6.3.1 Why are Bhaktas Not Receiving Baptism?

A Brahmin says: “I will call myself a Christian Brahmin, for I am trying to live my life upon the principles and spirit of Jesus, though I may not come out and be an open follower of Jesus Christ by taking baptism, but Iam following him” (quoted in Jones, 1925:32).

A Hindu doctor expresses, “Iam a Christian, but I have not taken baptism, for I feel no need of it. The thing that strikes me about Jesus is that He connected sin and cure of disease- the two went together” (quoted in Jones, 1930:35).

A Hindu professor says“I may live and die as a Hindu, but my attachment is to Christ. He has become my centre and joy. My soul has been unfolding to him like a flower in the sun” (quoted in Mattan, 1996:112).

In order to understand the reason behind the bhaktas’ rejection of baptism, and those referred above, we need to understand how in general the Indians view baptism and what are the implications of baptism are in India. In general baptism is not regarded as sign of commitment to Christ but rather a sign of discarding ones culture and community (Staffner, 1972:235-36). A Hindu is not only born into his religion but also into his caste. By birth a Hindu is initiated into his religious, cultural and social structures (Menacherry, 2005:1). A Hindu can remain a Hindu even though s/he is an atheist or does not worship any Hindu gods. As S. Radhakrishnan (1956:55), the former Indian president and philosopher, rightly said, “Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. While it gives absolute freedom in the world of thought, it enjoins strict code of practice. The theist and the atheist, the skeptic and agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life.”
The words of Radhakrishnan are confirmed by Bharati (2004:49), when he says that a Hindu is the one, “Who belongs to a particular community, not related to his personal faith in his religious systems. He is more of a social animal aiming for personal spirituality rather than one concerned about religious system”. On a social level, Hindu society has a hold on its members more than Hinduism as a religion. They believe that the traditional patterns were handed down centuries and need to be regulated and fashioned (Menamparampil, 2008: 22). Thus, in the Indian context, Hindus do not object to a change of heart and belief in Jesus Christ but they object to the change of dharma (especially through baptism) because they do not see conversion related to the spiritual sphere but “a step by which a person change his social community”. As Staffner (1972:235) points out, “far from being a purely a spiritual event, a spiritual rebirth, baptism implies the changeover to and the renunciation of person’s social community in favor of a new and different social group- a step that is alien to Hindu mind.”

Without acknowledging this Indian reality, the practice of baptism has become or forced to become, a rite of passage or separation from one’s community of birth. This has contributed to the image of Christian as a people with a separate communal identity. As Parekh (1924:324) rightly asserts: “When baptism becomes a means of joining a community; when it means absolute severance from one’s own community, one’s own birth and kin, and from one’s own national, cultural and spiritual heritage; when it means social submergence and ecclesiastical bondage for higher caste; then baptism is reduced to a ritual of Christendom rather than a commitment to Christian discipleship.”

Due to such an ethos baptism (in the Indian contex) has become a rite with sociological consequences that can alter the “communal structure of society resulting in social, cultural, communal and consequently- political problems in India” (Chandran, 1972:51). Thomas (1996:156) rightly states, “Since religious minorities have a legal entity in the political framework through reservation and other safe guards, change of a person from one religious community to another is seen as enhancing the political strength of one community and weakening the other.” Generally, Christian support and vote for a secular political party, has led to extremist group (BJP, RSS, VHP) to cause uproar at every instance of baptism, particularly group or mass conversions ( due to fear of losing votes - as the converts will vote for secular party).
Moreover, baptism has also legal ramifications for a convert’s relation to Hindu Personal Law (National civil law). During the time of the Portuguese rule in India, all juridical and administrative powers were administered by the Hindus. But as the British came to rule India they tried to impose English law on all subjects based on the view that the English law is a universal law for all society, even though it did not have rights and reasoning for non-Europeans (Falkowski, 1992:6). Soon they realized that English law is not applicable to the Indian context and therefore allowed Hindus and Muslims to be ruled by their respective laws (Staffnner, 1987:239). But then there were instances of people converted to Christianity- what law applies to them? In 1863 Lord Kingsdown, in a judgment stated: “Upon conversion of Hindoo (Hindu) to Christianity the Hindoo (Hindu) law ceases to have any continuing obligatory force upon the convert. He many renounce the old law by which he was bound as he has renounced his old religion or if he thinks fit he may abide by the old law notwithstanding he has renounced the old religion” (quoted in Saldanha, 1981:95).

This law allowed the converts to remain as Hindus. But later in 1865 Indian succession act was introduced by the British for all foreigners (British) who lived in India. Initially, Indians were exempted from this Act. However, when it was finally formulated, it was written into the text that its provision would be applied to the converts to Christianity. The ulterior motive behind this was that the Indian Christians would follow “in everything the ways of the British resident” (Staffnner, 1977:18). Even though this law was not compulsory applicable for all converts yet after independence the Supreme Court verdict made it impossible to live under the Hindu Personal Law, where it was stated that converts to Christianity cannot be governed by Hindu law. Here it is important to note that conversion is not seen as conversion to God but rather a change from one community to another in India. Thus, the Indian succession act of 1865, written for foreigners, became the Christian Personal Law – this had social and legal ramifications where a Dalit ceases to be treated as Dalit by the state for education and employment opportunities (Devadason, 1974:71).

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489 It is a standard procedure through which inheritance is passed on to the appropriate heir.
490 India has four personal laws, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsis, which applies to a person depending on his/her religious identity. These laws deals with marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship, religious endowments of those legally defined as Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsis. During Judicial consideration of any such dispute the religious identity of the person is essential to establish which law is applicable. Even in case the person in question does not practicing any religion the lack of religious identity is not an option (Rankin, 1941:426-442).
Furthermore, many Indian states have passed anti-conversion law (as mentioned in Chapter 4) whereby people asking for baptism must submit an affidavit to the collector then send it to the superintendent of police. He in turn passes it along to the local police where the person intended to take the baptism resides. Each case is investigated. Then the process reverses back up to the chain of command to the collector before he gives permission. Obviously, this is time consuming and open to abuse. Within this context there are different grades of positive responses among the Hindus with regard to Christ but negative responses towards baptism which are as follows:

1. They are prepared to accept Christ as God and his moral teachings. But they do not accept him as the only savior; rather Christ is the manifestation of the same God (Samartha, 1974:117).

2. They believe in Christ as God and in some instances, they preach and exercise healing ministry. They respond to Christ and Christ alone within the context of Hinduism, but with reject the Church and baptism.

3. The third group is *Yeshu bhaktas* who have divergent opinions regarding baptism. Based on an interview conducted by Kuttiyanikkal (2014:262) there are three different groups: - The first group of devotees who want to partake in Eucharist but who consciously do not want to take baptism so to remain in their community. The second groups of bhaktas want to enter the Christian community by observing baptism but are afraid of their family and fear ostracism. The third groups of bhaktas are those who are not aware of baptism as it was not taught to them. They believe what is required of them is to follow the teachings of Christ and be his disciples.

In these positive responses the common denominator is that they are all against baptism because in Indian context “baptismal water, the water of entire universe, is in constant flux and the movement, movement across times, peoples, cultures and situation” (Sebastian, 2008:255).

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491 Raja Ram Mohan Roy is the example of this group as already discussed in Chapter four. Roy believed Jesus as the ethical teacher par excellence and thus Jesus is unique in the ethical sense. He regarded the precepts of Jesus as the guide to peace and happiness. He was engaged in orthopraxis, actualizing moral reform in Hindu society based on the teachings of Jesus. Cf. Nag (1951)

492 The example of this group is the movement of K Subba Rao in Andhra Pradesh, who sought to proclaim Christ, disentangled from controversy, doctrine, ritual and denominational rivalries. For him the only qualification a person needs to become the disciple of Jesus was renunciation. He stated the teaching of Baptism as “madness of Baptism”. He said “the madness of baptism does not qualify anyone for admission into the school of Christ; rather it is the conversion of heart which is the true baptism” (quoted in Aleaz, 1991:45).
This negative response is not limited to Hindu Disciples of Christ but it is also evident among Indian Christians who voiced against baptism practiced by the church and questioned its necessity and importance. The Christian Institute for the study of religion and society (CISRS) organized a consultation on the meaning of conversion and baptism in the cultural context of India. After discussing the different issues related to baptism, it suggested that: “If baptism is to be retained in Indian Christianity, the churches that retain it should be constrained to find in it (or for it) a meaning that is strongly supportive of Christian life and faith, otherwise its liability to the gospel in India can hardly justify its continued practice” (Thomas, 1972:4).

At the ecumenical conference (1982) organized by National council of churches in India (NCCI to discuss the importance of conversion in Indian context, Singh stated that,

Christian baptism has often been presented as a total repudiation of one’s socio-cultural heritage and accepting a name, style of life alien to one’s own. This sort of idea and practice of baptism has kept many from accepting baptism. For many, baptism, particularly as presented in our churches, does not seem to be essential for the faith, response and commitment to Christ. In the light of the cultural and social demands that baptism has wrongly demanded from many, it may be important to ask the question whether the rite of baptism could be necessary condition for the entry into the fellowship of the church (Singh, 1985:2).

These are indeed powerful words and have to be listened to and responded to seriously, as it raises important questions,

1. Is baptism essential or non-essential to Christian faith and the Church?
2. Has baptism as practiced in India today become a liability in its relationship to the gospel?
3. If baptism is seen as a sacrament rather than as a rite, can it be re-interpreted and re-captured according to the Indian context?

In order to answer these questions, it would be helpful to consider an early Christian understanding on baptism. Early Christians were a minority group in the non-Christian world. In this context how did the early Christian understanding of baptism relate to the socio-cultural context? Did Christians renounce everything in order to step into the new sub-culture of Christianity? The present situation in India shows some similarities to that of the early

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493 In the Indian context baptism is understood as the rite of initiation involving separation from non-Christians; a magical washing way of sins whereas, baptism as sacrament signifies incorporation into Jesus Christ. See Thomas (1972: 96).
Christians, as the *Yeshu bhakta* movement is also a minority among a vast non-Christian population. Moreover, the response of early Christians in a similar situation may open some windows to reflect on the issue of baptism in the Indian context.

### 6.3.2 Early Christian Understanding of Baptism

The origin of early Christian baptism is uncertain.\(^{494}\) However, the early church based their practice of baptism on the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20\(^{495}\) and on the baptism of Jesus himself being baptized by John the Baptist (Ferguson, 2009:853). Among the early Christians, baptism was the common means of entering the community of followers of Jesus. Baptism as a rite or ceremony was not invented by Christians. As a rite of initiation and purification it was practiced both by the Jews\(^{496}\) (proselyte baptism) and the mystery religion of the Graeco-Roman world.\(^{497}\)

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\(^{494}\) The origin of early Christian baptism is identified with mystery religions, in the Old Testament ceremonial cleansing, in proselyte baptism and in the baptism practice of sects like Qumran. Although there are similarities, none of these practices give an answer to the origin of Christian baptism satisfactorily (Meyer, 1987:17-30; Pearson, 1999:42-62).

\(^{495}\) The New Testament scholarship believes that the commissioning of Mt 28:18-20 is product of a second generation Christianity rather than of Jesus himself. The following are the arguments for such a conclusion. Firstly, the tradition of the Mathean version to baptize is not found in any of the authentic strand of the Gospel. This view is supported by textual criticism; the earlier texts contained no mention of baptism. Secondly, the use of Trinitarian formula is late; Paul and Acts present baptism as administered “in the name of Jesus”. Thirdly, the passion for the Gentile mission is performed by Paul who was not an apostle in Jerusalem church. If Jesus had commanded to preach the gospel to all nations then it will be hard to assume that for the apostles of Jesus and the Jewish church this commission of Jesus seems to be unimportant and neglected. Finally, there is no reconciliation of the Gentile mission in Mathew’s Gospel it is forbidden (Matt 10:5b; 15:24). Cf. Willoughby (1989)

\(^{496}\) It is hard to know when Jews began to practice proselyte baptism as an initiation rite for Gentile converts to Judaism. In this regard there are three theories. Firstly, scholars like Gedalyahu (1977:146-189) holds that the immersion of proselytes goes back to the early second temple period, where the ritual was conducted to remove the uncleanness of the Gentiles that derived from idols. Secondly, some scholars like Rowley (1940:313-334) and Jeremias (1960:24-37) believe that proselyte baptism was a widespread practice prior to John the Baptist. Thirdly, scholars like Scobie (1964:95-102) & Zeitlin (1933:78-79) holds that it developed in Judaism in the second half of the first century of in the second century BC.

\(^{497}\) Judaism would admit the outsider into its fold, but only with the condition that the Gentile would submit to ritual bath (baptism), to circumcision and offer sacrifices. It involved an ethical element in which the person baptized made a complete break with their former manner of conduct and dedicated to a new way of life (Daube, 1973:106-113). Every religion in the Greco-Roman world consists of its own mystery religion. Even though they were not alike in every respect yet, they possessed many fundamental likenesses: 1) All held secret rites for the initiated. 2) All shared in sacramental meals that experience god. 3) All offered mystical cleansing. 4) All promised a happy life for the faithful (Enslin, 1938:186-200).
Unlike Jewish proselyte baptism (for Gentiles), John baptized the Jews, not Gentiles (Dockery, 1992:56) yet baptism calls for Jewish ritual cleansing and bathing practices, both have strong eschatological associations; both are associated with conversion and forgiveness of sins (Hartman, 1992:585). Whatever might have been the Christian baptism antecedents, baptism as understood by the Apostolic church was something unique and differed radically in its meaning from both Jewish and John’s baptism.

Christian baptism was different from John’s baptism in its call for faith in Jesus – it was administered in Jesus’ name and was connected with the Holy Spirit (Ferguson, 2009:853). It was a means by which one was incorporated into the company of those who are redeemed by accepting what God has done in Christ. Thus, baptism was seen as an “efficacious actualization of the redemptive work of Christ” (Bovon, 1999:436). Besides the formation of a community in the name of Jesus, baptism infatuated three functions, namely, forgiveness of sins, conferral of the Spirit and establishing a relation with the coming of Messiah (Strecker, 2000:286). So, it can be stated that in early Christianity baptism was understood as an eschatological reality, where believers were bound to the eschatological person of the Messiah and to one another.

The early Jewish Christian community, after their baptism, remained a part of their parent community (Jewish cultural community) by participating in customs and rituals. This is evident in the fact that they kept on attending temple, kept the Law of Moses, practiced circumcision, observed Jewish dietary laws and social customs. At the same time they came together exclusively to celebrate their newly found faith in Messiah. This new community was a spirit filled community of people who devoted themselves to the apostolic teachings and celebrated Eucharist at home and came together at the synagogue for petitionary prayers (Kavanagh, 1978:22). Thus, while remaining inculturated in their parent community they came together exclusively to celebrate their newly found faith in Jesus. It seems that this dual – identity could be maintained without much tension due to the fact that both the followers of Jesus and Jews believed in monotheism (God of Israel), claimed the same scripture and adhered to the same moral code. As Pathrapankal (1999:12) rightly asserts: “The Christian went to the temple of

498 By doing so John was saying, in effect, that even the Jewish people are not prepared for God’s Kingdom; they are as Gentiles, in need of repentance and God’s forgiveness (Witherington, 1992:386)

499 Ablution or washing was practiced in several ways in the Hebrew bible. It was an act of purification from impurity or uncleanness (Lev. 11-17; Num19:11-22). Moreover, in the Gospels baptizo is used for the Jewish ritual washing (Mt 15:2; Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38; Jn 3:25). Cf. Neusner (1973).
Jerusalem during times of prayer because they felt that their new faith did not involve a break with their past; but rather a completion and fulfillment of their ancient religion. Some even considered this group as a sect, the sect of Nazarenes (Acts 24:5) similar to the sects of Sadducees (Acts 5:17) and Pharisees (Acts 15:5)’’

However, as Christianity moved from its Jewish background to an Hellenistic context, how did Christians relate their baptism to society? Did they experience inculturation or de-culturation of their faith?

In the Hellenistic world, religion was a communitarian aspect that was closely interwoven with culture. They believed in the existence of many gods and thus it was not difficult for the Roman state to incorporate a new religion into their system (Jeffers, 1999:105). Moreover, in the early stages, the Roman civil authorities considered Christianity to be a sect of Judaism. As a result, the Roman authorities allowed Christian to share the legal protection of the Jews (Ferguson, 2003:602). They even show the complaint of the Jews against Christian as an internal matter. Even Paul could openly preach in Rome, which was not objectionable under Roman law due to this consideration (Bediako, 1992: 19). Moreover, along with the privileges of sharing the Jewish identity, the Christians also had to share the negative attitude that the Roman held against Jews. Ferguson (2003:609) rightly states that, “Gentile distaste for Jewish exclusivism, resentment of Jewish privileges, hostility to Jewish ambition and later suspicion of Jewish loyalty- all these affected attitudes towards Christians and were transferred to them to some degree at one point or another.”

There were mutual influences between Christianity and Hellenist world. Christian used the treasure chest of the Greek culture and philosophy by the second century (Lampe, 2004:28).

500 Julius Caesar officially granted the Jews the right to observe the Sabbath, freedom from military service, the right to maintain the temple and observe Jewish festival and protection against attempts to destroy the Jewish scriptures. He reduced the tribute owed by the Jewish nation. Later, Jews were expected to revere, but were exempted from worshipping the emperor and from participating in pagan religious rituals. cf. Jeffers (1999); Ferguson (2003).

501 For example, Clement of Alexandria demonstrated Greek thought in learning and writing. Philosophy was given to the Greeks as their own kind of covenant, their foundation for the philosophy of Christ. The philosophy of the Greeks contained the basic elements of that genuine and perfect knowledge which is higher than human even those of spiritual objects (Shelly, 2008:56).

502 For example, Plato’s highest idea was monotheism and he also held the view that there are two worlds; the visible world and invisible world. He further stressed that reality is spiritual and eternal rather temporal. The teaching of
The Christian diaspora translated the Gospels from the Aramaic to the Greek in order to preach it to the Greeks, due to which new words; new notions came in through the translation process.\textsuperscript{503}

In accordance with the Pauline understanding of baptism as sacrament - dying and rising with Christ (Rom 6:1-11), the Hellenistic Christianity saw baptism as sharing in the experience and destiny of the crucified and risen Lord.\textsuperscript{504} For Hellenistic and Jewish Christianity, baptism meant entering into a new community of Jesus. However, the notion of circumcision, as discussed earlier, as the condition for admitting non-Jews into this new community resulted in coupling the idea of baptism and circumcision (Ferguson, 1988:485). Here Paul is not comparing the Old Testament circumcision with baptism but the prophetic idea of circumcision of the heart took the place of physical circumcision (See Col. 2:11-15). In other words baptism was seen as the Christian circumcision incorporating women and men, slave and master, Greek and Jew into new people of God. This is a new faith that is open to all (Clark, 1960:312). Nevertheless the implication of baptism does not come from the circumcision rite of Judaism but from the cross-resurrection of Jesus (Clark, 1960: 312). This is because physical circumcision and baptism provide an incomplete analogy (circumcision was not for females and therefore could not provide analogy to the baptism of girls). Moreover, at the council of Jerusalem, the question was not whether baptism was a substitute for circumcision; but whether Gentiles should be circumcised. The council saw the two rites as distinct in their significance and subject as they have no place in the new covenant. Hence, they were able to absolve the Gentiles from the rite without mentioning baptism. But Paul who bitterly opposed circumcision of the Gentile as a matter of principle (Acts 15:1, 2) insisted on circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3) soon after the council. This could be because circumcision was a necessary convention belonging to a wholly different situation\textsuperscript{505} or simply practical – it would open new door for the Gospel for Jewish believers. Non-circumcision would be an impossible barrier for them to effectively hear the

\textsuperscript{503} Plato is in line with Christianity and its teaching of heaven and earth and also Trinity. Thus Christianity accepted the teaching of Plato and incorporated it and it conforms to the biblical teaching (Latourette, 1980:92-95).

\textsuperscript{504} For example the Greek word Christ was introduced for Messiah. Moreover, the word logos (originally meant an opinion, word, speech and reason) was used to refer to Jesus.

\textsuperscript{505} In second Corinthians (11:24) Paul mentions that he has received 39 lashes from the Jewish authority. This implies his continued inclusion in Jewish community. There is no need to discipline an apostate or an outsider with this particular punishment (Setzer, 1994:16).

\textsuperscript{505} Even though Paul insisted that circumcision meant nothing yet there is no evidence that he disavowed circumcision for Jews. As a Jew he remained loyal to Jewish law himself (1 Cor 9:20). The circumcision of Timothy was essential if he wanted to continue his practice of witnessing at synagogue.
Moreover, Paul stated in I Cor. 7:18-19 for everyone to remain in the state in which they were called- circumcised to remain circumcised and uncircumcised to remain uncircumcised. For Paul, the term circumcision was equivalent for the Jewish people and uncircumcision for the Gentiles. Jews were not to become Gentiles nor should the Gentiles become Jews (Polhill, 1999:135).

This new understanding had a far-reaching consequence – it enabled the growth of Christianity in the non-Jewish areas around the world. “By deciding that a pagan who wanted to be Christian did not have to become a Jew first, the church opened its door and became a place where anyone could enter and live at ease while maintaining his or her culture and customs” (Dumais, 1987:9). Thus, in the early church, the Jewish Christians, after accepting Christ continued to imbibe in their culture and practiced their former religious customs. Similarly, Hellenist Christians after accepting Christ did not become Jews but rather remained in their culture and practiced their new faith within their cultural context.

But as the church in the West went from being a persecuted church to becoming the official Church and official religion, the meaning of baptism underwent changes. Once the emperor declared his religious preference, the object of his religious veneration would obviously receive cult support from the public at large (Riley, 1974:213). Thus, Christianity gained a patron in the form of the emperor and any other religious worship in the state was considered illegal. This new situation led to the amalgamation of Roman and Hellenist cultures and Christianity. Baptism was seen as a social symbol or empire symbol as well as sign of faith (Pathil, 1998:3). Those who were a part of the Church automatically became the part of the Empire and vice versa. Whereas, those who do not belong to the church were considered as Barbarians or heathens and they did not get civil rights. In the middle ages, the unbaptized people were considered savages and beasts. The only way for them to be saved was by converting to Christianity (Grunder, 1995:22). It remained a standardized method in the Western thought throughout the age of modern expansionism - that barbarians had to be made into human beings (i.e. to take the missionaries’ culture) before they could become Christians (Grunder, 1995:22). Although the church and state were separated after the reformation, the concept of the Church was connoted with the western culture and this became normative concept. Even during the modern missionary movement, the missionary activity included both spreading the gospel and spreading the western civilization.
Therefore while spreading the Christian message; they intentionally spread the western culture. According to Grunder (1995:22), “The role of missionaries in spreading the western culture was more significant, as the missionaries thought their effort as a spiritual conquest and thus they became the most militant advocates of European culture.”

The missionaries considered themselves as the bearer of superior religion as well as superior culture. Therefore by baptizing the native the missionaries tried to integrate the natives into European cultural. Thus the new churches in the colonies were an extension of colonizing churches. Pathil (1998:9) states: “The New churches in the colonies were not exactly new local churches, but extension of the colonizing churches. Baptism thus became not only a symbol of religious conversion but also of cultural conversion to European or Western ways and customs.”

This kind of westernized Christianity as discussed also in detail in Chapter four, found its way in India resulting in a distorted image of the church as a foreign entity; and baptism instead of being seen as sign of spiritual transformation or as sacrament, it was regarded as social and cultural change. It is because of this notion that Khrisbhaktas do not want to be baptized. Does the present understanding of baptism have indeed become a liability in Indian context? Does this mean that one has to give up baptism in the Indian context? Is baptism not vital to Christian discipleship and commanded by Christ? As Parekh (1924:326) rightly said, baptism is “an unequivocal and open confession of the discipleship to Christ”. The same is asserted by Thomas (1972:89) but he goes further and states that as in the Indian context baptism has become distorted and needs to be purified from its colonial connections: “I have no doubt that the baptism in the New Testament sense is incorporation into Christ. But the meaning of baptism has been distorted for long in India as a mark of transference of sociological cultural-Judicial loyalties from one community to another. The real question is how to retain the meaning of baptism.”

In order to retain the meaning of baptism and purge it from the colonial understanding, the Indian context is of great importance. But this does not mean that the context determines everything for the church rather the context becomes the vehicle for the proclamation of the message the church has to proclaim. For example, when the church entered the Greek and Roman cultures, the Christian faith borrowed words and utilized consistently these words to proclaim its faith through these words and concepts. But this does not mean that the church went
into the Greek world to become Greek or into the Roman world to become Roman, but rather it had a message that could be now understood by these cultures. It proclaimed the gospel by giving a new meaning and a new context to the words it borrowed from Greek and Roman contexts. When the Christian faith touches something it no longer remains the same. It will become the vehicle of new impulses, new purposes and in the process will naturally undergo a certain amount of change. In the same manner, in the Indian context to explain the importance of baptism in the Indian context we need to use “transformed symbols and ceremonies familiar to the people” (Mathias, 1997:65). One such could be the, Ganga snan or ritual bath in the Ganges river during Kumbh Mela.

6.3.3 **Ganga Snan (bath in Ganges) at Kumbh Mela**

Outside the ecclesiastical context, बपतिस्मा (baptisma)\(^{506}\) as a non-Indian term has no meaning with which Khrist bhaktas can relate to except for its negative connotation as a Christian rite of separation from the Hindu community. Therefore, the term Ganga Snan at Kumbh Mela can be used for baptisma.

The word Kumbh literally means “pitcher” that is a receptacle\(^{507}\) and Mela means festival and thus Kumbh mela means “festival of pot” (Mishra, 2007:15). The most acceptable explanation of Kumbh Mela is the fight between the divine and demonic forces – the nectar of immortality and the ultimate victory and celebration of the divinity. The ancient origin of Kumbh Mela is described in the Vedic scriptures known as the Puranas, especially Bhgavata Puranas, Vishnu Puranas, Mahabharata and Ramayana. The account goes that from the bygone days of the universe Indra who had lost his kingdom due to the disrespect shown to the sage Durvasa, approached Vishu to regain his kingdom. As per Vishnu’s advice Devtas (demigods) and Asuras (demons) assembled together in the shore of Milk Ocean (Kheer Sagar) to churn the ocean of Milk and find the nectar of immortality inorder to regain the lost kingdom and make them immortal. The Mandara (name of a mountain) was used as a churning rod and Vasuki, the king of serpents, became the rope of churning. With demigods at Vasuki’s tail and demons at his head, they churned the ocean for 1000 years. A pot of nectar was eventually produced and

\(^{506}\) A Hindi variant of the English or rather Greek term baptism used today in almost all North Indian languages.

\(^{507}\) Kumbh is also synonymous to the human body. As water can be stored and held in a pitcher likewise Atma (soul) is contained in the body.
demigods fearful of the outcome of demons having the nectar stole away the pot and hid it in four places on the earth: Prayag (Allahabad, the place where Khrist bhakta movement started), Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. At each of these places there was a fight between demigods and devas for nectar and during the course of the fight a drop of immortal nectar spilled from the pot and fell. Meanwhile, Vishnu disguised himself as Mohini, a beautiful damsel and distracted the asuras and distributed the nectar among the devas.

In remembrance of this victory and due to the prominence of nectar of immortality spill on these four places, a festival (Kumbhmela) is held every twelve years which rotates between Allahabad, located at the sangam (confluence) of two rivers Ganges and Yamuna, the town Nasik on the Godavari river, the town Ujjain on the Shipra river and the village Haridwar on the Ganges.

The main highlight of Kumbh Mela is the observance of a sacred bath by the pilgrims at the sangam, especially at Allahabad where Yamuna meets Ganges and then Ganges flows into the Bay of Bengal. According to Rig veda (RV), “those who take bath at the place where the two rivers, white and dark, meet together, rise up to heaven; those determined men who abandon their body there secure immortality” (RV 6.45.31). Thus in order to achieve this immortality during these festivals the Kumbh Mela is actively performed through the ritual bathing, chanting, singing, giving to poor and debating various Hindu scriptures. As Singh (2009:176) rightly notes, “Bathing in these rivers during the Kumbh Mela is considered an endeavor of great merit, cleansing both body and Spirit.” The devotee believe that by bathing in the Ganges one is freed from the past sin (Karma) and thus one is eligible for the liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Of course, after taking bath pure lifestyle is also required to achieve the liberation.

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508 In the Greek mythology also ambrosia and nectar were regarded as the food of the gods and as the drink of gods respectively. Partaking in these substance confirmed immortality. Similarly, in the Jewish work of Joseph and Aseneth, a honeycomb is identified as the food of the angels that provides immortality to all who eat of it (Smith, 2003: 167).

509 Here the reference is made to the white Ganges and the blue water of Yamuna. Classical Sanskrit Poet Kalidas describe the sangam as string of pearls and sapphire combined or garland of white and blue lotuses interwined.

510 Every evening just before dusk at a number of places along the ghats Ganga Aarti is performed. This normally begins with Kirtan (congregational devotional singing and chanting that is repeated), and Bhajans (songs derived from Bhakti traditions). Cf. Jacobs (2010)
6.3.4 **Baptism as Ganga Snan**

To better communicate the idea of baptism the idea of *Ganga snan* can be used among the *Khrist bhakta* movement. These terms will directly evoke an immediate understanding among the hearers as the Indian culture already understands the idea of cleansing. Moreover, *Ganga snan* could help to solve the perennial misgivings about the rite of baptism as these words are able to relate to their past religious experiences rather than the term baptism which according to Bharati (2001:93-94) “creates a wrong understanding in that it not only denotes change in religious allegiance but also abandoning of Hindu culture and society”.

The Hindu disciple who desire to follow Christ in baptism would be asked to assemble along with their family and friends at the bank of Ganges or some other body of water at an appointed time (mixed with Ganges water). The leader should arrange for mats for the people to sit, if possible under a tree or shamiana as done during the Kumbh mela. Then the Guru (the baptiser) takes his seat at a slightly raised platform (making it clear that Jesus is the Guru) and along with the *bhaktas* will sing bahjans accompanied with indigenous musical instruments, such as *tabla* (drum) and harmonium.

After *bhajan*, their is a reading from the Apostle Paul’s letter to Romans chapter six, explains and the theological meaning of *Ganga snan* is explained to the *bhaktas*. It should be emphasized that Jesus as Guru commands a *jal sanskara* (sacrament of water) for his *bhaktas* and any disobedience to their Guru is to despise the *bhakti* tradition of total submission and obedience to the Guru.

It is explained to the neophyte that in order to receive eternal life (life of immortality), Jesus has already prepared way for *ganga snan* and the rite need not be repeated. As Sunil Sardar rightly asserts: “When it is explained that Jesus has prepared the way for *ganga snan* or holy bath, they begin to understand a new way that is no longer necessary to repeat the cleansing, believers need only to come once, as Jesus Christ has done the cleansing for us by His work on the cross. The Lord has revealed this bridge as a way to bring people to a full knowledge of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us” (quoted in Collins, 2007:161).

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511 Etymologically, it is river Sindhu (the name itself means river) which gave the name India to the subcontinent; the land of Indus became the land of Hindus in the language of the Persians (Morgan, 1996:115)
After making the brief teaching in a narrative form, the Guru leads the neophytes followed by the other devotees into the water. The Guru immerses the neophyte into the water one by one repeating the triune name of God. As they come out of the water, the Guru chants a mantra: - Khrista satguru (Christ is your Satguru) three times. Moreover, the Guru will state that Christ has washed your Karma and ignorance away and the neophyte is delivered from cycle of samsara. The Holy Communion that is already prepared and kept in the copper pot is served as prasada to the bhakta resembling the nectar of immortality by reading “whosoever eat my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (Jn 6:54). The leader closes the ceremony with a word of blessing with everyone responding tathaastu, (equivalent to Amen) “so be it”. Followed by the community feast everyone goes back home rejoicing.

Thus an inculturated form of baptism as discussed above will help to reduce the issue of cultural alienation this is true from the personal experience of the researcher, who is pastoring an intercultural church which consists of Hindu converts from 16 language groups and castes.

6.4 Ecclesiologies are Always in the Making

The Bible does not present a clear, systematic ecclesiological theology. Rather mainly uses metaphors, to describe the church. Jesus introduced the metaphor of “the Kingdom of God” and “a shepherded and flock” imagery to describe about church. Paul introduced the metaphor of “body of Christ” “Bride of Christ” and Old Testament imagery of “people of God”, Israel and “the holy nations” to describe church and loaded it with new meanings (quoted in Olена, 2016:238).

Although, these metaphors accentuated “the universal and all embracing character of the ecclesiological community” (Olена, 2016:238) yet these metaphors cannot be idealized as each of these metaphors highlights only limited and different aspects of what church is. As Kung (1976:37-38) observes: “The different images of the church are not only to be individuality of the various authors with their respective traditions, but also to their different theological attitudes, and the communities with which they were identified, as well as different missionary situations to which the various epistles were sent. Our knowledge about this is only very fragmentary.”
Similarly, when one sees the developments in the ecclesiology of the post- apostolic church, it also made choice of church is based on various reasons and majority of it was social and political reasons. Even though, the choice were not always the best one’s but while making the choice the church always had in mind it ultimate task to bring its members into communion with God and with each other. For instance, Ireneaus shared the dialectical understanding of the church – the local communities and the universal community should embrace all disciples of Christ simultaneously. The means for such a unity was the Eucharist and the office of the bishop:

See that you all follow the Bishops, as Christ does the father and Presbyterium as you would the apostles; and the reverence the deacon, as command of God. Let no one do anything connected with church without the bishop. Let that be considered a certain Eucharist which is under the leadership of Bishop or to one whom he has entrusted it. Where ever the Bishop appears, let the multitude of people be, just as wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not permitted without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate an agape, but whatever he shall approve of, that is well pleasing also to God, so that everything that is done may be assured and certain.512

But later, building on Ireneaus, Tertullian sustained the unity of the church in faith and ministry and scripture which gave emphasis to communion ecclesiology. Tertullian asserted that “We are in communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine in no way differs from their; this is the sign of truth”.513 However, in Cyprian and Augustine “the articulation of communion ecclesiology became more nuanced [as they] developed their ecclesiology in direct response to the conflicts of his days”.514 Both believed that those who do “no longer have God for Father, who has not the Church for his [her] mother” are lost (quoted in Burns, 2009:471). Therefore, “church [as] the sole mediator of salvation” set a course for ecclesiastical structures, which is practiced still today in Indian context (quoted in Burns, 2009:470).

With the birth of Protestantism there came a rift with the Western church. Protestants felt that “the truth was to be prized over unity.”515 The major question in this period was what are the signs of the true church? Luther and Calvin rearticulated that ecclesiology that was not tied to the structural and sacramental connection with a particular church organization. They stressed the

512 Eucharist, Bishop , Church: The unity of the Church in the divine Eucharist and bishop during the first three centuries.http://oodegr.co/english/biblia/episkopos1/kef2_2.htm#103 Date of access: 15 Sep. 2016
mystical communion of saints that transcends institutional church. For Luther, the true church has both visible (it contains unredeemed sinners and saints) and invisible (true believers throughout time and space and only God knows) natures (Arand, 2007:148-149).

What follows after reformation was devastating – the mind set of what is the true church to infect all protestant churches - so they continued to separate from each other and according to Barrett (2001:16) there are today 330000 distinct denominations.

The short historical survey indicates that no form of church should be considered as normative ecclesiology - all ecclesiological concepts, paradigms are dictated and conditioned by time social, historical, geopolitical and cultural realities in which they came to be. As Hovorun (2015:13) states, “the history of the self awareness of church is in effect a history of ecclesiological concepts, which differed depending on historical context”. This is also echoed in Haight (2004:7) view when he asserts: “The church in history never settles down, change is constantly being negotiated; there is no established church apart from eschaton. Historical realities especially social realities, communities or institutions that have an ongoing institutional life, continually develop and change. What is historical is usually considered mutable and relative precisely because of its historicity.”

The crucial point here is that the church, even though is unchangeable in fundamental terms, and is in constant change as a historical and social phenomenon. But the danger in such a context is that the institutionalized churches “ran the risk of distorting the faith when adapting uncritically to their world structure” (Schillebeeckx, 1985:90).

The different forms of ecclesiology, including the Khrist bhaktas do not claim to be normative ecclesiology applicable to other contexts or it claims to be immutable. Therefore, different forms of church are expected to emerge as that of Khrist bhaktas. However, the emergent ecclesiology of Hindu devotees of Christ needs in a long run, to be in conversation with other churches around the world - as it cannot survive if it cuts off the relationship with other forms of following Christ. As Schillebeeckx (1985:90) infering to the Johannine community validates the fact that Church communities that resisted structure disappears. He states, “In historical terms, we can infer from this institution that a community that lacks a good and realistic institutionalization of its ministry run the risk of losing for ever their apostate, the Christian character of their origin, inspiration
and orientation and ultimately their own identity”. Moreover, “an exclusive Christianity mirrored in an isolated church would negate the very message of Jesus upon which the church should be founded” (Haight, 2004:56). Therefore, the Khrist bhakta movement in the future should strive to have not only a unique expression in its local context but also a universal presence as it belongs to a wider community of people. As Mathew (2002:58) writes, “Church is always both a sarvadeshi (universal) and swadeshi (local) entity”. However, the institutional churches, need to be faithful to its Lord, it should recognize the Khrist bhakta as earnest followers of the same Christ - living out their new found faith in Christ in their own socio-cultural way, forsaking all their allegiance to their old ishta devta.

To be in conversation with the institutionalized church does not mean to globalize the Khrist bhaktas movement by impressing upon it the existing forms of institutionalized church, which are a replica of Roman or European ecclesiology. Rather, the institutionalized church should help this indigenous expression to develop and mature as an authentic expression of world Christianity. Moreover, the institutionalized church should be open to accept the prospects and challenges of other expressions as the gospel interacts with the Hindu culture in India. As Karokaran (1983:364) rightly states, “it is boundless duty of the church in India to evolve a more open ecclesial structure that does justice to its experience of an interrelatedness and mutual inclusiveness with other religions and their adherents”. As a result, different models of church diverse to the models that already exist will emerge.

**Summary**

The bone of contention in Indian society is not against Christ but against “churchanity”, a western institutionalized structure. Therefore the Hindus’ consider Christianity as a foreign religion. In such context when conversion takes place the Hindu fundamental groups oppose the mission work. Even though the churches have made several attempts (as discussed in Chapter 5), still today the church is considered a foreign entity by Hindu fundamentals. The church’s inculturation process was mainly Brahmanical in nature, neglecting the majority of the Dalit-Tribal culture. Therefore, the inculturation attempts did not appeal to the people at large. The decision of studying solely high cultures and the popular culture led to the misrepresentation of social reality.
In such a context, a movement called *Khrist bhakta* has emerged among the people. Even though the movement grew under the influence of the Catholic charismatic meetings, it separated itself from the institutionalised Catholic Church as it did not want to be attested as a foreign church. Today it is known by different names—“Yeshu bhaktas”, “believing but not belonging”, “Hindu disciples of Church” etc.

The *bhaktas* come from different walks of life and are bound together in the fellowship of Christ. Moreover, they remain Hindus even after accepting Christ and participate in the cultural and religious practices of Hinduism. This raises the question of dual identity—Is dual identity possible? Can *bhaktas* remain faithful to Christ by maintaining dual identity?

In answering this question this chapter focused on the early dual identity of the church, i.e. Jewish and Christian identities. The early church, that began as a Jewish messianic renewal movement did not have a problem in maintaining the dual identity due to the continuity between Old Testament and New Testament belief in God: the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. It was one unfolding revelation of the same God. But with regard to *Khrist bhaktas*, there is not the same concept of God. Therefore, there will be continuous struggle in maintaining the dual identity because of the two opposing world views. Even at times this leads to syncretism which is condemned in the Bible. This is the area that needs to be addressed in the movement by its leaders.

The early church could not maintain its Jewish identity. As the door of the church opened for the Gentiles there arose a dispute with regard to what is essential and non-essential for salvation. The Jerusalem council decision was that Jews were not to become Gentiles nor the Gentiles to become Jews. Rather, all are one in Christ. From this decision three principles emerge: First, in Christ no ethnicity has priority over the other. Second, in Christ Jewish and Gentile identities can be retained not by obliterating them but by accommodating them. Third, existing identities are transformed by Christ.

In order to show true Indian identity, the *Khrist bhakta movement* does not have fellowship with any institutionalised churches. This does not mean that the *Khrist bhakta* movement does not have any ecclesiological form. As discussed in this chapter we find implicit ecclesiology centred on *Matridham ashram* where devotees gather and experience communion. The organisation also
has ecclesiological implications. Even though the movement is spread by the word of mouth yet the movement is founded on the IMS congregation which takes the responsibility of its well being. This is the paradox of the movement. Even though it tried to separate itself from the Catholic Institutionalised church, yet the Christianity presented to the Khrist bhaktas is the Catholicized charismatic form of Christianity.

It is not compulsory for all to attend the prayer meeting at the ashram, which resembles to the concept of open church. Moreover, the movement lacks membership rules, mandatory rituals and activities. This allows the freedom for bhaktas to remain and leave the movement. These fluid structures of the movement become a bane to the movement as many bhaktas are leaving the movement. Therefore it is important for the leaders of the movement to envisage on this reality and bring out a concrete solution to this bane. Otherwise as it happened with other new movements, this can also be short lived. It is in this context that the bhaktas should reconsider their stand of non-cooperation with the institutionalised church. Rather, they should maintain the relationship with the church at large by remaining as a community on its own. However, the institutionalised church should also accept these movements as communities of disciples who confess the same Christ and base on their criteriaon their creeds.

The bhaktas do not want to undergo baptism due to the socio-political and legal implications, as discussed in the chapter. This action of Khrist bhaktas was evaluated on the basis of early biblical Christian who lived in multi-religious contexts. We found in this study that any community of faith built around Jesus will be willing to obey the guru no matter what the consequences are. Of course, the early Christians did not have any problem to practice their new found faith as it was the same God of the Old Testament. Moreover, in the Hellenistic world also the early Christian had no problem in practicing their new found faith because of its connection with the Judaistic religion. Even after that, Christians were willing to be persecuted for their new found faith. Therefore, just because baptism has become a liability by the way of how it was practiced, it cannot be the sole reason to negate the command of Jesus. Therefore, it is suggested that baptism in the Indian context should not be considered as rite (separation from non-Christians) but as sacrament (incorporation into the body of Christ). To make baptism more contextual, the nomen clature gangasnan is suggested with its elaborate procedures.
It is most important to note that there is not a normative ecclesiology and therefore the *Khrist bhkata* movement should not fall into the trap of the major traditions that considered their ecclesiology as normative for all contexts. Therefore, keeping in mind that ecclesiology is always in the making, it will provide space in the Indian context for ecclesiologies to develop as people from various cultures, languages and tribe accept Jesus as their Guru.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the Indian context conversion from one religion to another has been a common practice for centuries. But from the time of India’s independence, the practice of conversion has become a bone contention and more recently this issue has come into open debate, especially in relation to the Christian mission. The central question among the Hindus mind is whether the concept of conversion has a place in India today.

The evangelistic efforts to convert others, based on one’s view of conversion created further impediment to the church’s mission as each tradition had a different understanding of evangelism based on its view of conversion. Therefore what was missing was a common biblical understanding of conversion which could serve as a basis for discourse on the nature of the Indian church and its place in society, as well as the renewal of church life in contemporary India. This was identified as the main problem of the research.

In chapter two “Biblical Understanding of Conversion” the chapter focused on how conversion is defined in the Bible. This chapter also focused on the relation of conversion and mission and, how conversion and contextualization are related to each other. In the Old Testament the common word used to refer to conversion, in the sense of repentance is וּשׁ and its variants. It is used in the covenantal context where it emphasizes on maintaining an existing covenant relationship through continuous turning from evil to God—that includes both individual and community. There are references to Gentile converts to Yahweh but conversion did not enhance a complete break from their culture as we saw in the case of Abraham and Naaman.

In the New Testament conversion is a call to a new life, a life to discipleship. Therefore, conversion instead of being a one time event, it seen as a process conversion - where one reorients one’s life continuously. In addition, conversion is not only accepting a different creed, but also “migrating” into a completely new gospel-shaped worldview. However, this migration into a new context does not compromise the faithfulness to the text (Bible).

In chapter three “Understanding of Conversion in Christian Tradition” looked into different understandings of conversion in the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions. The purpose was not to engage in a critical discussion in order to understand “the
why” of conversion but rather the “what of” conversion. In the course of the study, it became clear that the Christian traditions’ understanding of conversion are the product of different historical periods which were shaped by peculiar constellation of events and creeds and, therefore, not absolute. Therefore, the Indian context also needs a amidst the conversion controversy India also needs needa a theology of conversion in dialogue with the social forces now at play in Indian society.

In Chapter four “Missiological Challenges in Relation to Conversion in India” deals with two questions. Firstly, why is conversion a bone of contention in India and secondly what are the missiological challenges the issue of conversion puts forth before the churches in India.

In his Chapter different reasons were identified for such hatred towards the practice of conversion.

1. Most of the Christian denominations were founded by missionaries who came along with colonial powers. Due to the nexus between the Church and the imperialistic powers of the time, the Church is still considered today a foreign entity.

2. In the practice of mission, the churches in India did not take seriously the culture of the people. They always considered the culture as evil and inferior, and encouraged the converts to do away with their cultural heritage by accepting the missionaries’ culture which was considered superior. In due course, the church developed a “quam” mentality.

3. There is disunity among the Christian churches and this is reflected even in the mission in the practice of “sheep stealing” (i.e. taking away converts from other denominations). Moreover, the divergent understanding of conversion has given rise to divergent views of evangelism. Furthermore, when there is persecution in relation to conversion, the main-stream churches publicly point at Pentecostals as the reason for such conversion activity. The Hindu fundamentalists take advantage of such disunity and question the ethics of the Christian churches.

4. Baptism is an integral part of the Christian faith. But in the Indian context, the practice of conversion by different Christian traditions as a means of entry into the church (by uprooting converts from their culture and relations) has been questioned by Hindu fundamentalists.
5. As mass conversion took place the caste system broke down. The caste system was one of the factors for preserving the Hindu culture and religion. Therefore, as the Dalit were the vote bank for the Hindu political party, the “ politicization of conversion” is also an important reason for opposing conversion. In addition, even though the caste system is an evil practice, yet the intention of mass conversion for social benefits gave converts the nick name of “rice Christians”. Even though the church always dichotomized between proselytism and conversion, the Hindu mind did not conceive these differences. Rather, for them conversion is crossing the religious boundaries, and forsaking the ancestral religion. Therefore, it makes no difference for them whether the church calls it conversion or proselytism. Moreover, the church failed to uplift the Dalit from their social status in the Indian churches, south India still practises caste system.

6. Mass conversion was questioned by the Hindu intellectuals who were educated in mission schools and colleges. In response, they began neo- Hindu movements, like Brahmo samaj and Arya samaj. They admired Christ and His teaching but were against the institutionalized church and its mission practice because of its disrespect to the culture and Indian religions. Therefore, they wrote against missionaries and mission practices and opined their voice against conversion, which for them was a denationalizing practice. This view was continued vigorously by the Sangh parivar which still today questions the church’s mission practice.

In the post – independence era, the practice of mass movement led to the introduction of an anti-conversion bill in different state assemblies, curtailing conversion activities. Moreover, the persecutions against Christians have risen tremendously in recent years. In such a situation, the theology of conversion practiced by the Indian churches was questioned - as this theology was itself historically determined by the social forces shaping the world of the time as discussed in chapter 3. If so how can such theology of conversion be absolute?

It was clear from these antagonistic approaches towards conversion that Hindus are not against Christ but against institutionalized churches (resembling foreign structures) and the practice of mission adapted from the foreign churches.

Amidst these antagonistic attitudes, the missiological challenge is religious pluralism- that is, how to respect the integrity of the adherents of another faith without compromising the
distinctiveness of the Christian faith. In addition, in relation to the challenge of culture we recognised that India has heterogeneous identities rather than homogeneous identity. However, the western missionaries never respected this heterogeneity they wanted to impose their culture on the native converts – this led to the image of the church as a western church and a foreign entity. This imagine of the church was further aggravated when the church placed unessential baggage on the converts (as part of the Christian practice) and condemned the Indian culture as demonic. Therefore, attempts were made in India to contextualize the gospel so that the church may not look foreign. As a result the challenge of contextualization comes to the fore. Here the church has to be aware that in the name of contextualization it should not attempt to create transplanted churches but rather contextualized churches. The challenge in contextualization is how to blend the biblical principle to “become all things to all men” with “Come out from among them”. In relation to this, our research focused on “communication adaptation”, “conversion adaptation” and “messenger adaptation”. In the process of contextualization, the challenge of syncretism was also dealt with. The question focus was how far and is too far in contextualization?

In Chapter five, “Conversion and the Nature of Indian Church” the research focused on the various attempts made to restore the foreign image of the church. In the early stage, different indigenous churches were formed, namely, “Hindu church of Lord Jesus”, “National church of India”, “Culcutta Christo Samaj”, “Nava vidhan sabha” and “Hindu Catholic church”. One of the common features among these churches was that it was founded by indigenous leaders and all of them had a positive attitude towards Hinduism, which was missing in the missionary era. In addition, they stressed the unity of Indian churches which remains a dream till today. Furthermore, these indigenous churches wanted to detach the church from the European garb and build an Indian church. Therefore, they created indigenous style of worship practices which is appreciable. But at the same time it was not without flaws:- Brahmanisation of Christianity is still prevalent today. They ignored other indigenous forms. The poignant part of these indigenous churches is that none of it exists today.

But these Indigenous churches, provided the impetus in the post- independence era for Indian Christians to develop different church models that reflect the nature of the Indian church. These different models are not contradictory rather complimentary to each other. All of these models
viewed conversion from different perspectives by raising the following questions in relation to conversion:

1. Kingdom model emphasized that the converts do not need be a part of an institution but rather become part of the Kingdom of God.
2. Liberation Model looked at whether the mission of the church is conversion or social Justice.
3. Inculturation model questioned the importance of conversion in Indian context. It advocated the synthesis of two religions.
4. Secular Model: Christ Centred fellowship focused on whether baptism is essential or non-essential for people who want to be disciple of Jesus.

Even though all these attempts have been made yet, the church is viewed as foreign because the institutionalized church still has connections with foreign churches and most of the inculturation models have not taken the majority of the Indian mass into consideration. And the forces behind these Inculturation models were foreign missionaries who have established ashrams. Therefore, all such attempts have been viewed suspiciously.

In such an atmosphere, Chapter six deals with a movement called *Khrist bhakta* which is growing in India. The characteristic of this movement is that the bhaktas are not rooted out from their cultural heritage after accepting Christ. Moreover, they do not identify with institutional churches and do not take baptism, as this will ostracize them from their community. In such a context, the final chapter analyzed this movement, based on the biblical understanding of conversion (Chapter 2) in order to see whether this movement can be an alternative solution to the issue of foreignness of the church in India and to the issue of conversion?

In analysing the *Khrist bhakta* movement we have argued that dual identity was a common feature in early Christianity. It was noted that this dual identity could be maintained at ease due to the continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament belief in God: the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. But *bhaktas* cannot maintain this dual identity without the tension between contextualization and syncretism.
Even though contextualization has a biblical basis, how does one draw a line between contextualization and syncretism? In other word, how far is too far? This is a crucial question in contextualization which was analysed in this thesis (see chapters 3, 4), and especially in this chapter in relation to *Khist bhakta’s* ecclesiology and baptism. Moreover, it is pointed out that the *Khist bhakta* movement cannot be a normative model to other contexts but rather different models have to emerge as per different contexts without compromising the faith in Christ. It is the duty of the institutional churches to support these forms of ecclesia so that it can witness Christ culturally.

**Recommendation for further research**

There are several areas that I suggest would be helpful for further research.

First, further research can be conducted on Hinduism as a missionary religion where people from traditional Christian countries have converted to Hinduism willingly. Why is such a reversal movement taking place?

Secondly, Conversion in the context of Constitutional freedom as mentioned in Article 25 of the constitution. This was recently debated in the parliament. Therefore, a study on conversion as chartered in the constitution is the need of the hour.

Thirdly, this study focused on the biblical view of conversion and *Khist bhaktas* a new way of being church in the context of conversion in India. But further study can focus on areas of soteriology, Christology, *bhakti* and other theological themes of such movements.
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