Prophetic Asceticism in the Wilderness:

Dilemmas of Liberation and Inculturation in the Interreligious Paradigms of Aloysius Pieris S. J.

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Dedication

Per la mia madre che mi ha trasmesso una fede che origina nell' esperienza del deserto immigrante,

et pour mon père qui a inculqué en moi une vision prophétique envers l'Eglise de sa jeunesse.

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Abstact/Résumé

This work explores the interreligious paradigms proposed by Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris from a liberationist methodological standpoint. Pieris' paradigms uncover the exclusivist tendencies of some liberation theology toward 'religion' and the anti-liberative tendencies of the inculturationist school of interreligious dialogue.

The Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm delineates how some Latin American liberation theology constructs a sharp dichotomy between "liberative faith" and "popular religion."

The Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm of the Brahminic Ashram movement in India is focused on personal liberation without regard for systemic poverty and oppression.

Pieris has endeavoured to bridge the dichotomy between liberation and inculturation through what I have labelled a method of *prophetic asceticism*.

Using insights from feminist theology, I argue that Pieris' dialectical method subtly reactivates the oppositional Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm in his theology. I propose the Exodus wilderness as an intrinsic part of the liberative process and to complement Pieris' dialectics. The wilderness is a landscape of survival for God's vanquished people; a landscape of doubt that can bring forth the bread of heaven.

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A partir d'un point de vue méthodologique 'libérationiste,' cette thèse examine les paradigmes inter-religieux proposés par le théologien Sri Lankain Aloysius Pieris. Ce modèle défendu par Pieris met en évidence les tendences promouvant l'exclusion de la "religion" dans la théologie de la libération et les tendences 'anti-libératrices' du movement pour le dialogue inter-religieux.

Le paradigme Christ-*contre*-Religion expose la manière dont la théologie de la libération latino-américaine met de l'avant une dichotomie marquée entre la "foi libératrice" et la "religion populaire."

Le paradigme Christ-*de*-Religion du movement Brahmanique de l'Ashram en Inde met l'emphase sur la libération personnelle sans considération pour la pauvreté et l'oppression systémique.

De son côté, Pieris a tenté d'établir un rapprochement entre les deux paradigmes de la libération et de l' inculturation à travers ce que j'ai nommé une méthode de *ascétisme prophétique*.

En m'inspirant de la théologie féministe, je soutiens que la méthode dialectique de Pieris réinscrit le paradigme oppositionnel Christ-*contre*-Religion dans sa propre théologie. Dans cette optique, Je propose le désert de l'Exode comme une condition inhérente de la libération et comme un complément pour la dialectique de Pieris. Le désert est un paysage de survie pour le peuple vaincu de Dieu; un paysage de doute qui peutamméner le pain du ciel.

Contents

Dualism is wrong relation. A dualistic epistemology is steeped in a wrong way of knowing and thus generates false knowledge/lies, about ourselves, others, that which we believe to be divine, and the significance of the Jesus story.

Carter Heyward

Reality's ultimate duality, its irreconcilable duality, is properly identified not in the binomial "transcendence and history" - which can and should be reconciled - but in the irreconcilable binomial of Reign and anti-Reign, the history of grace and sin.

Jon Sobrino

Wiping the Icon

The work of Sri Lankan liberation theologian and Buddhist scholar, Aloysius Pieris S.J., is among the most challenging and creative dialectical methodologies in the area of interreligious theology and *praxis*. Pieris has worked out interreligious paradigms that critically challenge liberationist methodologies that do not accord epistemological primacy to the plight of the suffering 'non-Christian.' This work will explore the interreligious paradigms proposed by Pieris, and how they pertain to the role of popular religion as an important tool for liberation, as well as an important source of wisdom for interreligious collaboration. These paradigms stem out of what Pieris has identified as the "Third Magisterium:" namely, the experiences of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. The paradigms developed by the first (Vatican/Bishops) and second (academia) Magisteriums, in Pieris' estimation, do not adequately address the specific history of Asian theology and the context of Asia's overwhelming economic poverty and religious diversity. For Pieris, interreligious collaboration from the methodological location of liberation theology must begin with soteriology - not ecclesiology or christology as the other two Magisteriums have always proposed - in order to mutually transform both the prophetic and mystical streams of the encountering traditions. Hence the methodological foundation for this study is a *praxis* of solidarity with the suffering 'other' that envisages concrete experience as the first act of doing theology and theorizing as the second act in a hermeneutical circle that seeks to overcome dualistic constructs such as theory/action, church/world, contemplation/action, faith/religion, as well as the often neglected liberation/oppression.

Feminist and womanist theologians have critically engaged and challenged dualist epistemologies that pervade the Christian tradition. This challenge has engendered far-reaching contributions in all the areas of theological enquiry. In fact, it has lead to an epistemological break with some European schools of systematic theology. Liberation theologians have also challenged dualist ways of knowing - and acting in - the world, especially in the areas of ecclesiology and soteriology. This work maintains an epistemological continuity with feminist, womanist, and liberationist theologies that seek to transform the tradition of dualism in Christian theology. Many theologians have argued that the tradition of dualist knowledge has helped generate the worst atrocities imaginable against the 'other.' One cannot but recall the "dangerous memory of suffering" (Metz 1980, 88) of those executed and tortured during the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Witch burnings, those who perished and were imprisoned in the Holocaust, and the indigenous peoples around the world who were conquered by the sword of a triumphalistic Christianity. The feminist, womanist and liberationist perspectives have awakened theologians throughout the world from the slumber of neutrality and so-called objectivity to the Gospel proclamation of compassion and solidarity with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. The unjustifiable situation of oppression and marginalization, argue the liberationist schools of theology, requires a conscious *praxis* of liberation that is deeply opposed to the present conditions of suffering. After all, Christian faith reminds us that the present situation is not the final word on history and that the

Reign of G*d[1] proclaimed by Jesus was in opposition to the Reign of Caesar. Liberation theologians everywhere seek to disclose the dialectical nature of Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of G*d. But how has such an oppositional construct impacted the oppressed and marginalized 'non-Christian', and those Christians from traditions within Christianity who have been considered as 'other' - such as the practitioners of popular religions?

Are liberation and oppression, the Reign and anti-Reign, the irreconcilable dualities that are required in a situation of suffering, of destitution, or of slavery? As a student of liberation theology firmly committed to prophetic engagement in the world, I want to answer yes. As a Roman Catholic engaged in a prophetic stance from within the structures of Church power, I also want answer yes. But as a Roman Catholic deeply committed to interreligious dialogue and *praxis*, a person who returned to the Catholic church through many years of serious Buddhist meditation practice, I must answer no. And as a student of liberation theology reflecting on the role of popular religion in theology, I must also answer no. The starkly dualistic timbre that the dialectical model has revealed in the area of interreligious theology and dialogue, from Karl Barth to the liberationists, has given me pause for reflection. Moreover, feminist and other women-centred methodologies have shown very convincingly that what sometimes passes as dialectical theology is at the core a consummately dualistic and closed method that rejects the epistemologies and survival strategies of the suffering 'other,' especially the suffering religious 'other.' Furthermore, no Christian theological method which has not sought to confront it's own tradition of exclusion, such as the *adversus*

[1]I write G*d in this way to point toward G*d's ineffability and unnamability (Ex 3:14). It is not meant to denote the absolute transcendence of G*d, but to veer away from burdensome and gendered presuppositions of the word.

judaeos tradition of the Gospels (the anti-Judaism embedded in Christian scripture) cannot claim for itself the designation of Reign-centred, or justice-centred theology. Hence, a rigorous examination of anti-Judaism in Christian scripture and it's tangible historical impact on the relationship between Jews and Christians is foundational for any theological incursions into the world of interreligious dialogue and *praxis*.

Based on the methodology of a theo*praxis* of liberation, I have laid out four chapters that will critically examine the faith/religion dichotomy, the *adversus judaeos* tradition, religion as fulfilment, popular religion as a symbolization of hermeneutic of suspicion, and the wilderness motif in liberationist, feminist and womanist discourses. I will do this by exploring the interreligious paradigms delineated by Aloysius Pieris which outline how liberationists and inculturationists have attempted to do theology in the context of other religions, as well as in the context of popular religious practices. Furthermore, I will examine Pieris' attempt to reconcile what he believes to be a false dichotomy between liberation and inculturation. And finally, using Pieris' method as a starting point, I will introduce the biblical landscape of wilderness as a space of survival and as a *locus* of doubt in order to examine the innate liberation/oppression dualism that plagues much liberationist discourses.

In the first chapter, I will examine what Pieris has identified as the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm of some Latin American liberation theologies. Pieris reveals how the hermeneutical "preferential option" for the plight of the suffering 'other' in this paradigm is not given the same weight when it is directed toward the plight of the suffering religious 'other'. An over-reliance on Marx and Barth is at the root of a model that discards "religion" as an ideology that keeps the poor enslaved and oppressed or as a human created idolatrous superstition. The prophetic call for liberation in this paradigm has subjugated the voices and experiences of the suffering religious 'other' to a situation of epistemological captivity and silence. Moreover, the Christ-*against*-Religion model has generated some tensions in Asia, where a deeply inculturationist methodology has a very long and rich history.

In the second chapter, I will look at the history and context of inculturation in India through the interreligious theology of Benedictine monk and *guru* Bede Griffiths. Pieris has labelled this the Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm. If the liberationist concern for the poor and oppressed has at times generated a disregard for the plight of the religious 'other', the Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm does not adequately address the situation of systemic poverty in Asia. It is instead concerned with the mystical liberation of the individual. In India, the traditional approach to inculturation has produced a Christian theology steeped in Bhraminic or Sanscritic Vedantic philosophy. However, the result is an inculturated model that does not take seriously the epistemologies and survival strategies of the poor and oppressed, of the dalits and tribals, of the bhaktis and bhaktas who have generated liberative wisdom in their own popular movements.

In the third chapter, I will critically engage with Pieris' theological method which seeks to bring the liberationist/prophetic and inculturationist/ascetic models in dialectical tension. From a location of critical support for liberationist methodologies, I will show how Pieris replicates in subtle ways the same Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm in his own work by constructing a framework (cosmic/metacosmic) not unlike the faith/religion division he seeks to critique. However, Pieris' creative exploration of what I have termed *prophetic asceticism* can serve heuristically to construct a method that can help dislodge liberation as a rigidly goal-centred utopia in liberation theology, as well as complicate the logical dichotomy between liberation and oppression. The model of *prophetic asceticism* can be a corrective in Pieris' own theology, which tends be centred on liberation while neglecting the biblical account of survival in the wilderness.

In the fourth chapter, I will explore the work of Orlando Espín and seek to define popular religion as a *locus theologicus* for interreligious *praxis*, and especially, for serious theological study. Much theology, including both liberal and liberation theology, has a long history of devaluing popular religious practices. I want to explore concept of vanquishment and the landscape of wilderness as paradigms for understanding popular religion. The principal question will be this: are the ideas of liberation and wilderness mutually exclusive? The biblical account of Exodus seems to demonstrate that they are not exclusive, but part of a holistic liberative process. Pieris' *prophetic asceticism* is a methodological model that arises out of the context of religious diversity and systemic poverty in Asia, yet it can also be an important paradigm in the emerging dialogue about the nature of soteriology in liberation theologies and interreligious collaboration. I want to show how the wilderness landscape can extend what Pieris' *prophetic asceticism* has begun: namely, to locate a landscape where the popular practices of the religious poor and oppressed find meaning and hope. Feminist, womanist, and women-centred 'Third World' theologies have begun to develop a survival-centred methodology that is not as oppositional as the liberationist method. My hope is to reclaim the wilderness landscape as an authentic space of doubt, a doubt that arises from the experiences and epistemologies of the poor and oppressed. The encounter with the religious 'other' in the wilderness can help to bring liberation theologies to encounter the meaning of liberation within their own traditions. Such an encounter could produce liberation theologies that are more fully liberative in their prophetic call as well as in their ascetic practices.

This work understands itself to be in continuity with the multidimensional traditions of liberation theology and other Reign-centred and justice-centred theologies that seek to transform the world and the church. As a 'First World' person seeking to do theology from the underside of history, or from the perspective of the victims and survivors of unjust structures, it is my hope and desire that the methodologies and epistemologies which have informed my thinking will help broaden the scope of what it means to do theology from a position of privilege and in a multireligious context. Latino theologian Roberto S. Goizueta reminds us that "before there can be authentic pluralism there must be authentic justice" (1995, 173). In our contemporary quest for a pluralist society, the element of justice is very often lacking. Pluralism is at times unfortunately invoked as a way into the mainstream, rather than as a challenge to hegemonic power structures. The works of Aloysius Pieris, Dolores Williams, Orlando Espín, Chung Hyun Kyung, Leonardo Boff, and others seek to understand difference from the standpoint of those who are already coerced into a positionality of difference. Just as liberationists would argue that poverty must be understood through the experience of those who are forced into poverty, alterity can only be fully grasped in all its complexity by those for whom an imposed alterity has become oppressive and dehumanizing. Poverty and alterity are not separate issues. There can be no pluralism if there are poor and marginalized people in our societies.

Christian theology has much to learn from the subaltern experiences of the Native peoples in Canada, from their experience of vanquishment at the hands of Christian triumphalism. Christian theology has much to learn from the Jewish peoples of the world, for whom the Christian Holy Week was at times a dreaded period of pogroms, persecutions, and hatred. It is my hope that the present inquiry into Pieris' paradigms of interreligious *praxis* will help concretize the point that discourses on alterity and difference must be approached from the standpoint of global struggles for justice and liberation, and from a theological stance that seeks to realize G*d's "preferential option" for the poor and outcast in the world.

Some have argued that to do liberation theology in a 'First World' context is a form of appropriation which does an injustice to the struggles of 'Third World' peoples. Although I am aware of how 'First World' discourses can exact hegemonic control over 'Third World' voices, I also think that it is imperative to do theology in a way that links global struggles. I have been fortunate to spent some time in the Philippines living in base communities and listening to people's stories of struggle and hope. I have also spent some time in India visiting Bede Griffiths' Shantivanam Ashram and learning from the profound religious ethos that permeates that country. Those experiences have instilled in me a deep sense of responsibility to bring forth in my work the need for a methodology that takes seriously the epistemologies of popular religious movements. I have sought to make my journey with liberation theology one of humble listening and deep gratitude. My hope for the future is that I am able to contextualize what I have been privileged to experience and learn for the 'First World' reality in which I live.

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I recently spent some time in the Philippines living with base communities and visiting threatened areas where aggressive development projects in the form of open pit mining and hydro power have incited the local people to rise up in resistance. I listened to their stories of struggle as they attempted to protect their livelihoods and their homes. After having spent a very short two weeks in the poorest section of Metro Manila, in an area known as the Tondo, I decided to go into the local Catholic church in order to discern how the 'official' church was addressing the problems of destitution, disease, and especially the threat of demolition that was immanent. Those who live in the Tondo are squatters on government land. Many of them are from the provinces, where land conversion schemes and aggressive development projects have forced them to find refuge in Manila. The people of the Tondo are the people for whom globalization has meant homelessness and poverty. The situation in the provinces is such that landlords have coerced many peasants to leave their land so that export-oriented cash crops such as sugarcane, bananas, and pineapples, may be planted. In some instances this has taken the form of military backed coercion and in some instances it has not. Unfortunately, the situation in the Tondo area for those who have come from the provinces is not any different. In the big city, people are also forced out of their homes because the government is building new infrastructure - bigger roads, more train tracks, and a larger port area - to get these same cash crops out of the country. The people of the Tondo are people who are simply in the way of neo-liberal economic development in the Philippines. They have been relegated to the status of nonpersons and made to live out a life of forced itineracy. Does the new so-called economic boom in Asia touch the people living in the Tondo? It has made survival in the hostile landscape of the Tondo much more difficult. In fact, economic growth only means that the people of the Tondo will be displaced again and again.

As I entered the church on a hot Sunday morning, I remembered the Egyptian slave Hagar, who after being released into the freedom of the wilderness was given a new vision by G*d to see survival strategies where she had not seen any before. I thought to myself that G*d would provide the tools needed for the people of the Tondo to survive the onslaught of an export-oriented economy that only serves the interest of the rich elite in the Philippines and 'First World' interests. I sat down in a pew and watched a congregation of almost a thousand people attired in the their best clothes form itself before the altar. During the homily I listened with growing anger and bewilderment to a young priest exhort the people of the Tondo to stop complaining about their plight. The priest pointed to a large crucified Jesus hanging behind the altar and asked his congregation if any suffering in this world compared to the suffering and agony Christ had undergone on account of humanity's sins. To complain, continued the priest, was to put human suffering before the suffering that Christ experienced on Calvary. My anger was brimming over!

At the end of the Mass, as I sat reflecting on the homily, I was overcome with disillusionment at the role of the 'official' Catholic church in the Philippines. How could anyone, I thought, express the idea that a passive acceptance of suffering and oppression was somehow G*d's plan for the people of the Tondo? It is in instances like this, I thought to myself, that Marx' critique of religion starts to make sense. I imagined the people leaving the church with an attitude of resignation, with a false consciousness about their plight and the plight of the families and friends. A few minutes later, I observed an elderly woman approach an icon of Mary, the Mother of G*d. I watched silently as she knelt down before the icon, crossed herself and prayed. She then stood up and wiped the icon with a handkerchief. I found out later that this was a common popular religious practice that involved supplication and the seeking of favours and cures from the Holy Mother. I was told by a Catholic Filipino acquaintance that 'icon wiping' was discouraged by the 'official' Church, because, he believed it to be an unenlightened superstitious belief. A Marxist friend responded to my enquiries about popular devotional practices by insisting that such beliefs were a product of an alienated mind. However, he firmly believed that proper education about the materialist view of history would easily eradicate such ideas and help the people stand on their own two feet.

Some days passed and the woman who wiped the icon remained imprinted in my mind and on my heart. I thought about her often while in the Philippines and after I had returned home. I also thought about the three different reactions her 'icon wiping' had prompted in myself and my two friends. My friends' reactions were typical of the 'official' Marxist responses to religion in general, and of the 'official' Catholic response to popular religion in particular. The 'official' Marxist attitude upholds revolution over and above religion, while the 'official' Catholic attitude upholds authentic faith in Christ over and above superstitious folk religion. I realized upon reflection how my reaction to the homily and the 'official' church stand on the situation of injustice in the Tondo area was not enabling me to enter into the symbols, practices and epistemologies of the people who seek to promote favourable change in such an adverse context. On that Sunday morning, I was internally reproducing a discourse that paternalistically portrayed the religious poor as passive repositories of 'official' church teaching, rather than subjects of their own theological strategies. I realized later, after I spoke with some women from the base communities, that popular religious practices, such as 'icon wiping,' were not only a location where the divine was encountered but they was also sources of power, dignity, shared suffering and community support that enabled the poor to make a way out of no way. I understood that the woman 'wiping the icon' was not only seeking magical favours through the intercession of the Holy Mother, she was also, as the base community women later explained, *doing* theology.

This woman's relationship to Mary, I later thought to myself, represents a theology, a way talking about G*d, that is rooted in a shared experience of isolation and suffering. In Mary, the mother of Jesus, this woman recognizes a woman who suffered the injustice of her son's execution and the loneliness at his tomb. The shared injustice of loneliness and suffering represents a space of recognition and dignity for those who are excluded and relegated to the status of nonperson, as Jesus had also been. It became obvious to be me that this shared suffering, shared in the spirit of solidarity and compassion, allowed the community of the Tondo to struggle against suffering in meaningful and courageous ways. The 'official' church is a crossroads where the private and public aspects of popular religious practices can come into contact and where 'official' hegemonic discourses can also be reproduced. However, the 'official' church is not the *locus theologicus* of popular religion. The home and the community are the *loci* of this way of *doing* theology and it is where the people come together to carve out a way of survival in the midst of chaos - what Mujerista theologian Ada-María Isasi-Díaz has called living "la lucha" (1996, 129). With theologian, Roberto S. Goizueta, I came to understand that "shared suffering is suffering already in retreat" (183). But more importantly, I came to understand how any methodology that claims a "preferential option for the poor" (Gutiérrez 1987, 94) as I seek to do here, must also claim as important the epistemologies and survival strategies that stem out of a situation of poverty and oppression. The Tondo area was the landscape that urged me to investigate and appreciate the important role of religion and popular religion from a methodological standpoint of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. This memory of the woman who 'wiped the icon' calls me to not impose a paternalistic reading of hegemonic power on the religious practices of the poor and excluded. In fact, the radical potential of the popular religion of the poor and oppressed is characterized by a doubt, a hermeneutic of suspicion, vis-à-vis 'official' or legitimized discourses (Espín, 98).With this memory of the woman 'wiping the icon' I have learned that accompaniment in the not-yet wilderness of liberation to be a location that speaks to the context of vanquishment and survival for those who struggle to become subjects of history.

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited are not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet. Those slaves went out in to the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Matthew 22: 1-10

Liberation and the Uninvited

"The irruption of the Third World
is also the irruption of the non-Christian world...
Therefore, a theology that does not speak to
or through this non-Christian peoplehood
is an esoteric luxury of a Christian minority.
Hence, we need a theology of religions that will
expand the existing boundaries of orthodoxy as we enter
into the liberative streams of other religions and cultures."
Aloysius Pieris

Weeks before the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador, Gustavo Gutiérrez delivered a paper at the 1980 Sáo Paolo Ecumenical Congress of Theology, in Brazil, which proposed a model of church based on the 'Wedding Banquet' parable in Mt 22:10. In this parable - a metaphor about the eschatological Reign of G*d - those invited to the Banquet are the downtrodden, the marginalized[1], the poor, and the oppressed[2]: namely, what Gutiérrez has called the "uninvited." In the aftermath of the Vatican II reforms, many Latin

[1]These terms are discursive constructs that I am using from within the tradition of liberation theology and from within both Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions. I am aware that a debate is being waged around the use of these terms, however this work understands itself to be in continuity with the liberationist tradition of Christianity. For an important problematizing of similar of uses of terms such as subaltern, other, and alterity, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" in Nelson/Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (1988).*

[2]I use these terms to refer to the victims and survivors of systems of oppression who are made objects of history rather than subjects of their own history, and protagonists of their own destiny. Aloysius Pieris writes that "God does not choose the oppressed because they are sinless but because they are oppressed (1996, 153). Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that poverty "encompasses economic, social, and political dimensions, but undoubtedly more than all that. In the last instance, poverty means death: unjust death, the premature death of the poor, physical death... The poor are the ones who constitute a despised and culturally marginalized race. At best, the poor are present in statistics, but they do not appear in society with proper names. We do not know the names of the poor. They are and remain anonymous. The poor ones are socially insignificant, but not so to God." (Batstone, 71-2).

American liberation theologians, including Gutiérrez, have fashioned a contextual 'Third World' theology from the "underside of history" (Gutiérrez 1983), which has critically re-interpreted much classical Western theology away from a church/world dualism - the "distinction of planes" model[3] - toward a *theopraxis* of liberation in history. For Gutiérrez, the theological task of liberation theology, or the methodological path to be followed is "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word of God" (Gutiérrez 1988, xxix). In his Sáo Paolo essay, Gutiérrez clearly delineates the "uninvited" people who are invited to the 'Wedding Banquet:' they are "the common people, the oppressed and believing people" (Torres 1981, 120). The explicit reference to a "believing people" in the essay is put forward in order to distinguish, according to Gutiérrez, the liberative Christian faith of the oppressed from two other perspectives on religion. The first, suggests Gutiérrez, is a "popular religiosity"[4] engineered by the oppressors in order to justify the status quo, and the second is the atheism of the revolutionary thinker who idealistically ignores the reality of poor people's faith. Gutiérrez rejects both these models as being reductionistic, one-sided, and one-dimensional; he speaks instead of liberative faith, or a spirituality of "contemplation in action," which genuinely involves the poor and oppressed in the process of liberation and in the proclamation of G*d's Reign through the transformation of history (*ibid.*, 115).

Who then are the "uninvited" in Gutiérrez' work? Are people

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[3]See Gutiérrez' *A Theology of Liberation* (1988), pp. 36-8.

[4] I am using the term "religiosity" here with an awareness that it denotes an ideologically negative or dismissive judgement on the people's religion by the so-called official religion or in this case liberation theology. "Popular" here is used not to simply mean widespread but to refer to a religion that is the people's own. "Popular" also conveys the *locus theologicus* and the social location of those who participate in popular religion. See Espín, pp. 91-110. Variant definitions of the "popular" are creating an on-going debate in cultural studies. Many are interrogating the complex nature of the "popular" and its relationship to institutional power. See Chapter 2, "The Concept of the Popular," in John Frow's *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (1995).

from 'other' religions part of the "uninvited" class of which Gutiérrez speaks? Are the indigenous peoples of Latin America, who constitute about one fifth of the population, invited to the 'Wedding Banquet?' These question cast some doubt on the inclusive character of Gutiérrez notion of the "uninvited." Gutiérrez' oppositional stance vis-à-vis popular 'religiosity' is not unknown to Latin American liberation theology. It is the product of much experience within Latin America, where the elite classes, Church hierarchies, and government supported landowners have in some cases manipulated popular religion to justify the subservience of the lower classes, to maintain an oppressive status quo, and to perpetuate hegemonic discourses. However, I would argue that this view is the product of a short-sighted understanding among some Latin American liberation theologians of the existing liberative traditions in 'other' religions and cultures, as well as in popular religions, that have propelled the vanquished to resist domination. The negative, and at times, outright dismissive view of religion and culture has caused much polemical deliberations amongst 'Third World' theologians. It is clear that from the advent of liberation theologies, the question of culture or race has taken a back seat to class in some Latin American theology. This is in part a result of the more economistic variants of the Marxist method which has been foundational to the understanding of *praxis* in Latin American liberation theology. The most blatant expression of this polemic has come about in the dialogue engendered between African-American liberation theologians and Latin American liberation theologians. Gutiérrez' use of the term "religion" in the 'Wedding Banquet' essay, mirrors the way religion has been constructed in Marxist thought, as well as in traditional European theology. This chapter will explore what Aloysius Pieris has labelled the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm of liberation theology by considering the works of Gustavo Gutíerrez, José Miranda, Jon Sobrino, and Leonardo Boff as leading examples of a methodology that sets up a stark dichotomy between liberative faith and enslaving religion.

THE IRRUPTION OF 'THIRD WORLD' RELIGION

The nineteen seventies and eighties were periods of much debating among 'Third World' liberation theologians, in which an attempt to resolve issues that pertained to class and culture became a critical focal point. The first major encounter between Latin American and North American Black liberation theologians occurred in Geneva, in 1973, at a meeting of the WCC (World Council of Churches), where these theologians expressed a shared commitment to create a space of mutual encounter and dialogue. During the Detroit (1975), and Mexico City (1977) conferences, as well as the EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) meetings in Der Es Salaam, Tanzania (1976), Wennappuna, Sri Lanka (1979), and Sáo Paulo, Brazil (1980), deeply divisive tensions arose in response to the question of the relationship between class and race oppression. While many Black and Asian theologians pressed for a broader analysis of poverty that went beyond traditional dependence theories, ideas around class struggle, and the existing class/culture dualism, many Latin American theologians reasserted their commitment to Marxist[5] methodological tools for insight into oppression and liberation.

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[5]The relationship between marxist thought and liberation theology was an ongoing polemic during the 1980s between Latin American liberation theologians on one hand and a number of critics on the other - including the Vatican. This enquiry is not intended as an intervention into this polemic, but instead seeks to contextualize Pieris' critique of Latin American liberation theology within the context of Asian soteriological discourses and *praxis*. For more information on marxism and liberation theology in Latin America see Arthur McGovern's *Liberation Theology and It's Critics* (1989), as well as his *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* (1980), Phillip Berryman's *Liberation Theology* (1987), and Gustavo Gutiérrez' *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (1990). Also, there is the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology" (1984) and the "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation" (1986) which is a more favourable response from the Vatican to liberation theology that its 1984 predecessor.

In an essay delivered at the 1981 EATWOT meeting in New Delhi, entitled "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," Aloysius Pieris, addressed what he believed to be the major stumbling blocks that have hindered mutual dialogue between 'Third World' theologians. Pieris' paper was written in response to the emergent ethos of the Wennappuna and Sáo Paolo meetings. At these meetings, Pieris perceived the predominantly Latin American liberationist[6] methodology being articulated as the most authentic theory of 'Third World' emancipation, and in opposition to the inculturation[7] method (also found in Latin America, although it is more pronounced in Asia), which has a pastoral rootage in popular cultures. In Wennappuna, Asian and Black (American and African) liberation theologians found themselves for the first time sharing similar misgivings about the dominant form of liberation theology of that time: the Latin liberationist expression (*ibid.*, 273-5). The debates around the issues of class and culture within liberation theology provided Pieris with some insightful observations on the place of the 'other' religions in liberation theology, as well as in Western theology as a whole.

In his essay, Pieris is insistent about a definition of religion that stems out of the Asian context, because it is under the category of "religion" that 97% of Asians find themselves situated. Pieris lives and

[6] Liberationist here means the praxis-orientated model prominent among the Latin American liberation theologians which is heavily influenced by the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx. It is important to note here that some Latin American liberation theology is rooted in the methodology of popular cultures - Gutiérrez' work shows some signs of this - although the Marxist method has had more visibility and more impact internationally.

[7] Inculturation is a concept of Catholic origin. It emerged out of the culture/religion dichotomy of the Latins. Traditionally, it has meant the insertion of Christianity minus European culture into another culture minus the 'non-Christian' religion. Emerging inculturationists in Asia, such as Raimondo Panikkar, are less threatened by the possibility of syncretistic "contamination" of Christianity by other religions. In Panikkar's work, we are offered the more challenging Hindu Christianity, rather then the Indian Christianity that a more traditional inculturation model would offer. See his essay, entitled "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (1987) for an interesting comparison with Pieris' use of immersion into water as a symbol for authentic inculturation. Panikkar uses the three rivers of Asia as "geo-theological moments."

works among a very small minority as a Christian in Asia. Thus to contrast popular religion with biblical faith, as does Gutiérrez, is hardly practical if not presumptuous in the context of Asian soteriologies. In Pieris' writings, liberation theologies, especially in the West, are summoned to construct a new paradigm that takes seriously the soteriologies of Asia. To apply a faith/religion dualism within the context of the Asian experience of religion is to construct a theology that cannot authentically take root in the hearts of Asian 'Third World' peoples. For Pieris it is imperative that we construct a theology of religion "that will expand the existing boundaries of orthodoxy" and help us enter "into the liberative streams of other religions and cultures" (Pieris 1988a, 87). In Gutiérrez' work, the construction of religion in opposition to faith is a very real concern insofar as institutionalized "Christendom" (Richard 1987) has also been responsible for the continued oppression of the poor and the marginalized in Latin America. Gutiérrez' notion of religion is not solely limited to 'non-Christians.' Christendom is the principal target of Gutiérrez' critique, a critique that unveils the idolatry of a religion which not only serves *Abba*, but *Mamona* as well (Mt 6:24). With Gutiérrez, Pieris also vehemently opposes any kind of religion which enslaves rather than liberates. However, for Pieris religion cannot be opposed to faith as it is in Gutiérrez' work, because Asian soteriologies have not advanced a definition of religion that is comparable to the Western understanding of the word. In Asia, religion is the all-pervasive ethos of human existence, and in itself has the potential for both enslavement and emancipation. Religion and culture overlap in Asia, especially in what Pieris calls the "cosmic" religions - such as Shamanism for example. Furthermore, religion and culture cannot be so easily wrenched apart in Asia, nor can they be subsumed by a class analysis as they are in some liberationist Latin American theologies.

To better understand the faith/religion dualism that plagues European theology it is important to explore its roots in scripture. According to Pieris, the word religion as it is understood in the West comes from the latin Vulgate *religio* , which was translated from the Greek *threskeia* . In James (1: 26-27), religion, or *threskeia* , is defined as being either pure, when it consist in "caring for orphans and widows in their distress," and defiled when it is only a rigid acceptance of doctine. Hence the contrast between faith and religion seems to have arisen, according to Pieris, in the time of Roman expansionism where *vera religio*, meaning faith in Christ, was set up against *falsa religio*, "a conviction that grew aggressive due to conflicts with Judaism and Islam" (Pieris 1988a, 90). What is wanting from Pieris' elucidation of the *vera/falsa religio* dichotomy is an awareness of what Rosemary Radford Ruether has labelled the *adversus judaeos* tradition in Christian scripture. As we will later see, Ruether's book *Faith and Fratricide* has documented the *adversus judaeos* tradition, namely the anti- Judaism polemics in the Second Testament[8], on which the Christian exegetical tradition is based. Ruether has argued quite convincingly that the early development of christology unfolded within an anti-Judaic worldview, or rather, that they form two sides of the same exegetical tradition. Hence, the anti-Judaic roots of Christian theology have informed the colonialist notion of false and true religion. The *adversus judaeos* tradition of the Second Testament requires a thorough investigation by liberation theologians, because a lack of awareness about this tradition can result in the continued

[8]I am referring here to what is usually called the "New Testament" which I refuse to use out of an awareness of the anti-Judaic bias and Christian supersessionism of such a designation. Many scholars are now using Hebrew Bible or Common Testament as less offensive and triumphalistic designations for the "Old Testament. " I will refer to it as the First Testament. See Fiorenza 1994, p. 193, f8.

perpetuation of a reductionistic anti-Judaic attitude that has defined Judaism as a false religion in Christian theology and history. A hermeneutics of suspicion must be applied to any attempt to justify anti-Judaism biblically, just as such a hermeneutic is applied by liberationists in situations where there are conservative attempts to justify oppression biblically[9].

Pieris has not thoroughly developed the relationship between the *adversus judaeos* tradition and his construction of the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm which he discerns in the Latin American liberationist method. Moreover, in his own method of *prophetic asceticism*, which I will examine in Chapter Three, Pieris reactivates the *adversus judaeos* tradition in a similar manner to the liberationists he is critiquing. The passage from James (1: 26-27) to which Pieris refers can easily be linked to Jesus' critique against the empty legalism of the scribes and Pharisees in the synoptic gospels, because *vera religio* in James is equivalent to ethical "works of mercy." Those who Jesus criticizes in the gospels, "who do not practice what they preach" (Mt 23: 3) are in James words those "who do not bridle their tongue but deceive their hearts" (1: 26). They are the 'invited' guests who do not come to the 'Wedding Banquet' in Matthew 22. Hence, the "uninvited," as we have seen in Gutiérrez' essay, are those who are deemed to be untouchable and shunned by the priestly classes - those on the margins and outside of the Judaism of that period. How did the "uninvited" come to refer only to Christians, when in fact this is not what the gospel text infers from the 'Wedding Banquet' parable? The *adversus judaeos* tradition has worked itself into the parable by a

[9]Many liberation theologians have fashioned a "christology from below" - which emphasizes the humanity of Jesus - using the existing institutional religious hierarchy of Jesus' time as a mirror reflecting the existing Christian hierarchy in our time. Jesus is depicted as the prophet who renounces the enslaving aspects of the Jewish religious institutions of his time and thus understood as a model for those who seek to follow Him now. There is truth in this, but a more nuanced awareness of the anti-Judaism in the Second Testament is lacking in some work. See especially Leonardo Boff's *Church: Charism and Power* (1992) and Jon Sobrino's *Christology at the Crossroads* (1978).

simplistic reading of Jesus' critique of the empty legalism of the priestly classes in the gospels. Unfortunately, all of Judaism was insidiously constructed to reflect the critique of empty legalism levelled at the scribes and Pharisees[10] by Jesus, and more importantly, Judaism was understood as being superseded, or abolished, by the 'new' covenant in Christ. In Gutiérrez' use of the 'Wedding Banquet' parable, it is not so much the case that he is consciously excluding 'non-Christians,' especially Jews, from the "uninvited" poor and marginalized. However, the dichotomy that he sets up between liberative faith and popular religion casts an exclusivistic shadow on his theology. This exclusivism is acutely noticed by some Asian liberation theologians, for whom religion is not simply a concept that refers to a false or distorted faith, it is life itself. The *adversus judaeos* tradition tends to resurface whenever faith is opposed to religion and buttressed exegetically with scripture. This is unjustifiable in any theology that aspires to do theology from the "underside of history." Does the irruption of 'Third World' theology challenge European constructs of religion? The next sections will identify more precisely the roots of the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm that has travelled to Asia under the banner of liberation theology.

REVOLUTION AGAINST RELIGION

At the EATWOT (III) meeting in Wennappuna, Sri Lanka, in 1979, Aloysius Pieris delivered a paper, entitled "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," that caused much debate between the

[10] Even the use of the term Pharisee is problematic here. Historically, the Pharisees were loved by the populace; they worked among the poor people. The term was used quite prominently in the gospels, because at the time of their writing, the Pharisees were the only group, with the Christians, to survive the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. Hence, they quickly became a powerful rival to the new Christian sects. The attack on the Pharisees in the gospels reveals more about the polemics that the Christians and Pharisees were engaged in 45 to 90 years after the death of Jesus, than about the nature of Pharisaic religiosity. See Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

inculturationist and the liberationist streams of thought. In this paper, Pieris writes that

> for us Asians, then, liberation theology is thoroughly Western, and yet so radically renewed by the challenges of the Third World that it has relevance for Asia that classic theology does not have... In the churches of the East this new method has already begun to compete with traditional theology... The second feature, quite important for Asians, is the primacy of praxis over theory... We know Jesus the *truth* by following Jesus the *way* (*ibid.*, 82).

According to Pieris, to do theology in Asia, or more precisely to create an indigenous Asian theology, one must consider two points: first, Asia's overwhelming poverty, and second, Asia's multifaceted religiousness (*ibid.*, 69). Hence, an authentic Asian theology for Pieris must support the creation of an authentic Asian ecclesiology: namely, the creation of base communities or local churches *of* Asia, rather than local churches *in* Asia. This distinction is very important in Pieris' work because it attempts to bring together, or bridge, the culture and class preoccupations of both the African-Asian and Latin American liberation theologians. For Pieris, a local church *in* Asia is usually a rich church working *for* the poor; it is a church from another continent struggling to acclimatize to the Asian ethos. On the other hand, a church fulfilling its mission to the poor, a church that stands in solidarity *with* the poor is, according to Pieris, a local church *of* Asia. An Asian clergy does not guarantee an authentic local church *of* Asia, particularly if it does not take seriously its mission with the poor and its place within the dominant Asian soteriological ethos. Some Asians theologians reacted to Pieris' position as being too closely aligned with the Marxist bias of Latin American theologians. In fact, Pieris had been very critical of the Western Marxist thrust of Latin American theology, because it did not take seriously the second aspect of an authentic Asian liberation theology: the multifaceted and diverse make-up of Asian religiosity.

Pieris has always been sympathetic to elements of the Marxist method and he has repeatedly spoken to its emancipatory potential in the Asian context. The real breakthrough in theology occurred, in Pieris' view, when Western theology was released from its Kantian orbit and made to rotate around a Marxist axis (*ibid.*, 82). The Kantian method that liberated reason from authority was reconfigured by the Marxist ideal to free reality from oppression. The Marxist influence in liberation theology can be discerned primarily by its methodological emphasis on *praxis* .[11] This method of *doing* theology from the experience the poor and oppressed became very influential in both Central and South America after the 1968 Latin American Bishop's Conference (CELAM) at Medellín, Colombia, attempted to apply the Vatican II reforms to the Latin American continent. However, Pieris believes that a liberatory *theopraxis* in Asia that uses only Marxist tools of social analysis will always remain incomplete, and can also reproduce the tradition of Western colonialism and triumphalism. In Pieris' view, no Asian theology of liberation can be complete without first consulting Buddhism which is "pan-Asian in cultural integration, numerical strength, geographical extension, and political maturity" (*ibid.*, 72). An Asian theology of liberation must not only take seriously the Asian cross of the poor and oppressed; it must also enter into the liberative streams of Asian soteriologies and sit to the feet of their gurus.

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[11]Most liberation theologians define *praxis* in a circular way, the circle of human life that always requires reflection, theory, and clarification. This circle always begins with one's context, with one's experience/action and then moves to reflection and back again to experience/action. The stress on *praxis* is to move away from the dualism of theory and action, and adopt a more dialectical theory in action approach. Marx's critique of previous materialisms was to effect a change to purely theoretical models that ignore the importance of human activity, or *praxis*. Gramsci's later insisted that Marxism be, above all, a philosophy of *praxis*, or a doctrine of action. In this sense, liberation theology could be called a theology of *praxis*, or a *theopraxis*. See McGovern 1980, 74; Sölle 1990a, 6; Gramsci 1971; Pieris 1988a, 82.

Pieris has delineated two paradigms [12] that seek to demonstrate the positionality of Christian faith in relation to religion in an Asian theological context (See Appendix 1). I am emphasizing Pieris' construction of an Asian *theopraxis* of liberation to illustrate the influence the Marxist method has had on his work. This has caused a rift between those Asian theologians who see culture as a foundational aspect to their theology. Pieris is in agreement with aspects of the inculturationist vision, but he believes that it cannot exist without an authentic immersion in the experiences of the poor and oppressed. Pieris has designated the inculturation method as the Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm. This vision was made manifest within the Christian Ashram movement of India in the 1960's, and articulated in Raimondo Panikkar's *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. What is lacking from this paradigm, according to Pieris, is a commitment to create an authentic local church *of* Asia which stands in solidarity with the voiceless. As we will see in chapter two, the Christian Ashram movement was not concerned with the macro-ethical demands to transform social structures; it was, and continues to be, concerned solely with the micro-ethical demands to transform the self. According to Pieris, this movement looked away from social justice, and looked instead inside its own walls in order to eradicate personal sin. While voluntary poverty, or a life of the desert, is at the forefront of Pieris' vision of an Asian theology of liberation, it cannot stand alone, isolated from the reality of the Asian struggle for a full humanity .

Pieris has labelled the liberationist method the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm because it subtly imposes a rigid Western perspective on Asian soteriologies and religion. The liberationist

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[12] See H. R. Niebuhr's book, *Christ and Culture* (1951), which is particularly influential for Pieris' two interreligious paradigms.

paradigm is believed to be a kind of crypto-colonialism that has angered many 'Third World' theologians. The liberationist paradigm is based on aspects of the Marxist method which, in some forms, tend to suppress the voices of ethnic identities and racial minorities in its theology. Culture and gender are often subsumed under the more foundational category of class struggle in the Marxist method. This has also sparked a critical reaction from many women-centred and feminist theologians in Latin America who challenge the androcentric bias of some liberation theology. The specific experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, as well as sexuality, are not imparted with epistemological primacy within a narrow Marxist critique of capitalism and imperialism. This dialogue informs many of the debates between Latin American and Asian/African theologians at the EATWOT meetings. More recently, however, these debates have been greatly enhanced by the diverse voices of 'Third World' women, who in the mid-eighties, "irrupted" onto the theological scene and injected the debates with a serious and steadfast emphasis on gender issues.[13] The contributions of feminist and women-centred liberation theologies have not only diversified the theological discourses, but they have also broadened the horizons of theology through a complex and wide-reaching examination of religious life. As we have already seen with Gutiérrez' work, the liberationists have been called upon to examine the faith/religion dualism in their work in order to authentically respond to the criticism of their Asian 'Third World' sisters and brothers. This examination entails a critical re-evaluation of Marx and other Marxists' views about religion and culture in order to discern what is truly is fruitful for those engaged in the work of interreligious

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[13]See Fabella and Oduyoye eds. *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology.* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988).

praxis and liberation[14].

Born in Tier, Prussia, in 1818, Karl Marx was the prime architect of the *praxis* method. Marx' religious roots were originally Jewish, however his father converted the family to the Lutheran Church. Marx studied law and philosophy in Germany and later settled in London, England, where he worked closely with his associate Frederick Engels. Marx was deeply influenced by Hegel's dialectical method, by his notions of *praxis* and alienation, and by his sense of the stages of history. But it was Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of Hegel, especially his views on religion, which shaped the young Marx. Feuerbach sought to demystify religion and argued that G*d was a "projection" of human ideals (McGovern 1980, 16). Like Feuerbach, Marx understood religion as a projection that alienates humans from themselves; thus he wrote that "the more man puts into God, the less he retains of himself" (1972, 72). Marx likened his analysis of religion to the way the capitalist system alienates workers from their labour. However, Marx argued that simply demonstrating that religion was a projection did nothing to transform the state of alienation. Hence, Marx later critiqued Feuerbach because he failed to stress the need for action, or *praxis*, to transform the world. Thus the now famous epigraph engraved on Marx' tombstone: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it" (McGovern 1980, 25).

Marx was working toward constructing a materialist view of history that sought historical change, not by demonstrating new ideas (as did the Idealists), but by human intervention in history through the dialectic of *praxis* - a new interdependence between theory and action. Furthermore, the task of history was to construct a truth of this world,

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[14]This should also entail an examination of those marxists who have engaged with certain streams of marxist thinking in a critical manner. Here I am thinking particularly of Gramsci, Lucàks, Luxemburg, and the Frankfurt School.

not from beyond the world, which the illusion of religion shapes in human consciousness. Religion is, according to Marx, a kind of repressive movement of the psyche which human beings set up in order not to confront 'true' reality. For Marx, religion, and most particularly Christianity in the West, was a socially constructed and illusionary ideal born out of the human being's quest for consolation and justification. Religion epitomized the regression of the oppressed person unable to progress toward the self-shaping and revolutionary transformation of society. Religion was understood by Marx as a form of protest, but in the end, he argued that it remained ineffective in accomplishing an authentic transformation of class hierarchies and in bringing about a just redistribution of wealth and power. In Marx' work, as we have also seen in Gutiérrez, religion was a tool of manipulation of the owners of wealth and capital to crystallize and justify inequality in the world; it was the major obstacle toward salvation and liberation. Marx wrote this of religion in 1844:

> The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion. (Marx/Engels, 42)

Although Engels' later writings reflect more of an awareness of religion's potential for emancipation, these men were in fact reacting to a very conservative Church, particularly the German Lutheran Church, which consolidated much power in the European culture of the 19th century. For this reason, it is important to read their writings contextually and appreciate their implications in confronting the hegemonic character of the European Churches which organized themselves as a kind of sacred canopy for the legitimization of an oppressive status quo.

Many Latin American liberation theologians, especially those influenced by Marx' writings, have uncritically incorporated his polemic against religion into their theological enterprise. While Marx' dictum that religion is the "opiate of the people" was reformulated by some Latin American theologians by casting the Christian faith as the "leaven of liberation," the cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity of Latin America has not been seriously reflected upon. It is important to remember, that in some regions of Latin America, such as the Chiapas province in Mexico, indigenous people constitute a majority of the population and liberationists must begin to listen to those 'non-Christian' epistemologies that have provided hope for a people struggling to survive cultural genocide. Pieris has evaluated the Western bias found in Marxist thought, especially in Marx' writings on India, and he has suggested that in the *Manifesto* (1847) the idea of an international proletarian revolution actually puts forward the global implementation of Western ideals. Pieris writes that "the whole idea of 'progress' and 'civilization' is simply equated with the Westernization of the East" (Pieris 1988a, 92). Furthermore, it is crucial to examine the way religion is contrasted to revolution in the liberationist school of theology in the context of Latin American. This dualistic presupposition also imposes a European framework on 'Third World' theology.

The work of Marxist Christian José Porfirio Miranda, a liberation theologian and biblicist from Mexico, is a good example of how the appropriation of Marx' notion of religion has been used in Latin American liberation theology. Miranda is well know for his book, *Marx and the Bible* (1974), in which he not only writes about the compatibility of Marxism and biblical faith, but also draws out the biblical roots of Marxist thought. Authentic Christian faith, in

Miranda's work, is a prophetic eschatological faith. The eschatological transformation of history in relation to the living G*d of history is Miranda's point of reference in defining faith. In *Being and the Messiah* (1977), Miranda writes specifically about the content of religion as it is contrasted to the eschatological faith of the Bible. For Miranda

> the anticultus of Jesus Christ and the prophets was a struggle against religion... Religion lubricates the cycles of the eternal return in history. Rebellion against religion is mandatory for anyone convinced that justice must be achieved, because persons with moral conscience cannot resign themselves to the eternal return of all things (Miranda 1977, 40-41).

Miranda understands "Yahweh," the G*d of the Bible, as a G*d who is opposed to cultic idolatry. The Hebrew Bible, or First Testament, is replete with situations where a prophet will critique the distorted "cultus" of the Israelite people. Miranda is concerned about illustrating how the biblical prophets, such as Amos, Jeremiah, Micah, Isaiah, as well as Jesus, attacked the "cultus" of religion in order to preach the revolutionary eschatological G*d of history. "Yahweh," Miranda tells us, rejects "cultus" because it is a way of reducing G*d to a 'god' of religion. A 'god' of religion is a 'god' of eternal return who crystallizes history as a fate to be repeated over and over again in the cosmos. The eschatological G*d, for Miranda, transforms history and liberates the oppressed from their immediate bondage. Miranda believes that the "greatest disaster of history was the reabsorption of Christianity by the framework of religion" (*ibid.*, 40). The intention of Miranda's statement is to show that when Christianity became a state religion, it assigned an important place to cultic worship and lost its revolutionary potential. Miranda here does not demonstrate any awareness of the *adversus judaeos* tradition of the gospels, yet he is careful to speak of the G*d of the Bible in a holistic way, not solely equating Judaism with the "cultus" of religion. For Miranda the biblical G*d is always vulnerable to distortions and idolatry. The prophets are the safeguards against the falsification of faith and the distortion of the living G*d in whom the faithful put their trust and eschatological hope.

Is the contrast between revolution and religion favourable to interreligious *praxis* in liberation theology? Pieris believes that it hampers interreligious collaboration, because cultural and religious identities tend to be subsumed under the one banner of religion. If all the soteriologies of Asia are subsumed under the category of religion, it is quite understandable that the inculturationists would react unfavourably - even if the concept of religion can also apply to Christianity, albeit in its distorted form. The point here, and one which is argued by some Asian and African theologians, is that the revolution/religion antagonism suggests that it is only through an authentic relationship with the biblical G*d that religion can be overcome. How does one go about the business of liberation, or how does one stand in solidarity, for example, with the marginalized indigenous peoples of Latin America, if their revolutionary tools are implicitly cast as being against the revolution? Pieris argues that such a conception of religion is in fact a neo-colonial position that is masked in the guise of liberation.

REVELATION AGAINST RELIGION

The interpretation of religion as opposed to faith does not come down to theology solely via Marx. There is another stream of thought which arose as a response to Protestant liberal theology in the 19th and early 20th century: namely, the dialectical school of Karl Barth. Born in Switzerland, in 1886, Karl Barth's early theological training developed amidst the liberal school of Protestantism at the turn of the century. However, in light of the horrors of World War I, and the liberal inability to appropriately respond to that war, Barth abandoned the liberal school and forged a path which he believed to be a return to the original principles of the Reformation. Liberal theology was critiqued by Barth because it was deeply entrenched in, and blinded by, a worldview that was at the point of breakdown. Rather than resisting those very ambitions and discourses that led to WW I and WW II, argued Barth, the assumptions of liberal theology, which were based in part on the idea of 'experience' as the touchstone of truth, endorsed a worldview espoused by the dominant cultures of Europe, and more specifically, by their bourgeois churches.

As the Barmen Declaration of 1934 (for which Barth was primarily responsible) reveals, Barth's theology opposed Nazi and "German Christian" idolatrous claims to 'truth' and power. For Barth and the other 'crisis' theologians of the dialectical school [15], such as his friends and collaborators Eduard Thurneysen and Emil Brunner, there is only one revelation given by G*d whose absolute transcendence is not intrinsic to human consciousness. Hence, G*d alone, without humanity, can initiate all that is good in the world. Evil is the product of human sin and can only be overcome by faith in G*d. Barth was opposed to *gefühl*, the feeling of contingency or "absolute dependency" which was initially proposed by Frederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), considered by many to be the father of Protestant liberal theology. Paul Tillich describes *gefühl*, not as a subjective emotion, but as an "intuition of the universe" and as "the immediate awareness of that which is beyond subject and object" (Tillich, 392). The Romantic rebellion created a context whereby the experience of relationality with

[15]Hence the term "neo-orthodox" used to describe this school of theology. Barth did not like this term and felt it did not reflect what he and his and collaborators were doing. The usage of the term 'crisis' theology is much more appropriate to the contextual character of Barth's theology. As well, Paul Tillich argues that the use of the word dialectical to describe Barth's theology to be misleading. Tillich writes that "in its prophetic beginnings it was paradoxical, and later its conceptualization became supernaturalistic. But it is not dialectical" (1968, 538).

G*d, rather than the idea of the rationality of G*d put forward during the Enlightenment, became an important theological category. In Schleiermacher's celebration of the consciousness of relationality with G*d, Barth discerned an emphasis on humans celebrating themselves, or individuals celebrating their own experience. Barth found this to be a most dangerous idea in the European context of the twenties and thirties, and especially during the Nazi ascendency.

Barth's kerygmatic methodology, characterized by discontinuity, distance, and the complete transcendence of G*d, paved the way for a definition of religion which is in stark contrast to what he believed to be the one revelation of G*d in Jesus Christ. Religion, for Barth, is an idolatrous manipulation of G*d; it is unbelief. Barth believed that all human attempts to reach G*d is religion. In his massive *Church Dogmatics*, begun in 1927, Barth writes that

> because it is a [human] grasping, religion is the contradiction of revelation, the concentrated expression of human unbelief, i.e. an attitude and activity which is directly opposed to faith. It is feeble but defiant, an arrogant but hopeless attempt to create something which man could do, but now cannot do, or can do only because and if God himself creates it for him: the knowledge of the truth, the knowledge of God... In religion man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking away in advance the very thing which has to be given by God (Hick, Hebblethwaite, 38).

This passage was written in 1930, at a time when mounting German nationalism was taking on what Barth understood as an insidious idolatrous character. However, Barth's later writings assumed milder tones and he made more positive statements about the nature of religion - especially in his 1949 essay, entitled "How My Mind Has Changed." Nonetheless, Barth's contrast between revelation and religion has had quite a significant impact on Christian theology of religions, on missiology, on ecclesiology, and in particular on interreligious dialogue in the 40's, 50's and early 60's. Barth was not only reacting to what he perceived as the 'relativism' of the liberal tradition of Protestant theology, he was also endeavouring to save Christianity from the theories of religion he believed to be reductionistic, such as those by Friedrich Nietzsche, William James, Karl Marx, J.G. Frazer, Emil Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud. By lifting Christian faith above the realm of popular religious belief, Barth reduced everything that was not authentically biblical to the pejorative class of religion - this includes idolatrous expressions of Christianity as well. In Barth's work, like in Miranda's theology, Christianity is not immune from the judgement on religion; no religion is in itself 'true', although it can become 'true' only through the grace of G*d - the sola *gratia* of the Reformation (*ibid.*, 43).

Aloysius Pieris has remarked, in his essay "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," that Latin American liberation theology has been influenced by the Barthian school, especially in the book, *Christology at the Crossroads*, written by the Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino (1988a, 90). Like Miranda, Sobrino understands the Christian call to faith as a rejection of "cultus." Christians, argues Sobrino, reject the idea that there is a direct access to G*d in cultic worship; Christians are called to follow Jesus and to adjust their lives to the service which he demands from them. Faith is *praxis*-oriented for Sobrino; it is the not the cultic proclamation of the risen Lord. Like Gutiérrez, Sobrino is also working out dualisms that have plagued much traditional theology. Gutiérrez' main concern was addressing the church/world, or sacred/secular, dualism which prevented the "uninvited" from participating, in relationship with G*d, in the transformation of their oppressive conditions. In Sobrino's book, the emphasis is on christology, and his central task is redressing the century long dualism between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history.

Liberation theologies as a whole have put much emphasis on the historical Jesus in order to maintain a balance with the priority given to the Christ of faith in much classical European theology. However, this does not imply that the Christ of faith is forgotten in liberation theology. The *praxis*-oriented methodology in liberation theology is the foundational characteristic which distinguishes it from the European method. Therefore, the historical Jesus, the peasant who came from Galilee, the most oppressed region in Judah (Judea), who lived impoverished among the outcasts, who preached a radical vision of love and justice, and who was executed because of his lived vision, is paradigmatic of the path Christians must tread in their lives of service. Hence the risen Lord of whom Paul and John of Patmos speak, argues Sobrino, can only be understood through a profound and committed understanding of the historical cross. The resurrection of Christ, according to Sobrino, finds its authentic meaning in the crucifixion of the historical Jesus, executed because he lived and preached the radical justice of the G*d of Israel. The resurrected Christ appeared before his friends carrying the wounds of his crucifixion. Therefore, the resurrected Christ comes back from the dead carrying the wounds inflicted upon him in history. This suggests that the resurrection, the glorified Jesus, is intimately connected to the radical vision of justice that the historical Jesus lived and preached, and for which he was executed.[16] Sobrino argues that solidarity with the oppressed, or the freedom to serve and suffer with the 'other,' is the

[16]John Dominic Crossan calls this the dialectic of faith and history for Christian living (in a HarperCollins sponsored e-mail debate with Marcus Borg and Luke Timothy Johnson, February, 1996). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza makes a similar point focusing instead on the empty tomb tradition (associated with women) which Crossan denies (1994, 126).

process of picking up one's cross as a resurrected people (1978, 282). For many Latin Americans, Archbishop Oscar Romero, initially a conservative cleric whose life was transformed by the plight of the Salvadoran poor and landless, epitomizes the resurrected lived struggle of an authentic Christian faith. For Sobrino, Christians are called to a historical way of living as resurrected beings in the present.

Sobrino's 'christology from below' brings together the Christ of faith in harmony with the cross of the historical Jesus. Sobrino nonetheless leaves untouched the revelation/religion dichotomy which has direct links to Barth's notion of Christian faith. In Sobrino, it is not solely the eschatological element which characterizes the distinction between faith and religion, as it is in Miranda's work. Rather, Sobrino's understanding of faith is also directly connected to his construction of a *praxis*-orientated 'christology from below' where union with Christ is authenticated in concrete and historical discipleship. For Sobrino, faith becomes religion when a lived struggle for the 'other' becomes an abstract devotion to the Christ of faith: namely, the institutionalization of Christolatry. Sobrino writes that

> whenever Christian faith focuses one-sidedly on the Christ of faith and wittingly or unwittingly forgets the historical Jesus, and to the extent it does that, it loses its specific structure as Christian faith and tends to turn in religion...By "religion" here I mean a conception of the world and humanity, a conception of reality, in which the meaning of the whole is already given at the start because the reality of God is satisfactorily shaped and defined from the very beginning (*ibid.*, 275).

Sobrino's faith/religion distinction, which is in fact based on a 'christology from below,' is quite opposed to Barth's 'christology from above' - the discontinuity between G*d and humanity. Yet they share a similar methodological approach by regarding that which is true, as incarnational faith, and that which is a distortion, as religion. As in

Barth, Christianity, or Christendom, is also under judgement in Sobrino's work for falling prey to distorted cultic and idolatrous practices. Yet quite unlike Barth, Sobrino believes, as does Miranda and Marx, that these distortions are a result of a distancing from the historical *praxis* of societal and self-transformation. One should note however, that unlike Miranda, Sobrino eschews simplistic conflations between his definitions of religion and the popular religion of the poor. In a footnote, Sobrino warns against such parallels where a so-called "enlightened faith" is contrasted to "popular religiosity" (Sobrino 1978, 308-9). Sobrino's concern here does implicitly focus on class implications insofar as the educated, or those who have access to education, are perceived as applying a 'correct' faith to their lives, whereas the popular religion of the poor and illiterate is perceived as simplistic superstition (*ibid.*).

To understand Sobrino's work as being informed solely by the 'crisis' theology of Karl Barth while perceiving Miranda as being solely informed by the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx would be reductionistic. Both Sobrino and Miranda have constructed theologies of liberation that are imbued with European systems of knowledge that continue to sanction the epistemological primacy of Christian faith over and above religion. For Asian theologians, such as Aloysius Pieris, the continuity with European systems of knowledge cannot be reproduced in his culture without the proper indigenization of theology. The indigenization process is accomplished, according to Pieris, through the soteriologies of Asia as they are experienced by the poor, oppressed, and marginalized - the victims of a global economy dominated by an elite few.

DIALECTICAL SYNCRETISM

In the book, *Church: Charism and Power*, Leonardo Boff devotes a full chapter to the rehabilitation of the concept of syncretism, a concept much reviled in Christian theology. Boff's book caused much concern in the Vatican at the time of its publication because of its trenchant critique of ecclesial power and how hierarchical church structures remain distant from the reality of Latin America's poor and oppressed. First published in Portuguese in 1981, *Church: Charism and Power* provoked the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF) into a defensive position resulting in a thirty-six page critique of "certain aspects of liberation theology" by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, along with the eventual silencing of Leonardo Boff. These events accompanied a controversy that saw the critics of liberation theology simplistically portraying liberationists in Latin America as Marxists in disguise working to deliver the Americas into the hands of Communism.[17] If Marxism was the Latin American spectre that loomed dangerously in the eyes of the Magisterium in the 1980's, the recent excommunication of Sri Lanka's Tissa Balasuriya[18], one of the co-founders of EATWOT, reveals that the Asian commitment to religious pluralism is the 90's version of Vatican uneasiness. In fact, Cardinal Ratzinger spoke in May of 1996 to the Latin American Bishops saying that the collapse of Marxist regimes means that liberation theology "in its more radical forms" is no longer the most urgent challenge for the Catholic Church. However, Ratzinger goes on to say

[17]The best example of this position is Michael Novak's "The Case Against Liberation Theology" in *The New York Times Magazine* (Oct. 21, 1984). In 1980, the "Santa Fe Document" written by members of the so-called 'Reagan circle' laid out the new U.S. policy for Latin America which stated that: "U.S. policy must begin to counter liberation theology as it is utilized in Latin America by the 'liberation theology' clergy." The Santa Fe Committee accused liberation theologians of using the church "as a political weapon against private property and productive capitalism by infiltrating the religious community with ideas that are less Christian than Communist" (Berryman, 3-4).

[18]As I write this, the news of Balasuriya's reinstatement into the priesthood, in an official ceremony of reconciliation with the Vatican, has just been announced.

that "relativism has thus become the central problem for the faith at the present time."[19]

Boff's attempt at rehabilitating syncretism in *Church: Charism and Power* was not perceived as a threat to the Vatican as such, but as a distinct feature of his application of a liberationist methodology to Catholic ecclesiology. The book was perceived as a Marxist re-interpretation of classical ecclesiology insofar as an uncritical acceptance of class struggle was injected into the relationship between the BECs (Base Ecclesial Communities) and the institutional ecclesial power structures. In the SCDF's 1984 "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation," which was released three and a half months after Boff was summoned to Rome for an interview about *Church: Charism and Power,* it is stated that in some liberation theology,

> building on such a conception of the Church of the People [the BECs], a critique of the very structures of the Church is developed... [This critique] has to do with a challenge to the *sacramental and hierarchical structure* of the Church, which was willed by the Lord Himself. There is a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed...Their theology is a theology of class. (IX:13, X:1)

As we have seen earlier in this section, the "Instruction" is quite correct in discerning the influence of Marxism in some Latin American liberation theology. However, it's reactionary tone suggests a perspective that is completely out of touch with the methodology and hermeneutical principles brought forth by liberation theologians in the

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19National Catholic Reporter ,V.32, NO.44 (OCT. 18, 1996), p. 12.

'Third World.'[20] Theologians such as Gutiérrez, Boff, Sobrino, Miranda, and others have always been very open about the importance of some aspects of Marxist theory on their theologies[21]. As we have also seen, Asian liberationists, such as Pieris, believe the impact of the Marxist notion of *praxis* on liberation theology to be the great paradigm shift in Western theology, effecting a "complete reversal of method" and "putting theology back on its feet" (1988a 82). Some theologians[22] have argued that the use of Marxist theory by liberation theologians is no different from the use of Aristotelian philosophy by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. In Boff's *Church: Charism and Power*, the definition of syncretism offered is not one that gives genuine agency to the syncretic elements evolving out of popular religious movements, but a reassertion of Marx' critique of "religion" as the sacred canopy for the oppressive status quo in Latin America. Boff's version of popular syncretism in Brazil was never a threat to the Vatican, because his notion of syncretism from a "lower level" rather than from "the privileged places within Catholicism" reveals on one hand the acceptance of heterogeneous elements within the faith, while one the other a "firm christian identity as its substantial nucleus" (1992, 89, 101). It is Boff's denunciation of ecclesial powers and hierarchical structures as religious in the pejorative Marxist use of the term - as an institution that achieved a onetime syncretism with the Roman

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[20]After his visit to the Vatican, Boff was quoted as saying: "Up to now the Church of Europe has been looking at the Church of the Third World through a window. This problem of liberation theology comes not from the Third World, wherein the principal cause of exploitation and oppression reside." From "Comments and Views on the Theology of Liberation" by Louie Hechanova, CSsR, in Claretian Publications 1986, 136.

[21]See Gutiérrez' careful and rewritten section on class conflict in *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988, pp. 156-161. Also, Miranda's *Marx and the Bible*, 1974.

[22]See Dom Helder Camera's " Thomas Aquinas and Karl Marx: The Challenge to Christians" in *Church in the World*, vol.10 (Chicago: University of chicago Press, 1972).

Empire - that continues to be viewed by the Vatican as opposed to what it believes to be "willed by the Lord."

Boff has since left his Franciscan order, but continues to write, teach, and work pastorally in the BECs of Rio de Janeiro and in other parts of Brazil. As a liberation theologian, Boff's critique of church structure methodologically posits BECs in dialectical opposition to institutional ecclesial structures. Like most liberation theologians, Boff accords hermeneutical preference to the experience of the poor and oppressed. Yet unlike Gutiérrez and Miranda, Boff struggles with the notions of faith and religion in a much more dialectical fashion. Boff's construction of syncretism must be understood in relation to his definition of the role of the BECs. The basic distinction that Boff makes is the difference between a church that is organized on the principle of charism and a church that is hierarchically organized through power relations. Boff understands the meaning of charism to come from Paul (1Cor 12:7, Rom 12:4) who introduced the term "in the context of the organization of a community" (1992, 156). Charism, according to Boff, comes from the root word *charis* or *chairein* which means gratuity, benevolence, G*d's gift granted on individuals (*ibid*). In Paul's letters, charism is understood as a structuring element of a community based on his belief that the appearance of the Church inaugurated the period of eschaton (*ibid.*, 157). In this context, Paul's notion of charism is understood by Boff to mean each individuals' responsibility within the community to work for the good of all. Hence in 1 Cor 12: 25, Paul writes that "all members must be concerned for one another." This understanding of Church, as the people of G*d in mutual relation and as equally responsible for each other is Boff's model of the BECs. The model of the Church as power, argues Boff, is one that understands the hierarchy to be the only fundamental charism and the only charismatic state. This in turn dictates the organizational nature of the Church, rather than the process of discerning the movements of the Spirit. Boff writes that

> the Church is alive where the Spirit is not suffocated. Diverse charisms abound, creatively flourishes, and Jesus' message becomes, again, good news. People become true members of the Church, and not simply parishioners, allowing the religious realization of the diverse capabilities (charisms), placed at the service of the Gospel and all people (*ibid.*, 158).

Boff understands the BECs not simply as a way of evangelization in popular settings, but as a new way of being Church. The more the Church is open to people, writes Boff, the more it becomes what it is authentically meant to be: the people of G*d (*ibid.*, 126). In this sense, the BEC is regarded as a sign and instrument for the liberation of G*d's people: the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

Boff's option in favour of syncretism derives from this notion of Church, from his liberationist ecclesiology. Moreover, Boff's defense of syncretism is also firmly structured around his understanding of the Catholic Church as catholic or universal in its salvific mission. In his chapter on syncretism, Boff offers many different definitions of syncretism and posits the concrete experience of the poor and oppressed as a criteria for discerning between false and true syncretism. Boff argues that syncretism has always existed in Catholicism, yet the hierarchy understands its own syncretism, its one-time syncretization, as doctrinal purity. Boff believes that "pure Christianity does not exist, never has existed, never can exist. The divine is always made present through human mediations which are always dialectical" (*ibid.*,92). Hence, Boff opts for a syncretism from below as the legitimate incarnational experience of popular communities. However, true syncretism for Boff maintains a dialectical balance between faith and religion. False syncretism takes on two deviations: faith without religion and religion without faith (*ibid*., 99-100). For Boff, the definitions of faith and religion are not distinct from Gutiérrez, Sobrino or Miranda. Boff defines religion as functional in a sociocultural sense, without autonomy or substantive value, and faith as essentially substantive and transcendental. In contrast to his peers, Boff believes that faith finds its proper expression in dialectical tension with religion rather than as a liberative model that opposes oppressive religion. Without religion, faith "demands impossible purity as if the individual were not part of this world," because faith without the sociocultural dimension of religion can lead to an individualistic and privatized experience (*ibid*.,100). On the other hand, religion without faith amounts to the simple adherence of rites and norms - from an ethical perspective it can amount to empty legalism, or in Boff's words "pharisaism" (*ibid*). However, in full concurrence with his peers, Boff maintains the substantive primacy of faith over the functional character of religion within his dialectical model. As we have seen earlier, the result of such a setup is an uncritical perspective vis-à-vis the *adversus judaeos* tradition of the Gospels. Here again, religion is uncritically equated with the Pharisaic movement of Jesus' time, revealing the anti-Judaic elements once again resurfacing in contemporary Christian theology.

A closer examination of Boff's faith/religion distinction reveals a critique of the Protestant Christ-*against*-culture model that posits the revelation of the Word in distinct opposition to culture (Niebuhr 1951). Boff's syncretism is in fact an emphasis on the Catholic model of inculturation, of sinking the Word in the different cultures that accept it, thereby making its apprehension diverse and culturally conditioned. In his reclaiming of syncretism, Boff is trying to rehabilitate a concept that emerges from the grassroots, from popular religious movements, from the BECs. His dialectical syncretism nevertheless falls into Pieris' paradigm of Christ-*against*-Religion because of the hierarchical distinction he sets up between faith and religion, albeit more subtle and interrogated than in Gutiérrez and Miranda. Boff's syncretism is in complete accordance with the inclusivist or fulfilment theology of Vatican II insofar as Boff posits Christian identity, the charism Church , as the locus of purification and fulfilment of religion. Boff's challenge to the hierarchical Church, the Church of power, lies in his denunciation of its one-time syncretization within the Greco-Roman culture ethos. The authentic Church, the people of G*d, calls on the institutional Church to authentically immerse itself in the life of the Latin American people who, according to Boff, experience syncretism as an ongoing process. Boff's model prepares the way for Pieris' Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm. The rigidity of Boff's ecclesiology does not allow for the agency of 'religion' as an autonomous or substantially liberative epistemology. In the next chapter, we will examine what Pieris means by Christ-*of*-Religion and how it has evolved in the context and culture of India.

Inculturation in the Cave of the Heart

"Self-analysis alone is therefore inadequate to discern the contemporary strategies of mammon: social analysis must complement it... We *become one with God* (is this not the aim of all mysticism?) to the degree that our poverty drives us to appropriate God's concern for the poor as our mission."
Aloysius Pieris

Pieris argues that in South Asia, specifically in India and Sri Lanka, the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm has also shown itself to be subtly present in the work of such liberation theologians, as Sri Lanka's Tissa Balasuryia and India's Sebastian Kappen, both of whose theological methods are focused on the problem of the "poor"[1] (Pieris 1988a, 63). However, in South Asia the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm of liberation theology evolved quite differently and has taken on a more nuanced tone than in Latin America. In India, for example, the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm, which resurfaced after Vatican II in the form of what Pieris has identified as the "crypto-colonial Christ of the liberationists" (1988a, 89) unfolded as a direct reaction to years of indigenized Christian Indian theology, and in some cases Hindu Christian theology, which disregarded the plight of the poor, oppressed,

[1]Sebastian Kappen's work is hard to locate. Kappen's essay "Toward an Indian Theology of Liberation" in the book entitled, *Leave the Temple* (1992), puts his theology unambiguously in the liberationist camp. However, interreligious concerns are briefly discussed. Tissa Balasuriya's most recent book, *Mary and Human Liberation*, does attempt to address inculturation issues. However, his method situates itself in the theology of religions approach that is invested in the issues of Christian uniqueness. Pieris has described this method as originating in "the academic magisterium of the West" (1996, 154).

and marginalized. Moreover, much of the early liberation theology in Asia was directly parachuted in from Latin America, thereby encountering much criticism from theologians who called for a more contextual and indigenous theology.[2] Unlike Latin American liberation theology, South Asian liberation theologians have not systematized their theology into a distinctive school of thought. This is due in part to the minority status of Christianity in Asia - except for the Philippines - and has resulted, as Pieris has noted, in a wide range of tensions and polemics between the inculturationist and liberationist positions.

Pieris' view has garnered support by the Indian theologian Felix Wilfred, who identifies this polemic as evolving out of the two streams which make up the contemporary Indian theological journey: the religio-cultural stream symbolized by the ashram, and the socio-political stream championed by liberation theologians. The religio-cultural or inculturationist stream, which has also been labelled ashramite and sanskritic theology, has been a significant, and at times creative, feature in the evolution of Christian theology in India. This stream of theology was identified by Pieris as the Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm at the 1981 EATWOT conference in New Delhi. One of the leading exponents of this stream of theology was Bede Griffiths, whose ashramic name was Swami Dayananda. Griffiths was a British Benedictine monk who lived in India for almost forty years as a *sunnysa* and as the *guru* and spiritual guide at Shantivanam Ashram in Tamil Nadu. His theology will be the central focus in this exploration of Pieris' Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm, specifically in light

[2]This was a deep concern among the lay and religious people with whom I talked during a recent visit to the Philippines. Many Filipinos and Filipinas feel very strongly that they need to have a more indigenized Philippine theology which is not just an imitation of Latin American liberation theology. Philippines liberation theology is still in a formative stage, because, many argue, the influence of Latin American liberation theology was very overpowering. Some theologians have labelled Philippines liberation theology a theology of struggle. The term evolved under the Marcos dictatorship in the early 1980s. See *Currents in Philippine Theology* (1992).

of the criticisms that have been levelled against it by South Asian liberation theologians. But first, it is important to understand the context and history of the religio-cultural stream out of which Griffiths' theology emerged.

SANSKRITIC MISSIOLOGY

The history of Christian missions to India is rich as well as complex; thus, it is very important in understanding how the model of inculturation, as well as how a specifically Indian theological methodology, has developed on Indian soil. Christianity in India is commonly identified with the colonial expansionism of the Portuguese at the end of the 16th century. In fact, it continues to be seen by many Indians as "a foreign importation and [as] a relic of colonialism." (Griffiths 1983, 58). The Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, arrived in Goa in 1542, where he began to promote educational activities and "win converts" with his companions and fellow Jesuits in the first years of Portuguese rule (*ibid.*). But Christian history in India goes back much further than the colonial times. In fact, Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus is venerated in Southern India, because, according to tradition, he is said to have arrived on the Western coast of Southern India, in Kerala, in 52 C.E. (Griffiths 1984, 89; Wilfred 1993, 3). Thomas is said to have preached in Kerala until his death in Mylapore. His presumed grave just outside of Madras is venerated as a holy place, and he is considered to be the "apostle of India." Although the legitimacy of this tradition is still being debated in India, a small group of Christians existed in Kerala (alongside Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu communities) as far back as the third and fourth centuries (Wilfred 1993, 4).

The "Thomas Christians," as they are now commonly called, emerged in somewhat isolated circumstances from the rest of the Christian world, yet they developed a relationship with the Church of Persia, or the East Syrian Church. As far back as the eight century, there are records that speak of bishops being sent to Malabar (present-day Kerala) from different areas of the Persian empire. Their liturgical books, which were written in Syriac, contained Nestorian elements which emphasized the dual nature of Christ. Nestorian Christology was deemed heretical at the Council of Chalcedon, in 451 C.E., where the unity (one person) and distinction (two natures) of Christ was fixed as orthodox Church teaching. The split away Church, sometimes called the Non-Chalcedonian Church, is said to have reached both China and India by the seventh century through vigorous missionary efforts. The Thomas Christians trace their roots back to the *Nambudhiris* and *Nairs*, high caste Hindus from that region, who according to their traditions were the first converts of Thomas' teachings (*ibid.*, 5). Moreover, the Thomas Christians emphasized fasting and other ascetic practices due in part to the influence of the Desert Fathers, a tradition very important in the Eastern Christian traditions, and also in part to the Hindu emphasis on asceticism in the *sannyasi* and *sadhu/sadhvi* renunciate ideal.

Unlike the Portuguese missionaries of the 16th century who stressed the abandonment of Indian cultural norms, the Thomas Christians seem to have developed a healthy relationship with the culture in which they lived. Although the liturgy and the language spoken in Church was quite foreign to the culture of India, the Indian way of life for Thomas Christians, including the maintaining of a caste hierarchy, were not forcibly altered as it was in Goa in the 16th century. When the Portuguese merchant ships arrived on the shores of India, a little to the south of Bombay, they brought with them a triumphalistic

Catholicism caught up in the midst of a defensive counter-attack incited by a revolt in Northern Europe: the Reformation. This period is what Pieris calls "phase one" of the Christ-*against*-Religion tradition which "covers the era of Euro-ecclesiastical expansionism, when the colonialist Christ was sent on a warring spree against the false religions in the lands now called the Third World" (Pieris 1988a, 94) . The difference between the Thomas Christians and the Goan Catholics lies in the imposition of 'civilization' that the Portuguese enacted on the so-called 'moral poverty' of the colonized countries. In this model, Christianity is understood as having a civilizing effect on the colonized who up until the encounter with Christ lived in a state of moral depravity.

In the Thomas Christian communities, we can discern the first stirrings in India of what has come to mean inculturation for many theologians. However, the situation of Christians in Kerala cannot be defined as inculturation as such, since the theology and workings of the Syrian Church was unaffected. The Syrian Church seems to have been imported into Southern India remaining intact and untouched by the Indian culture which welcomed it. Certainly, the separation between Christ and culture which one finds more prominently in the Protestant tradition, and to a lesser degree in Orthodox Christianity, is discernable here. Yet, it is important to note that the history of Thomas Christianity reveals a divergent approach to inculturation in relation to the triumphalistic model of the Portuguese. The Thomas Christians proved that it was possible to be an Indian Christian without loosing one's Indian identity.

The 16th century model of Catholic triumphalism in India created a feeling of distrust of anything Christian among Hindus and the other indigenous Indian religious adherents at the time. This occurred because the Portuguese Christian missionaries were challenging the basic norms of Indian identity through a 'Western' supremacist worldview that sought to 'civilize' by introducing the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ (this antagonism flared up once again at the turn of the 20th century during the Swaraj movement, a time of fervent Indian nationalism, when India struggled to come out from under the yoke of British colonialism). Yet one figure stands out as an example of a more inculturated approach to Christian mission work in India: Roberto de Nobili. The Italian Jesuit, who was born in 1577, provided a model of inculturation which has had far-reaching consequences in the history of Indian theology for having gone beyond the narrow confines of Western missionary work from that period. De Nobili, along with his contemporary in China, Matteo Ricci, advocated that missionaries adopt the way of life of their host country and deeply immerse themselves within its cultural context, rather than attempting to 'Westernize' Indian converts to Christianity.

De Nobili immersed himself in Indian culture by studying Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu, by learning Hindu philosophy and theology, and by assuming the Brahminic way of life. He is considered to be the first 'Western' scholar to have studied the Vedas with the help of his Sanskrit teacher Sivadharma (Wilfred 1993, 15). This was unprecedented at a time when learning the Vedas was considered the privilege of the Brahmin class only. For it was the Brahmin class which deemed itself to be the guardians and protectors of Indian culture and religion. According to Felix Wilfred, de Nobili seems to have arrived in Madurai, Southern India, in 1606 (*ibid.*, 12). From 1610, up until his death forty years later, de Nobili had lived away from his Jesuit mission house and assumed the life of a Hindu *sannyasi*, living in a small hut, wearing a *kavi* (the long ochre robe) and eating only vegetarian food prepared by a Brahmin cook. De Nobili was trying to transform his so-called 'Western' ways in order to give concrete expression to his *praxis* of inculturation[3]. Wilfred suggests that de Nobili's approach to inculturation was a radical move and should be appreciated within the context of colonial attitudes to Indian culture. Wilfred writes that

> from the mid-sixteenth century onwards there were mass conversions along the Southern coast of today's Tamil Nadu among the fishermen. These and other converts from the lower strata of society had to abandon their traditional ways and adopt Portuguese customs, even assume Portuguese family names. The missionaries along with their converts were eating beef and drinking wine, a practice abhorrent to the high caste Hindus, especially the Brahmins. The Portuguese, and for that matter all Europeans, were known as *Paranghis*...Christianity was know as *Paranghi Marga* or the path of the Paranghis. It was a symbol of all that was alien, strange and detestable. (*ibid.,* 12)

In such a context it is not difficult to imagine the kind of resistance and opposition that de Nobili faced in his efforts at evangelization (Griffiths 1984, 60). On the other hand, his superior, Fr Pero Francisco, the Jesuit Provincial at the time, seems to have had much sympathy for de Nobili's efforts, and admired him for his ascetic austerity which rivalled, he claimed, "the greatest penitents in the world" (*ibid.*, 13). In this statement emerges the first glimpse at what in the 20th century came to be expressed as the meeting of religions in the "cave of the heart." In other words, the Indian theological method of inculturation found a strong foundation in the ascetic encounter, based on shared traditions of fasting, contemplation, and silence.

The ascetic method was also discernible in the Thomas Christian

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[3]Interesting work in the realm of cultural studies has been done on the 'Western' appropriation of the exotic, of 'going native' and racial masquerade. See Green's "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe" (1988) and Ward Churchill's "Indians Are Us?" in *Indians Are Us?* (1994).

approach to indigenization. However de Nobili pushed the boundaries even further. De Nobili sought to give Christianity relevance in India by establishing a point of contact between Hindu and Christian theology; he wanted to make the Gospels discernible within the Hindu landscape. For de Nobili, the question of contact between Catholicism and Hinduism was never in fact the mutual meeting of two great religious traditions. De Nobili understood the Gospel message as the ultimate truth which remained universal - in the sense of truly catholic - in scope and application. His point was to make the Gospels a living and breathing Word made incarnate on Indian soil. There is no question that de Nobili tried to persuade learned Brahmins that Christianity was the true and only *marga*, or path. Moreover, although de Nobili's written works on Hinduism were quite nuanced, even at times apologetic of 'learned' Hindu theology, his writings were more often than not explicitly dismissive of what he termed the 'idolatrous' group of Hindus - the popular 'religiosity' of the lower strata in India (*ibid.*, 16). Nonetheless, despite these serious limitations one can appreciate in de Nobili's approach to missionary work a spirit of dialogue which has come to dominate certain schools of interreligious collaboration in the 20th century. For example, de Nobili spoke of Jesus as *guru* or *satguru*, teacher of reality, a term that was popularized by Mohandas Gandhi in the 20th century. Some Indian scholars identify in de Nobili's work a foreshadowing of the 'inclusivist' teachings of Vatican II (*ibid.*, 17). De Nobili, along with Matteo Ricci in China, stretched the boundaries of ecclesiology and missiology at a time when the Catholic Church was rigidly setting boundaries around its identity as a missionary Church.

De Nobili's method of sinking Christian theology within the religio-cultural context of India using Hindu vocabulary became the most striking feature of the religio-cultural stream, or inculturationist school of theology in India. However, de Nobili's influence on Christian missiology in India has been interpreted quite differently by scholars, theologians, and pastoral workers. From the inculturationist perspective, de Nobili is perceived as a pioneer, an innovator, and a person of genuine integrity who lived a life of simplicity and holiness. These are the views espoused by Bede Griffiths whose life and work are greatly indebted to de Nobili (1984, 59). Even Felix Wilfred, who has been identified with the liberationist stream of Indian theology (1992, 175-196), is careful to point out that de Nobili should be understood as a remarkable case in history because he "pursued theology in an original way specially (*sic*) through his way of life" (1993, 18). Aloysius Pieris on the other hand, is more inclined to see de Nobili's approach firmly embedded within the triumphalistic Catholic theology that nurtured him. In Pieris' evaluation, de Nobili and Ricci's *praxis* of inculturation was little more than a masked Christ-*against*-Religion methodology, because it "used 'pagan' culture itself as their medium to draw Asians from their religions to that of Christ" (Pieris 1988a, 60). For Pieris, dressing Christ up in a *kavi* and using Sanskrit terms to describe G*d's activity in the world does not make an Asian theology. Pieris argues that the underlying emphasis in de Nobili's work was to bring Indians to the one universal truth which is Christ. Hinduism was instrumentalized by de Nobili not only in order to make Christ discernable to Brahmin Hindus, but also in order to convince learned Hindus that Christ was indeed the only 'true' spiritual *marga*.

Pieris is not indifferent to the unmistakable influence de Nobili has had on the Indian theology of the 20th century. However, his main concern is to reflect on how this Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm of the 16th and 17th centuries was transformed into the Christ-*of*-

Religion paradigm of the 20th century. The work of Bede Griffiths is very important for this transformation because it spanned a number of important religious and political changes in the West in the 50', 60's and 70's: particularly, the Second Vatican council, and the developmental method of 'industrializing' 'Third World' counties. Griffiths considers de Nobili, as well as Gandhi and the European Jesuit Fr. P. Johanns (1882-1955), as the most important influences on his life and work. For Griffiths, de Nobili's contribution to indigenous Catholic theology in India is twofold: first, his study of Hinduism and sanskrit which enabled him to sink Christian theology into a Hindu context, and second, his *praxis* of inculturation which propelled him to live the life of a holy man, a *sannyasi*, in India (Griffiths 1984, 60). These two aspects of de Nobili's life and work in India would invariably shape the way Griffiths mapped out his own Indian or Hindu Catholic theology. How Griffiths' theology of inculturation differs from that of de Nobili's can only discerned within the political climate of a post-colonial India and within the major religious and political trends that influenced 'First' and 'Third World' relations at that time.

The work of Bede Griffiths is a unique achievement of interreligious thought in the 20th century. Along with Thomas Merton, Griffiths made accessible a method of interreligious inquiry which focused on the mystical landscape as the authentic meeting place for the world's great religious traditions. Griffiths is never mentioned in Pieris' work as a model of his Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm. Yet I want to argue that Griffiths' life and work is exemplary of Pieris' Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm in three ways. First, in his use of a Vatican II inspired fulfilment theology that instrumentalizes Vedantic philosophy in order to 'complete' Hinduism; second in his emphasis on personal liberation from sin - which fails to attend to the popular religion of the poor as a legitimate survival strategy and as a serious form of theology; and third, because his work is shaped by what has come to be known as developmentalism, a Western ideology made popular in the 60's that sought to industrialize the 'Third World.' I will investigate Griffiths' theology through the hermeneutical lens offered by Pieris and seek to uncover what constitutes a Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm in the specific context of 20th century India.

FULFILMENT THEOLOGY AND ANTI-JUDAISM

Bede Griffiths arrived in India in 1955 along with another Benedictine monk from Belgium, Francis Mahieu, and founded the Kurisumala (Hill of the Cross) monastery in Kerala. Griffiths' theological enterprise follows closely in the steps of two other Westerners, Jules Monchanin (Swami Para Arubi Anandam) and Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), who collaborated in founding the Shantivanam Ashram (Abode of Peace) in Tamil Nadu. Le Saux arrived in India from France in 1948, and opened the Shantivanam Ashram with Monchanin on March 21, 1950. In 1957, Griffiths became the spiritual teacher and *guru* of Shantivanam when Le Saux left the ashram to pursue life as a wandering ascetic, spending a number of years in the Himalayas. Le Saux had an important influence on Griffiths, especially in the area of Advatic (non-dual) Hindu philosophy. However, it was the Hindu convert to Christianity, Brahmobandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), who paved the way for Griffiths, Le Saux, and Monchanin to explore the possibility of Vedantic philosophy as a foundation to Christian faith.

If de Nobili's method of inculturation is understood as an attempt at providing an outer Indian garment to Christian theology formed in a 'Western' mould, in Upadhyaya's method one can discern the first steps at formulating a Hindu Christian theology through the meeting of Vedanta and Christ. For Upadhyaya, it was imperative that Vedantic philosophy be utilized to serve Christian faith for Indians, as Greek philosophy was used by Christian scholars to make Christ indigenous to the European landscape. Therefore, Upadhyaya was interested in breaking the 'Western' mould of Christian theology and recreating it anew in the Vedantic mould of his native land. Like de Nobili, Upadhyaya was critical of traditional 'Western' missiology in India and lived the life of a *sannyasi*. In fact, Felix Wilfred writes that not only was Upadhyaya fully committed to the independence of India under British rule, but was the first to demand *swaraj*, full independence, to India (1993, 31). But unlike de Nobili, Upadhyaya's ideal was a Hindu-Christian spirituality that did not seek to convince Hindus to drop their Hinduism in favour of Christianity. In Upadhyaya we find evidence of a fulfilment theology which will come to dominate in Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council, based on his understanding of Vedantic philosophy as a preparation for the Gospel in India, as *preparatio evangelica*. [1]

The concept of Vedanta as preparation for the Gospels was taken up by Griffiths in his book *Christ in India*, which is a compilation of essays written between 1955 and 1965. It is a very comprehensive guide to understanding Griffiths approach to inculturation and missiology in India. In his new introduction written in 1984, Griffiths acknowledges that the essays written at that time in his life "do not allow sufficiently for the radical transformation which the encounter with Hinduism

[1] The Vatican II openness to the other religions is not a new invention. Upadhyaya had spelled out, what came to be known as fulfilment theology in his journal called *Sophia* at the turn of the century. As well, a protestant theologian, J.N. Farquhar , published a book in 1913, entitled *The Crown of Hinduism* , which advanced the notion of Christ as the crown, or perfection, of the faith of India.

may demand for the Church," but he still believed in working to create an Indian Church that was, in the words of Monchanin, 'totally Indian, and totally Christian" (1984, 7). In his later years, Griffiths seems to have moved from a fulfilment position to a position of "complementarity" (Wilfred, 1993, 98; Griffiths 1992). Like his contemporary, Raimondo Panikkar, an Indian of Spanish-Catholic descent who wrote *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* in 1965, Griffiths is hard to pin down for those who work within the theology of religions paradigm worked out by Alan Race[2]. Griffiths tends to blur the line between the so-called inclusivist and pluralist paradigms, argues Race, upholding an inclusivism that "occasionally appears to follow a pluralist approach"(Race, 62). But whether he speaks of Christ as the fulfilment of the inclusivists, or as the complementarity paradigm of the pluralists, Griffiths' vision of Indian theology is firmly rooted in a 'return to the centre,' the 'cave of the heart' where authentic meeting can only take place. This meeting occurs in the *ashram*, in contemplative silence, in the inner journey toward G*d, the Divine, or the Ultimate Reality.

The inner journey for Griffiths is not simply the process by which Christ fulfils or completes Hinduism, but it refers also to the mutual complementarity of the 'mystical East' and the 'rational West' (1984, 80). Griffiths, like Pieris after him, fully recognizes the need for Catholics to recover their own contemplative tradition in order to authentically meet the great tradition of Hinduism (*ibid.*, 82; Pieris 1988a, 56). For Griffiths this process is fully brought about by the meeting between the "East" and "West." What India has to offer to the 'West' according to Griffiths, is its "spiritual intuition" and its age old

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[2]According to Paul F. Knitter, the "types" (exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism) that have become the standard within this paradigm were first elaborated in Alan Race's book, entiled *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (1983). See Knitter's *No Other Name* (1985), pp. xv-vi.

inner quest for G*d, while the great traditions of reason and humanism are what India can learn from the 'West' (*ibid.*,80). Griffiths tries to keep these reified notions of 'East' and 'West' in a dialectical relationship in order to uphold the ideal of a holistic humanity. However, such essentialism does not do justice to the complexity of either Christianity or Hinduism. Griffiths' work falls within the confines of the Orientalist school that sought to release the Christian 'West' from the confines of reason through an appreciation of 'Eastern' mysticism.[3] The Orientalist influence can still be felt today in New Age movements and other forms of Hindu, Buddhist, or Native American religious appropriation. Carl Jung's treatment of religions as a way to speak about the unconscious is paradigmatic of Griffiths' approach. In the book, *Psychology of the East*, Jung equates India, presumably because of the concept of *maya*, or illusion, in both Hinduism and Buddhism, with his understanding of the dream state. In his essay, entitled "What India can Teach Us", Jung writes that

> one gets pushed back into the unconscious, into the unredeemed, uncivilized, aboriginal world, of which we are only dream, since our consciousness denies it. India represents the other way of civilizing man, the way without suppression, without violence, without rationalism (1986, 100).

For Griffiths, the 'West' has built up a great body of scientific, technological, and humanistic knowledge, but remains spiritually empty. Hence the traditions of India can help the 'West' become more fully in touch with its own mystical traditions, its own intuitive side, of Jung's unconscious, which has been suppressed for so long. Althought much less pronounced, this way of thinking was true of

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[3]Korean feminist liberation theologian, Chung Hyun Kyung writes this about the impact of Orientalism on Asian women: "Asian women also see Asian men's internalized orientalism when Asian men tell them that their liberation struggle must be non-confrontational. Orientalism is the product of Western colonialism... They called Asians exotic, mysterious, and emotional." See *Struggle to Be the Sun Again* (1990), p. 33.

Thomas Merton as well, who found the so-called 'East' not so much in his travels, but in the silence of his own monastic cell.[4] However, Griffiths' seemingly mutual meeting, which has come to be called 'complementarity,' is an Orientalist imposition of 'Western' hegemonic discourses upon the varied indentities that make up the so-called 'East.' Griffiths' Orientalist perspective is complemented by an acute fulfilment theology that understands "Christ as the saviour India will one day come to recognize" (1984, 85).

Fulfilment theology stems out of a tradition that understands Judaism as having paved the way for Christianity: hence the 'Old and New Testaments' of the Christian tradition. In the writings that pre-date the birth of Christ, this tradition tells us, we find passages that point to the person of Jesus as the Messiah who will ultimately restore Israel's covenantal relationship with G*d in an eschatological reinstitution of G*d's Reign on earth. In fact, fulfilment theology is the theology of the Gospels; it is the theological midrash of the early Christian[5] communities who understood Jesus to be the Messiah proclaimed in Hebrew scripture. Unfortunately, the negative side of this theology promotes, as we have seen earlier, what Rosemary Radford Ruether has labelled the *adversus Judaeos* tradition: the anti-Judaic character of the early Church's midrash of Jesus. When the early Church proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah of scripture, it also had to explain his crucifixion by the Roman occupiers of Judah (Judea). For

[4]Merton's earlier writings, such as *Bread in the Wilderness* (1953), are firmly embedded within the fulfilment framework of the Second Testament. His later interreligious works show less concern with fulfilment and more of a concern with the radical shift in Christian consciousness toward mysticism since Vatican II. Merton worried about a tendency among certain Catholic "progressives" (liberationists?) to dichotomize what they defined as a "dynamic" dialogue with the modern world (including Marxism) and "static" dialogue with the mystic traditions of Asia. Merton believed that interreligious dialogue had much to teach, not only Christian mystics, but the modern world as well. Unfortunately, Merton's sudden death cut short his remarkable journey with the Asian mystics. See *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968), pp. 15-32.

[5] I use the term Christian community here with an awareness that the early followers of Jesus (including Paul), and the Jesus movement, understood themselves as a renewal movement within Judaism, not outside of it.

most Jews at the time, Jesus simply died like the many other Jewish prophets who were considered a threat to Roman rule. There was no miracle, no restoration of the Davidic Kingdom, no eschatological establishment of G*d's Reign. Jesus died. When the profound trauma of Jesus' death on his followers was radically transformed by his resurrection, a community which was scattered and grief stricken had to try to understand and sort out from the standpoint of their Jewish faith tradition this new standpoint, this new beginning for them as a community. Out of this experience developed a theology that was both rooted in a midrash that saw Jesus in the One written about in Hebrew scripture, and as the One in whose name alone (Acts 4: 12) was the salvation for Israel (Ruether 1974, 72). As Ruether has rightly noted: "theologically, anti-Judaism has developed as the right hand of christology. Anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was the Christ." (1981, 31). And the *adversus Judaeos* tradition has been the foundation of anti-semitism in 'Western' civilization.

The Holocaust, which saw the destruction of six million Jewish lives, shocked Christian theologians into confronting the anti-Judaic tradition in their own theology. This examination of Christian anti-Judaism resulted in widespread changes within Catholic theology at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's. In fact, much discussion about Christianity's relationship with the 'other' religions at Vatican II can be understood as emerging out of this urgent desire to redress Christian anti-Judaism. Griffiths' use of the concept of *preparatio evangelica* (Griffiths 1984, 174) invokes the anti-Judaic tradition within Christianity, only now Vedanta has replaced Hebrew Scripture as the only appropriate preparation for Christ in India (Race, 59). This method hinges on the concept of the death and resurrection of the 'other ' religions to the true and eternal saving grace of Christ. Griffiths writes that

> from a christian point of view there is therefore no difficulty in seeing in Christ the fulfilment of all religion. We can say that the mystery of Christ is 'hidden' in all religion as it was in Judaism...Just as Judaism had to die that it might be born again in Christ, so also with every religion. There had to be a death and resurrection , a death to all that is imperfect and temporal... But at the same time a resurrection in which all that is essential, the eternal reality underlying the temporal forms, is preserved (*ibid.*, 220-1).

Griffiths' deployment of such a methodological approach toward Hinduism can be seen in continuity with the anti-Judaic tradition which many Christians have laboured to radically transform. Griffiths is careful to move away from the Barthian concept of 'false religion' in his work. For Griffiths, the Hindu religion is not so much a 'false religion' as it is a "true preparation" for the coming of Christ (*ibid.*, 97). Yet ironically, Griffiths writes of the danger of Christ becoming an avatar, an incarnation of a Hindu deity: "[the christian faith] is always in danger of simply being absorbed in Hinduism" (*ibid*,. 105). Hence, the inclusivism of Hinduism is rejected by Griffiths in favour of the true and authentic Christian absorbtion of Hinduism within an anti-Judaic framework which was, at the time of Griffiths' essay, being rejected by many theologians at Vatican II.

Complementarity and fulfilment are not separate issues in Bede Griffiths' work. They are two sides of the same coin. Complementarity suggests implicitly what fulfilment theology delineates explicitly: namely, what Edward Said has described as the "positional superiority" of the 'Westerner' in relationship to his or her own construction of the 'Orient,' of the 'East,' of India, and of course of Hinduism. For Said, the point at which Orientalism is established is not so much in a nefarious plot of 'Western' imperialism to keep the Orient in a state of dependency, but in a *discourse* that "is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with power" (Ashcroft, 90). Pieris has labelled this notion of "uneven exchange" as "theological vandalism" in his work (1988a, 53). Christian theology has produced, and continues to produce, a discourse that instrumentalizes - as we have seen with the *adversus Judaeos* tradition - philosophies and cultures within a pre-set framework that is claimed to be universal. This can further be discerned in Griffiths' attempt to forge a *praxis* of inculturation in solidarity with the poor of India.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN INDIA

The guiding point of reference for a Christian liberationist methodology concerned with interreligious collaboration in a political context of systemic exploitation and dehumanization is the following of Jesus in a *praxis* of solidarity with the poor, with the nonperson, with the subaltern. Bede Griffiths was always concerned with the overwhelming situation of poverty and destitution in India, and he wrote extensively about his commitment to the path of Gandhi's *satyagraha* as a model of societal transformation. Yet Griffiths never identified with the liberationist stream that become popular in Asia in the 1970s, because he always gave primacy to internal liberation as a way to societal liberation. Griffiths' writings show evidence of a concern for the context of poverty in Asia that goes far beyond many who position themselves within the inculturationist or religio-cultural traditions of the ashram. In Griffiths' life and work, Felix Wilfred finds embodied the mystic, the theological, and the prophetic, all the elements that make up a holistic approach to religious life in Asia (1993, 69). Griffiths work comes closest of all his contemporaries in

India in bringing together the mystical journey of the wilderness and the prophetic call at the city gates. However, his prophetic call was always framed within a Brahminic context, and thus remained meaningless, and in fact oppressive, for the dalit peoples of India.

Throughout his life, Bede Griffiths was critical of Marxist analysis as a means of remedying the social ills that afflict Indian society. He remained steadfast in his critique even during a period of positive change in Kerala where the Communist party ruled for a number of years (1984. 54). Although never articulated as such, Griffiths seems to have uncritically linked the emerging liberationist stream of theology in India with Marxism. Griffiths believed, as does Pieris, that Marxism does not address individual internal conversion. Moreover, Griffiths equated Lenin with the spiritual and moral vacuity of the 'West,' and Gandhi with the spiritual and moral richness of the 'East' (1984, 9). He saw Marxism as simply transferring the ownership of the mode of production without transforming the actual system itself: a system that produced an imbalance between humans and nature. Later in his life, Griffiths became interested in science and how Indian philosophy could radically alter what he saw as a very mechanistic and exploitative view of nature in the 'West' (1989). Although Griffiths again structured his worldview within an Orientalism that essentialized India and the 'West' in a specific discourse of fulfilment and complementarity, we also find in his writings a subtle reassertion of the prophetic role of Christianity's social gospel for India's religions as it was deployed through 19th century British colonialism.

Griffiths characterizes *moksha*, release or liberation, as the ultimate goal in the life of a Hindu. However, Griffiths believes that *moksha* has shifted in the 20th century from a process undertaken in the solitude of a Himalayan cave to include the way of service to humanity (*ibid.*, 127). This shift, Griffiths believes, has come about through the meeting of 'East' and 'West;' more precisely, it has come about through the influence of Christianity on Hinduism. Griffiths is emphatic that both Vivekananda and Gandhi, major sources of prophetic Hindu thought in the 20th century, came to a concern for the social and political sphere in their lives because of Christianity's influence in India (*ibid*, 17-8). It is especially Gandhi's life and teaching that inspired Griffiths to take up the path of voluntary poverty in order to be in solidarity with the poor. During Griffiths' life in India, Gandhi's program of *satyagraha*, the non-violent method of social struggle, was the path to social transformation that Griffiths endeavoured to live out. For Griffiths, living the life of a *sannyasi*, wearing a *kavi*, eating with one's hands, dispensing of furniture and other possessions, sleeping on the ground, and ultimately adopting a lifestyle of simplicity, was to be concerned with the poor of India.

Griffiths was of course a monk, and such a program was foundational to his relationship with the social reality of India. The monastic cell can be understood in his work as a place or right relationship "where the proper relation of man with nature, society with God may be worked out on a small scale" (*ibid.*, 18). And for a monk living in India, the right relationship between the 'East' and 'West' must occur in the "cave of the heart" first and foremost before it can happen on a large scale. The heart is understood as the microcosm of the macrocosmic totality in Griffiths' work. Hence, one transforms society by transforming the self. As Cynthia Eller argues, in a book of essays on engaged Buddhism[6], "for Buddhists the other will be served

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[6]Engaged Buddhism was a term coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk in exile Thich Nhat Hanh. See *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Change* (1993).

if the self is transformed; for Christians, the self will be transformed if the other is served" (Kraft, 97).

This same point is made by Aloysius Pieris when he speaks of the emphasis on *agape*, or redemptive love, in Christianity, and the emphasis on *prajna*, or wisdom, in Buddhism. The difference between Griffiths and Pieris lies in how these tensions are deployed. For Pieris, the meeting between Christianity and Buddhism is a dialectical process of sending both traditions back to recover their lost traditions. Pieris believes that Christianity has a tradition of inner wisdom, which he has labelled *gnosis*, and that Buddhism has a tradition of selfless love, or *karuna*, that can be recovered through earnest collaboration with the poor and marginalized (Pieris 1988b, 110-135). The point of interreligious collaboration for Pieris is to make religions whole again through a process of self-discovery; it is what John B. Cobb has called the "mutual transformation" of both traditions in dialogue (Cobb 1982). While their approaches are different[7], both Cobb and Pieris believe that meeting the 'other' can potentially bring one to recognize the 'other' within oneself - within one's own tradition. Bede Griffiths intended to approach Hindu-Christian dialogue in quite the same manner. However his method of fulfilment and complementarity, in which Vedantic philosophy is crowned by Christ, was also at work in the social sphere.

In considering Gandhi's non-violent *sarvodaya* ideal of service, as well as his idea of *ahimsa*, or compassion toward others, Griffiths explicitly traces these ideas back to the thinking of Leo Tolstoy, with whom Gandhi had corresponded while imprisoned in South Africa. It

[7]Cobb's work is centred on the notion of dialogic transformation, while Pieris is concerned with collaborative transformation. Liberationist and feminist Korean theologian, Chung Hyun Kung, made a similar distinction to me in a conversation. Her critique of the dialogic school was that it did not stem from the experiences of poor and marginalized communities, but from academia, while Pieris' model was much more grounded in the experiences of the poor in Asia.

was Tolstoy's writings and the Sermon on the Mount, Griffiths believes, which transformed the concept of *ahimsa* from a "negative conception into a positive dynamic force" in Gandhi's life (1984, 144). There is no question that the Gospels and Tolstoy were influential to Gandhi. However, in light of his emphasis on fulfilment, Griffiths' suggestions that the Christian Social Gospel completes Hinduism contrasts with Pieris and Cobb's notion of "mutual transformation." In fact, I want to argue that Griffiths' fulfilment theory reveals traces of progress-centred developmentalism which was a hegemonic discourse deployed in the 'Third World' of the 60's. Griffiths conflates the incorporation of the Christian social gospel into Hinduism (*ibid.*, 127) with an essentialistic construct that maintains the 'West' as the authentic bearer of "modern science and technology, humanism and democracy" (*ibid.*, 16). However, Griffiths' is careful to insist that any appropriation of Western science and technology must be an inculturated process that carefully integrates theses elements with the spiritual wisdom of the 'East' (*ibid.*).

Developmentalism can be defined as a progress-centred worldview that privileges 'Western' economic, technological, and scientific development as a model to be implemented in 'Third World' countries. The development project was advanced through two main ideas: first, it sought to utilize the untouched natural resources of the 'Third World' as the *locus* of development, and second, it believed that the economies of the 'Third World' were destined to pass through predictable stages of development (Williams 1983, 103). Both ideas are grounded in the principle that the 'Western' version of development was to be the paradigm of upliftment for the so-called 'underdeveloped' world. Through this lens, the 'Third World' was perceived to be in an infantile stage of development and in the process of 'growing-up' to full maturity. Indian feminist and environmental scientist, Vandana Shiva, defines development as a

> post-colonial project, a choice for accepting a model of progress in which the entire world remade itself on the model of the colonising modern west, without having to undergo the subjugation and exploitation that colonialism entailed. The assumption was that western style progress was available to all. Development, as the improved well-being of all, was thus equated with the westernization of economic categories (1989, 1).

For Shiva, developmentalism is the continuation of the colonialist project without the use of explicitlycoercive measures. It is operates through Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony: namely, the "spontaneous consent" of the subaltern[8] classes historically created by the prestige and power exercised by dominant groups (1971, 12). Hegemony is the means by which state power gets reproduced and legitimized in civil society by means other than direct coercion, such as the manufacturing of mass consent. I will return to Gramsci's notion of hegemony in the fourth chapter when I delineate a definition of popular religion. In this instance, it is important to understand that developmentalism was a masked colonial project that deployed hegemonic discourses (and at times armies) to implement its projects. Griffiths' use of the Christian Social Gospel as prophetic fulfilment to Hinduism can be understood to be in continuity with those hegemonic discourses. Griffiths maintained that 'Western' "humanism and democracy" were a product of the Christian Social Gospel and the meeting of 'East' and 'West' made it possible for India to appropriate such a vision.

Pieris argues that the Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm stems out of

[8]In his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci use the term subaltern classes (le classi subalterne) interchangeably with the terms subordinate and instrumental classes. The subaltern classes belong to civil society, the sphere of hegemonic consent. They are the classes that form the base and thus instrumentalized to uphold state power.

developmental economic theory, which he creatively paints as Christ in the person of the missionary who came to the 'Third World' in a jeep (Pieris 1988a, 94). Unlike the triumphal Christ of the colonial period who came with the sword to impose 'civilization' as a means of conversion, the jeep represents for Pieris the hegemonic control enacted on the 'Third World' through the 'Western' notion of progress - a control that was deployed as a means to save the 'Third World' from destitution and poverty. As we have seen in Bede Griffiths' work, the saving presence of Christ is not only positioned as the fulfilment of all that is good and true in Hinduism, it is also reproduced in his reified constructs of 'East' and 'West' which carry with them the baggage of 'Western' hegemonic discourses on the humanizing role of the Christian Social Gospel. For Pieris, the Christ-*of*-Religion model of the 60's concerned itself only with internal demons, especially greed, and did not attempt to deal with the situation of systemic poverty. Griffiths' life and work challenges Pieris' theory insofar as he showed much concern for the plight of the Indian poor and dedicated himself to its eradication. Unfortunately, Griffiths' theological model of fulfilment did not sink its roots into the epistemologies and strategies the poor, the tribals[9], and the dalit peoples of India. It remained firmly entrenched in 'Western' notions of material development and scientific progress. What was lacking in developmental theory, argues Pieris and other liberationists, was a critique of the ways in which 'Western' colonial expansion was the real cause of 'Third World' poverty. The developmentalist worldview exercised hegemonic control on the 'Third World' by implementing its own agenda without regard for those who were affected most by their programs: the 'Third World' poor and marginalized.

[9]A term commonly used in India which refers to indigenous peoples.

Griffiths was very interested in the Sarvodaya Movement which was originally envisaged by Gandhi and later organized by Vinobha Bhave. Bhave walked from village to village in order to help organize peasants, tribals, and the dalits into organic self-sustaining cooperatives.[10] Griffiths, interest in this movement moved him beyond the voluntary poverty of his monastic hut to the city gates where he prophetically denounced some of the larger development projects that were being implemented in India. However, the Sarvodaya Movement was viewed by Griffiths, not only in terms of Christianity's influence on its founder, but as the coming of the genuine Christian society (1984, 129). He believed the creation of a non-violent cooperative society, envisaged as the middle way between the collective ownership found in Marxism and the individual ownership found in capitalism, to be the ideal of Acts 4 in the Second Testament. Griffiths vision of this genuine Christian society was a more modest and collective version of developmentalism, which at that time was being implemented in parts of the 'Third World.' Yet Griffiths was quite critical of 'Western' approaches to progress, the rapid implementation of technology, and notions of material welfare that were devoid of a spiritual foundation (*ibid.*, 120). Many developmentalist proposals of the 60's implemented large expensive projects that remained unmanageable for most 'Third World' countries, and which were dependent on large loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. For Griffiths, the most empowering approach was to start at a micro level and create an economy that is self-sustaining (*ibid.*). Gandhi's principle of *ahimsa*, or

[10]Pieris has not written very much on the Sarvodaya Movement, except to mention that "in its earlier phase" it provided "a saner philosophy of development" (1988a, 94).

non-violence, would be the foundation out of which such an economy would evolve. The spiritual 'East' would then fulfil the spiritual vacuity that the 'Western' development paradigm was lacking. Although his concerns were laudable relative to most inculturationists, Griffiths' Orientalist 'East/West' construct has rendered his Sarvodaya alternative undiscerning of the survival strategies and resistance movements that have taken root in India.

Along with its Orientalism, Griffiths' vision of a materially and technologically rich 'West' in conversation with a spiritually rich 'East' remains firmly anchored to the development model of the 'First World.' Despite the fact that Griffiths has endeavoured to reform the development model, Pieris argues that such a model remains divorced from the reality of the "non-Christian masses" (1988a,94). Pieris writes this:

> How could other religions relieve the poor of their plight if those religions themselves are the partial cause of people's underdevelopment , and if technology and progress are unique Christian achievements destined to free the non-Christian masses from their superstitious tradition (*ibid.*)?

The lives of the dalit peoples, the tribals, along with the popular traditions of *bhakti* with its emphasis on an unmediated relationship to G*d or the Absolute, are absent in Griffiths' work. Griffiths relegates all that is 'good and true' about Hinduism to the "educated" strata of Vedantic philosophy, which he believes must be instrumentalized, in the manner "Aquinas used the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle" (1984, 58; 168). Yet he describes much of Hindu faith as ahistorical, or mythological, and incapable of effecting much change in India (*ibid.*, 111). Hence Griffiths cannot see beyond his own construction of a Hinduism that is fulfilled and made whole by Christ, who

> as long as he is regarded as a symbolic figure like Rama and Krishna, Christ can never have a true birth in Indian soul. But

> when it comes to be realized that he is in reality a historical figure, that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried, that is the point at which God enters history, not as a symbol but as a person, to change the course of history and to transform it, then the decisive point in the history of India may be reached. (*ibid.*).

The distinction between historical and mythological faith is for Griffiths the distinction between an educated and an uneducated faith. As discussed earlier, Gandhi epitomizes the historically sound Hindu faith in Griffiths' work. Griffiths argues that although Hinduism had reached the "highest level ever attained by human thought" in its ascetic and mystical traditions and in its philosophy, it remains bound up with a "vast system of mythology that the modern mind must find impossible to accept" (*ibid.*, 110). Griffiths' overemphasis on Vedantic philosophy stems out the religio-cultural tradition of de Nobili and those he influenced. De Nobili sought to influence the powerful Brahmin caste by adopting the *sannyasi* lifestyle and by studying Vedanta. Griffiths believes that he did so in order to overcome the label of outcast given to foreign Christians by high caste Hindus at that time (*ibid.*, 59). Yet Griffiths' interreligious model is tightly invested in a methodology that distanced itself from India's most oppressed classes. Thus his work tends to display a lack of sensibility about the faith of the poor and marginalized in India a well as the structural nature of poverty and oppression. In particular, the rich history of *bhakti*, or devotional, movements and their influence on dalit peoples for example is lacking in Griffiths work - as in much of the work from the inculturationist camp. Like de Nobili before him, Griffiths' work presents a perspective from the point-of-view of the Brahmin caste who guarded and controlled the whole landscape of Vedantic philosophy and thought.

It is with respect to this Bhramin-centred methodology that many liberationists have critiqued the inculturationist or religio-cultural tradition. For a theology to be genuinely popular, liberationists would argue that it must not only opt for popular cultures, popular religion, and popular idioms, but for popular epistemologies as well (Wilfred 1992, 63). The tradition of de Nobili all the way to Abhishiktananda (Le Saux) and Griffiths was created through the lenses of the elite Brahmin or priestly caste. For example, the sanskritic nature of the religio-cultural tradition has been a major reason why "tribal Christians" do not accept inculturation. They have a culture that is considerably different from Hindu culture and thus are attempting an inculturation which springs forth from their own cultural landscape (*ibid.*). A liberationist hermeneutic positions itself at the level of the victims of dehumanizing systems of oppression, such as the caste system. Late in his life, Griffiths still maintained that the recent emphasis on the "option for the poor" (read liberation theology), that had taken hold of many Christian communities in India (such as with the Jesuits and the Redemptorists) should be "brought into the inner life of prayer." Griffiths argues that an authentic encounter between religions in a country where religion can be so divisive (with communalist strife in India), occurs first and foremost in the 'cave of the heart.' Griffiths maintains that only "when Christ is fully realized within, then you discover him outside in people." (Griffiths 1992)[11].

Certainly, the *bhakti* tradition is not monolithic; it has gone through some major shifts in the history of India. I will briefly delineate some aspects of the *bhakti* tradition and draw out its distinct relevance for liberationists who are seeking to formulate a theology

[11]Griffiths defines this as the "meeting between contemplation and action," however, contemplation is given epistemological primacy in his construct. All quotes in the paragraph are from a video made on the life of Bede Griffiths in the early 1990s. See *Christ in the Lotus: An Interview with Bede Griffiths* (1992). It is available from Christian Meditation Media.

rooted in the popular movements and ethos of Indian culture. Walter Fernandes has written extensively on the socio-historical emergence of liberation theology in India. In an essay on the *bhakti* tradition and its influence on liberatory movements, Fernandes delineates three different connotations of *bhakti* that have emerged in divergent contexts. First, Fernandes speaks of the Bhraminic meaning of bhakti, understood philosophically in the contemplative sense with no real connection to the social reality. The second is based on a specific reading of the of the *Bhagavadgita,* where the personal devotion to G*d, or in this case Krishna, is combined with a call to action. And third, Fernandes writes about *bhakti* as a popular movement that sought to challenge Brahmanic supremacy through an ethic of equality before G*d (Wilfred 1992, 47). Fernandes argues that not all of these aspects of *bhakti* are appropriate for developing a liberative ethic in India. However, combinations of the above classifications have produced communities of resistance that were interreligious in character. Fernandes also argues that the *bhakti* tradition has gone through four stages: first, was the Kshatriyan (warrior) caste's appropriation of the emphasis on equality before G*d in the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Bhagavata-Purana* in order to challenge Bhraminic power; that was followed by a Bhraminic reaction that sought to reinscribe *bhakti* within as the ascetic life of the chosen few[12]; the third stage saw the influence of Sufism, the rise of a social consciousness, and the mass conversions of low castes peoples to Islam; and the fourth stage came about during the freedom movement with new interpretations of the *Bhagavadgita* begun by Sri Aurobindo and continued by Gandhi (*ibid.*, 48).

[12]It is important to note here that it was at this stage, approximately between 6-8th centuries C.E. that Brahmin assertiveness began to stamp out Buddhism from India. Buddhism, like the *bhakti* movements that accompanied it at that time, sought to create communities of equals outside of the constructs of caste hierarchy.

In the third and fourth stages of *bhakti*, one can discern in some *bhakti* communities a social movement of equality before G*d. During the third stage, a famous *bhakta* from the Rajasthan area stands out as a key figure in Indian history: Mirabai. Born in the Rajput clan of princes in the late 15th century, Mirabai "spurned her caste and family obligations in order to live out a relationship with Krishna" (Mukta 1994, 19). The legend of Mirabai is deeply imbued in the consciousness of popular religious devotion in India. Her life and songs are not only recited, sung and passed down within Hinduism, but also in Muslim and Sikh popular movements as well (Mirabai 1993, 14). In hagiographical accounts of Mirabai[13], and in the songs of the bhajans she has influenced, she is described as a wandering ascetic drunk in her devotional love for the "Dark One," Lord Krishna, and prophetic in her challenge to the patriarchal caste system in India. Parita Mukta describes the appropriation of her figure during the freedom movement by Gandhi as an attempt at Hindu religious revival and nationalism, yet within a context that ultimately reinscribed her in a patriarchal framework for which Gandhi had no critique (Mukta, 188). For Gandhi, Mirabai was the quintessential *satyagrahi*. Yet he deprived her bhajans of their anti-patriarchal and anti-family sting. For Mukta, the "deeply imaginative message of Mira was neutered by Gandhi" because he was not able to accept her rejection of marriage and widowhood (*ibid.*, 197). Unfortunately, today she has been commercialized in movies and comic strips by the middle classes in ways that erase her visionary and transformative critique of gender and caste stratification. Yet in popular movements, the figure of Mirabai

[13]Some scholars claim that there is no proof that such a person ever existed. However, Parita Mukta is not so much interested in that debate, rather she attempts to look at what the figure of Mirabai has meant for popular movements in India, as well as how her story has been manipulated to serve nationalist interests. See *Upholding the Common Life*, 1994.

has retained its "dangerous memory" as a rebel who opposed imposed marital relationships, challenged the institution of widowhood, and caste 'pollution.' Mukta writes that

> the spirit of Mira bhajans is a profound right to personal association, in many and varied ways - with God, with those society stigmatizes as 'polluted,' with ragged wayfarers and poor bhajan singers, with those on the fringes of society - governed by the right to enter into these associations unchained by the fetters of a dominant social system. To understand the spirit of Mira bhajans and take this understanding into the entrails of society would require a closer listening to the voices of the bhajniks, and would make for a deeper transformation of social relationships as we know them today (*ibid.*, 194).

Pieris and other liberationists in South Asia critique the religio-cultural stream of theology for its complete neglect of the prophetic and mystical streams that have taken root within the popular expressions of religion in India. We have seen that in Griffiths' writings on India there emerges a concern for the poor and for the transformation of Indian society. However, Griffiths' reliance on a method of fulfilment and complementarity which is inscribed within an Orientalist ethos that reifies and essentializes the notions of 'East' and 'West' into monolithic constructs reinforces hegemonic power structures that render the poor and outcast invisible in India. Griffiths' further reliance on Vedantic theology reinforces Brahmanic caste hegemony from which the dalit peoples are struggling to free themselves. Griffiths situates his theology in the tradition of Roberto de Nobili which understands inculturation as the *praxis* of sanskritic appropriation through the study of Brahminic philosophy, as well as the *praxis* of ascetic relationality in the shared Hindu-Christian traditions of fasting, contemplation, and renunciation. Such a methodology fails to join hands with those who struggle daily against divinely ordained societal structures that legitimize poverty and marginalization, because it is fashioned in conformity with the discourses that negate the epistemological primacy of the dalit and tribal peoples, of the bhaktis and bhaktas, of poor widows and other oppressed and marginalized peoples. What liberationists seek in India is a method that will take seriously the prophetic traditions of liberation and soteriology in Asia - such as the communities inspired by the songs and life of Mirabai.

The Christ-*of*-Religion paradigm opts for a theology that is focused on a neo-colonial model: namely, a method that ultimately reinscribes colonial hegemony through a discourse of progress and development. In contrast to some Latin American liberation theologians who have unleashed a liberative Christ against the idolatrous religions that keep the poor captive within the matrix of an oppressive status quo, the inculturationists of India situate their theology within a sanscritized Brahminic framework, a site which is constructed as the norm for all Hindu Christian theology. This has resulted in an attempt by liberationists in India to move away from a method that upholds the systems of oppression the poor and outcast are struggling to uproot. The inculturationists have continued to assert Vedantic theology as indigenous in the face of what is viewed as a liberationist intervention imbued with 'Western' notions deriving from Marxism[14]. In the next chapter, we will explore how Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris proposes to use a dialectical method to bring these two tensions together.

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[14] I have not found very much by Griffiths on liberation theology. His concern with Marxism is focused on secular movements such as the Communist Party of India, which was quite popular in Kerala during his lifetime. Griffiths is quite assertive in his disdain for secular Marxist philosophy. His principal critique stems out of the importance he assigns to personal transformation , which in his view is completely lacking in Marxism. See the introduction to *Christ in India*, 1984.

Dialectics of the Third Magisterium

We announce the good news *in our own tongues* to our own people (that is the content of inculturation) - namely, that Jesus is the new covenant or defense pact that God made against mammon, their common enemy (that is, the content of liberation). For liberation and inculturation are not two things anymore in Asia.
Aloysius Pieris

In a recent address given in Detroit[1], Sri Lankan theologian, Father Tissa Balasuriya spoke passionately about the events surrounding his excommunication by the Magisterium in January of 1997, and delineated some of the ideas in *Mary and Human Liberation,* the book which prompted the Sri Lankan Bishops to call for an investigation of his work. Unlike Leonardo Boff, Balasuriya was not defended or supported by his local Bishops. In fact, it was the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL) who, after an initial investigation by an "Ad Hoc Theological Commission," first condemned Balasuryia's theology because, they argued, it "den[ied] the divinity of Jesus Christ" (Balasuriya, 3). The 'Balasuriya Affair' reveals some of the dynamics and tensions which constitute the ongoing theological dialogue in Asia - not only between the 'inculturationist' and 'liberationist' camp, but also between Asian Catholic theology and the Vatican. Balasuriya's work became the main target of official condemnation by Cardinal Ratzinger's Sacred Congregation for the

[1] At the November 1997 "Call to Action" conference in Detroit which I attended.

Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF), precisely because of the issues of inculturation and liberation. In his January 1993 meeting with the CBCSL, Balasuriya was condemned for proclaiming the following notions: "that there is no original sin; no redemption is necessary; no Saviour is necessary; Jesus Christ is not the saviour; he is not God" (*ibid.*, 4). No mention of mariology, on which the book is focused, is included in these preliminary statements.

The condemnations of *Mary and Human Liberation* were situated within the boundaries of christology and soteriology without any mention of mariology until the later investigations by the SCDF. This is because, as Pieris argues, "interreligious dialogue... is having its own way in Asia and reveals its own theology of religion" (1996, 154). Asian theologies of religion, as they have been revealed in the work of Balasuriya and other Asian theologians, struggles to develop a kerygma that does not clash with the 'other' religions of the Asian context. However, it does "clash with the official catechism of the church," writes Pieris (*ibid.*, 159). This is especially the case with of John Paul II's 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), which Pieris perceives as a counter-move against the inclusivist and pluralist christological positions held by liberal 'First World' and some 'Third World' theologians. American Catholic theologian, Paul F. Knitter, whose work is influenced by Pieris' methodology, concurs. Knitter argues that the so-called "waning" of missionary activity (RM 2,4) as it is described in the pope's encyclical, is expressed as contingent on two theological problems: a christology that dilutes the definitive self-revelation of G*d in Jesus, and a soteriology that reduces salvation to solidarity and historical emancipation (Knitter 1996, 103). Christology and soteriology, argues the pope, are constitutive of the church's mission in the world if, and only if, "Christ is the one saviour of all" (RM 5), and if missionary work is not limited or reduced to helping "people to become more human and more faithful to their own religion" (RM 46). This position, lament both Knitter and Pieris, is an explicit rejection of the newly adopted Reign-centred missiology that took root at Vatican II. The encyclical's "subtle regression to a preconciliar (exclusivist?) approach to other religions" (Pieris 1996, 155) was the context out of which Balasuriya's theology came under close scrutiny.

However, Pieris' theology is distinct from Balasuriya's work in part due to Pieris' deliberate unwillingness to engage in a christological discourse within a framework whose boundaries have been defined by what he calls the "First" and "Second Magisteriums:" the Roman Curia and Western academia, respectively. For Pieris, interreligious collaboration must stem out of the context and experiences of the "Third Magisterium:" "the poor (the destitute, the dispossessed, the displaced, and the discriminated) who form the bulk of Asian people" (*ibid.*, 156)[2]. Balasuriya's liberationist methodology, like Leonardo Boff's work, confronts and challenges the rigid boundaries set forth by the first two Magisteriums that impose themselves 'from above' on the Asian context. However, the result of this approach has been, according to Pieris, "mere 'christological reflections' focused... on the problem of the poor," which deny the indigenized christological reflections that have been informed by the Asian context, as in the work of Bede Griffiths and Swami Abhishiktananda (Pieris 1988a, 63). Balasuriya's

[2]In *Fire and Water*, Pieris writes this: "I am embarrassed when I am asked in classrooms or in public forums whether I am an inclusivist or a pluralist. The reason is not that I dismiss the paradigm that gives rise to these categories as wrong, but that I have found myself gradually appropriating a trend in Asia which adopts a paradigm wherein the three categories mentioned above do not make sense. For our starting point is not the uniqueness of Christ or Christianity, or any other religion... Furthermore, interreligious dialogue itself is not a conscious target pursued as something desirable per se, as it is a luxury which the urgency of the sociospiritual crisis in Asia would not permit." (155-6)

christology is a liberation-centred or soteriological pluralist[3] christology informed by, engaged with, and most importantly, critical of the 'Western' methodological approach to the theology of religions. It is not that Pieris believes the 'Western' approach to be wrong, but he insists that Asian theology must develop its own paradigms. Such paradigms, argues Pieris, must respond to three overlapping concerns: the experience of the Third Magisterium, the liberationist thrust of popular religion, and the social location of the Church of Asia or the Basic Human Communities (BHC).[4] These concerns form the context for an indigenized Asian theology which situates itself in solidarity with the many poor (the liberationist thrust) and the many religions (the inculturationist imperative). Although Pieris has never labelled his new paradigm, I will risk labelling it by using the words he used for describing Jesus' prophetic immersion in the Jordan. Pieris writes that

> Jesus' self-effacing gesture in the Jordan indicates a prior discernment concerning what was enslaving and what was liberative in the religion of Israel. The narrow ideology of the Zealots, the sectarian puritanism of the Essenes, the self-righteous legalism of the Pharisees, and the leisure-class mentality of the Sadducees had not impressed him. Rather, he opted for the *politically dangerous* brand of *prophetic asceticism* practised by John the Baptizer (1988a, 63).

I will return to Pieris' evaluation of first century Judaism, but for the present it is important to lay claim to Pieris' notion of *prophetic asceticism* insofar as it tries to render whole a division which has been a scandal, or stumbling block, for Asian theology in the 20th century.

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[3]It is important that a distinction be made between the theocentric pluralism of John Hick and the soteriocentric pluralism of Paul F. Knitter for example. Knitter's approach is informed by a liberationist method that understands *praxis* as the foundational hermeneutic framework for 'doing' theology in an interreligious context. Hick's method is much more in line with the liberal philosophy of religion tradition. See Hick and Knitter's *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (1987).

[4]Pieris uses BHC (Basic Human Communities) here to distinguish Asian base communities from the Latin American BEC (Base Ecclesial Communities) because of their interreligious or pluralistic character.

By bringing together "fire and water" (the title of his most recent book), Pieris' *prophetic asceticism* is an attempt at dialectical wholeness - a holistic liberation of Asia's oppressed and marginalized. Immersion in the water of the Jordan is Pieris' hope for a Christianity immersed in the waters of Asian religion, while fire in Pieris' dialectical formula refers to Jesus' second baptismal immersion: the immersion in the fire of Calvary, the prophetic fire of liberative faith.

I want to argue that Pieris is not able to completely rid his methodology of the divisions he claims to heal. Is the oppositional core of liberation theology (or Christianity?) - Reign/anti-Reign, *Abba/Mamona* - a scandal which maintains a subtle dis/closure of the limits of the dialectical process? Do Pieris' dialectical bipolarities point to an eventual closure of the liberative process? Or does liberation also have it's shadow side: a journey through the wilderness of doubt and expectation. I will argue that the wilderness can be a landscape where the 'other' is encountered and where interreligious trust and collaboration can be created.

HEARING THE MONASTIC CALL

At the beginning of his book of collected essays on the Christian-Buddhist experience, entitled *Love Meets Wisdom*, Aloysius Pieris describes an event that occurred in 1980 at a WCC (World Council of Churches) interfaith dialogue meeting in Sri Lanka. This incident, which is now quite famous and known as "the pebble, the flower, and the encounter" (1988b, 6) is quite indicative of the direction Pieris, who was present at the conference, believes interreligious dialogue should be heading.[5] Midway through the conference, Thich Nhat Hanh, a

[5]For more on this WCC meeting, see *The Raft Is Not the Shore* (1981), a dialogue between U.S. Jesuit peace activist Daniel Berrigan and Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Murray Rogers, a British Christian monk, and Hindu *sadhu* Swami Chidananda, who had all been silent throughout most of the discussions decided to articulate their understanding of interreligious dialogue. The seminar tables were taken away, the chairs were placed in semi-circles and the spiritual guides appeared with three gifts: a pebble, a blank sheet of paper, and a basket of temple flowers. Thich Nhat Hanh led the group through a meditation on the pebble that was mentally dropped into the rushing waters of a stream, which he accompanied with a Buddhist chant. Murray Rogers offered everybody a flower and invited them to write any message or feeling that flowered in their hearts. From these thoughts the spiritual teachers offered insights from their own traditions which were offered back to the conference people as "gifts transformed" (*ibid.*, 7). Swami Chidananda then asked everybody to follow him out of the luxurious hotel where the conference was being led to the nearby Prithipura Home where physically and mentally disabled children were being cared for. Here the conference people met, spoke, and spent time with the children.

Many members from the conference thought the "experiment" was a failure, but for Pieris, it captured a failure that the Christian tradition suffers from greatly: dialogue with its own mystics and monastics. For Pieris, the silence that accompanied these three renouncers into the conference room was a healing and transformative silence; it "reaffirmed the religious and transcendent dimension that should never be absent in interreligious dialogue" (*ibid.*, 6). Hence, Pieris believes that Asia, which he describes as the largest and oldest generator of monasticism in the world, as well as the inheritor of those among the world's most poor, has much to teach the Church in this respect. However, Christianity must first get in touch with its traditions of voluntary poverty so that it can reach out to the forced poor of Asia.

Pieris' conceptualization of an Asian theology of liberation is centred around the biblical notion that in Jesus, G*d and the oppressed have formed an alliance, or a "defense pact" (Pieris 1996, 159) against Mammon. This alliance is two-sided and derives from the historical Jesus of the Synoptic gospels: namely, the ascetic struggle to be poor, and the prophetic struggle for the poor (1988a, 15). For Pieris and for many liberation theologians, *Abba* and *Mamona* are irreconcilable in the teachings of Jesus (Mt 6:24), the core of which is the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5; Lk 6). Jesus preached the Reign of G*d to the poor and outcast with whom a covenant was made. This covenant does not include the rich (Lk 6:24), argues Pieris, except if the rich renounce their possessions in solidarity with the poor (Mt 19:23-6). Thus, poverty is understood in two ways: one (voluntary) is the "seed of liberation" while the other (forced) is "fruit of sin" (*ibid.*, 20). In Pieris' understanding of the Gospels, one must become poor if one is to denounce poverty; one must become a victim of Mammon, as did Jesus (the "victim-judge"), if one is to credibly judge its systemic oppressive structures. In this sense the victim is not simply an object of victimization but a subject of one's own emancipation. Pieris writes that

> whoever dares to be with God on the side of the poor must renounce all hope of being a hero. It is the criminal's fate - the cross - that Jesus holds out as the banner under which victory is assured. The disciple is not greater than the master. If the master is the victim-judge of oppression (Matt. 25:31-46) disciples too must become victims of the present order or else they have no right to denounce it. The struggle of the poor is a mission entrusted only to those who are or have become poor (*ibid.*, 23).

Pieris paradigmatically invokes the life and work of Mohandas Gandhi to construct an Asian model of voluntary poverty. Gandhi resisted the colonizing British forces in India and renounced all attachment to wealth and possession. In the hearts of the Indian masses from all religions, Gandhi's life was an example to live by and to actively follow. It is in Gandhi's *praxis* that Pieris sees a model for the churches or Basic Human Communities (BHC) *of* Asia. He discerns in such a *praxis* the intermingling of *gnostic* "disengagement" and *agapeic* "involvement," those dichotomized and polarized notions (much like inculturation and liberation) which are in need of a more dialectical relationship (1988b, 12). Furthermore, Pieris argues that it was Gandhi's renunciation of Mammon, not his avowed sexual continence, which made him credible - "virtually canonized" - among the Indian masses (1988a, 19). Pieris' consideration of Gandhian *praxis* is attuned to how Asian christologies can begin to emerge out of, and take root in the Asian context. Pieris argues that the title of *Satyagrahin*, the suffering servant of truth, that Gandhi bestowed upon Jesus serves as a "christological title" that would in fact describe the "Gandhian Christ." The emphasis on renunciation in the Hindu tradition highlights the cross in this "Gandhian Christ" as the "supreme locus of Jesus' revelation of the divine. What was a scandal to the Jews and folly to the Greeks could be wisdom to a Hindu!" (*ibid.*, 64-5).

Gandhi represents for Pieris an example of the Asian emphasis on both the internal freedom of the soul and the structural emancipation of the social-political-cultural order. Only in Pieris' most recent work do we find a critique of Gandhian paternalism in relationship to the dalit people[6]. Also, Pieris' latest work has begun to integrate a feminist critique, especially in the areas of popular or "cosmic" religion. However, Pieris has yet to consider critiques such as Parita Mukta's treatment of Gandhi's domestication of the bhakta

[6]See Chapter 7 in *Fire and Water* (1996), "Does Christ Have A Place in Asia?," pp. 65-78.

Mirabai. Mukta argues that Gandhi's bestowal of the title of *Satyagrahin* upon Mirabai was in fact his attempt at reinforcing patriarchal hegemony. As I have shown earlier, Mukta demonstrates how Gandhi depicted Mirabai "as a women who went to seek 'devotion to one's husband'"(Mukta, 185), while upholding her as an example of the non-violent freedom fighter. This domestication of Mirabai has resulted in a popular image of her as upholding the Indian nation through a rather rigid understanding of mother and wife. Pieris' understanding of voluntary poverty does provoke a "suspicion," because his Mammon-focused interpretation of renunciation, not unlike Gandhi's, has male-centred and paternalistic implications. His latest writings show an attempt to redress these views, the result, he explains, of an on-going dialogue with feminist scholars.[7]

The Gandhian model proposed by Pieris demonstrates what he argues to be an integral vision of religious life: the gnostic and agapeic dialectic. In Pieris' work, *gnosis* is defined as wisdom, or more specifically, "salvific knowledge" and the realization of an "Impersonal I", a characteristic which is prominent in the religions of Asia, such as Buddhism for example (1988b, 12, 85). Working in a Sri Lankan landscape - geographically, intellectually, and spiritually - necessitates that Buddhism be central in Pieris' delineation of Asian emancipatory struggles. Pieris also argues that Buddhism's pan-Asian history and relevance has enmeshed it at different levels of Asian consciousness and *praxis*. Hence, Pieris believes that no Asian theology of liberation can be constructed without first consulting Asian Buddhism - the ways of *prajna* and *karuna* (1988a, 73). Pieris is very mindful of defining *gnosis* in a way that does not invoke the anti-material gnostic teaching

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[7]See Chapter 1 in *Fire and Water* (1996), "Autobiographical Reflections,"pp. 3-7.

of some early Christian communities, such as Docetism for example[8]. *Gnosis*, in Pieris' evaluation, evokes Jesus in the desert, his personal quest to purify himself from the 'Satanic' grasp of worldly power, spiritual prestige, and spectacle. *Gnosis* is meant to represent the psychological 'East' in Pieris' work, the *Yin* aspect of existence, the "water" aspect of the spiritual quest.

Agape is the way of "redemptive love", an encounter with a "personal Thou" according to Pieris; it is the radical love that Jesus experienced with the poor and marginalized in his society, which ultimately brought him to Calvary (1988b, 9, 85). *Agape* is the Christian conceptualization of compassion (literally: to suffer with), the love that draws one into society to work against oppression. *Agape* in Pieris' schema is thus associated with the psychological 'West,' the *Yang* aspect of spiritual and physical existence and the "fire" side of the religious life. It is important to note that Pieris does not essentialize these terms insofar as they are meant to represent the innate nature of the rational humanitarian Christian 'West,' or the mystic, intuitive Buddhist 'East' as we have seen in the work of Bede Griffiths and earlier Orientalists. *Agape* and *gnosis* are for Pieris the two mutually relational poles of genuine spirituality in all traditions. The notion of *gnostic* disengagement, explains Pieris, is more prominent in the Buddhist Theravadan *arahat* ideal, whereas *agapeic* involvement is the way of the *bodhisattva* in Mahayana Buddhism.[9] Furthermore, Pieris does not accept the "Weberian sociologists'" characterization, or as he puts it

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[8]Pieris writes this: "Gnosis - the liberating knowledge of the saving truth dawning on a person disposed to its reception by a process of self-purification - constituted the basis of a legitimate line of Christian thought in the early church, thanks especially to the Alexandrian school. 'Heretical' gnoses 'were only as it were embroidered along the edge of this continuous line'" (1988b, 27-8)

[9]The *arahat*, or *arhat*, a sanskrit word that means "worthy one," was the ideal of early Buddhism. In contrast to the *bodhisattva* (awakened being) who steps away from final attainment until he or she has freed all beings from suffering, the *arahat* is much more focused on striving to gain his or her salvation. However, this does not imply a negative evaluation of the *arahat* ideal, simply a different emphasis. See Love Meets Wisdom, 75; Gombrich 1988.

"caricature," of Buddhism as a world-denying system of thought that promotes disengagement with the world; it is a reductionism that has distorted the way many Euro-Americans envisage Buddhism in the twentieth century (*ibid.*, 85).

For Pieris, the mutual poles of *gnosis* and *agape*, "East" and "West", inculturation and liberation, secular and religious, contemplative and activist, are all dualisms in our lives that are mutually corrective, complementary, and in urgent need of repair. Pieris writes that

> a genuine Christian experience of God-in-Christ grows by maintaining a dialectical tension between two poles: between action and nonaction, between world and silence, between control of nature and harmony of nature, between self-affirmation and self-negation, between engagement and withdrawal, between love and knowledge, between *karuna* and *prajna*, between agape and gnosis. Hence the Evagrian mysticism does not become "pre-Christian" because it uses gnostic idiom, just as the bodhisattvas do not become less Buddhistic because their religious experience is one of love! As I have shown elsewhere, Christian agapeic tradition has a gnostic stream and Buddhist gnostic tradition has an agapeic vein (*ibid.*, 27).

Although there are times when Pieris' distinctions between Christianity and Buddhism, 'West' and 'East,' *agape* and *gnosis*, can lack dialectical sharpness, his aim is to awaken Christian theologians from their *gnostic* slumber, so as to activate a much-needed dialogue between theologians and renouncers, between activists and contemplatives, between inculturationists and liberationists.

Dialogue with our own monastic traditions would, in Pieris' understanding, help mend the splits between philosophy and religion, as well as "G*d-talk" (theology) and "G*d-experience" (spirituality). Pieris believes this to be the only way to enter into an authentic core-to-core encounter with other traditions in Asia. A holistic vision of interreligious collaboration is offered by Pieris, where the G*d-experience of voluntary poverty (*gnosis*), as well as the G*d-experience of radical love through emancipatory *praxis* against forced poverty (*agape*) constitutes a genuine interreligious meeting, a meeting that joins hands within the complex diversity of Asian soteriologies.

FROM THE JORDAN TO CALVARY

Although much liberation theology - especially from Latin America - remains thoroughly 'Western' in Pieris' view, it has an authority and relevance for Asia that classic theology does not have. According to Pieris, Latin American theology has been among the most important recent developments in theology. It has renewed theology by shifting the orbit from the Kantian attempt to free reason from religious authority, to the Marxist attempt "to free reality from oppression" (*ibid.*, 37). Gustavo Gutiérrez has said that in America he is labelled a theologian, but in Peru he is understood as an activist (Hick/Knitter, 20). Gutiérrez' words are quite indicative of the emphasis 'Third World' liberation theologians put on *praxis*, as well as the way 'First World' theologians conceptualize G*d-talk. The arrival of liberation theology was embraced by Pieris and other theologians in Asia because they believed it corresponded quite well to how *praxis* is understood in indigenous Asian religions.

Pieris demonstrates that in Buddhism for example, the basic Buddhist teachings (*dharma*) of the Four Noble Truths have incorporated within them (in the fourth Noble Truth) the Eightfold Path (*marga*): the path leading to release from discontentedness and suffering. In Buddhist practice *dharma* and *marga* are inseparable and therefore have no application without mutual participation and reciprocity. For this reason philosophy and religion are not two separate disciplines in Asia as they are in the Euro-American context. "An Asian philosophy is not simply a worldview (*darsana*) but is equally a program of action (*pratipada*)" (1988a, 25). Pieris believes that the methodology of liberation theology has renewed the theory/action interdependence in Western theology by placing a new emphasis on *praxis*: specifically, as Pieris argues, to live out the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, which is what Christian are called to do. Yet, in an Asian context liberation theology, for reason discussed earlier, must undergo genuine Asian inculturation. This does not simply mean replacing 'Western' clergy with an Asian one, since an indigenous clergy is not necessarily the sign of an authentic church *of* Asia (*ibid*,. 111). Genuine inculturation should, according to Pieris, be the "forging of an indigenous ecclesial identity from within the *soteriological* perspectives of Asian religions and a participation in the non-Christian ethos, a baptism in the Jordan of our precursor's religiousness" (*ibid*,. 55).

Pieris finds biblical support for his thesis in Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan (Mt. 3). For Pieris, Christianity must humble itself before the indigenous Asian religions in order to learn (*ecclesia discens*) from the religious poor (*anawim*) of Asian soteriology. Christianity must sit at the feet of Asian *gurus* and learn from the world-renouncing and liberative soteriologies of Asia, just as Jesus had to pass through the wilderness-experience of John the Baptists' prophetic asceticism (*ibid*,. 46). Pieris believes that Christianity arrived in Asia too late, because the inculturation of the "cosmic" religions, such as Shamanism, with their "metacosmic" religions, such as Buddhism, had already resulted in the mutual co-existence and co-mingling. By cosmic, Pieris is referring to those religions firmly rooted in the workings of the cosmos; his usage of cosmic is meant to avoid the term 'animist,' which he believes conveys pejorative implications. Metacosmic on the other hand, pertains to those religions that have a transcendental quality that is operative within the immanent sphere (*ibid.*, 54). In Asia, warns Pieris, the cosmic religions were not replaced by the metacosmic religions, they were not "instrumentalized" to serve the "greater" religion. They complement each other in such a way as "to form a bidimensional soteriology that maintains a healthy tension between the cosmic *now* and the metacosmic *beyond*" (*ibid.*). Therefore, the classic Christian inculturation technique of "instrumentalizing" a non-Christian culture in the service of Christianity, as it happened in Northern Europe with the cosmic 'pagan' religions, is counterproductive and can be imperialistic in the Asian context. It results in what Pieris has labelled "theological vandalism"

> against which I warned Asian theologians long ago. This fear has been confirmed by reports I have seen. Recently in Thailand, Buddhists have reacted with bitter indignation against the church for usurping their sacred symbols for Christian use! Inculturation of this type smacks of an irreverent disregard for the soteriological matrix of non-Christian religious symbolism, and it is easily lends itself to the charge of being a disguised form of imperialism (*ibid.*, 61).

In Pieris' view, Christian theologies must now re-think a new paradigm of inculturation. This is what Pieris is proposing with the baptism of Christianity in the Jordan of Asian soteriologies. To be poor as Jesus was poor and to work to eradicate forced poverty as Jesus did is the Asian path (*marga*) to liberation. This *gnostic* and *agapaic* involvement with of the poor and oppressed necessitates in Pieris' work an active engagement with the subaltern epistemologies of Asia. For Pieris this means that Christianity must immerse itself in the waters of Asian soteriologies and learn from its great Asian teachers.

While Pieris' image of Christian humility and conversion to Asian soteriology is promising and inspiring, it nonetheless invokes the anti-Judaism which is inherently enmeshed in Christian scripture. As we have seen in Chapters One and Two, Rosemary Radford Ruether has argued that anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was Christ. A closer examination of the baptism passage in Chapter Three of Matthew's gospel, reveals a midrashic interpretation of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 where it is written: "Behold I send a messenger to prepare the way before me." In Mt.3 John the Baptist is interpreted as this messenger who will "prepare the way of the Lord" (Mt.3:3). Thus Christ has traditionally been proclaimed as the fulfilment of the messianic claim made in the Hebrew Bible, or First Testament. In the eyes of this gospel writer, John the Baptist symbolizes Hebrew prophecy preparing the way for Christic salvation.

With this image, Pieris risks reactivating a subtle form of anti-Judaism (inclusivism?), insofar as Christian baptism in the Jordan of Asian soteriologies could potentially be interpreted as Asia preparing the way for Christ - the *preparatio evangelica*. Pieris' reading of the image of baptism in the Jordan needs to be approached with a hermeneutics of suspicion, whereby the presuppositions inherent in the text as well as the interpretations of the text are selective articulations that need critical evaluation (Fiorenza 1984, 15-18). Pieris has been very careful to discredit this way of conceptualizing inculturation in relation to Asian soteriologies. Yet the absence of a critique of the inherent *adversus Judaeos* tradition in Christian scripture and theology diminishes the emancipatory potential of interreligious collaboration in his attempt at constructing a new Asian theology of liberation.

Pieris believes that theology in Asia should be "the christic apocalypse of non-Christian experience of liberation," which is the flip side of his dialectical equation of baptism (1988a, 63).[10] This is an invitation to a return to the historical Jesus, who according to Pieris, was not simply baptized in the Jordan, but on Calvary as well. For Jordan is only the beginning of Calvary, because the first baptism must lead to the other (*ibid.*). If baptism in the Jordan is meant to represent an authentic and humble invitation to learn from the diverse Asian soteriologies, the baptism on Cavalry represents, in Pieris' program, an invitation to participate in the elimination of forced poverty in Asia. There can be no authentic religion without a painful participation in the conflicts of poverty - voluntary and forced. For Pieris, there is no such thing as an *Abba*-experience, for which we are witnesses in Jesus' life, without a struggle (internal and external) against *Mamona*. An invitation to return to the historical Jesus, in Pieris' understanding, is the realization of Jesus' uniqueness as an individual who trod the path of voluntary poverty in order eliminate the forced poverty to which the majority of Galilean peasants and workers were subjected.

Pieris' methodology has influenced Paul F. Knitter who also believes that it is time for Christians to rethink "constitutive" christologies, whereby we find the only and unique revelation of G*d in Jesus. In academic discourses, the theology of religions debates continue to polarize constitutive christologies with representational ones[11]. Although Pieris is quite critical of these debates, his emphasis

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[10]Pieris uses the word apocalypse in its literal translation from the greek, which means "revelation." In John's *Revelation*, the apocalypse is a utopian vision: a defeat of the oppressive imperial forces of Roman rule and a "breaking-in" of the Reign of G*d, conveyed in mytho-poetic form. See Fiorenza (1991) and Keller (1996).

[11]Knitter equates the "Pascal/Easter" christology of Paul with constitutive christologies which, he argues, understand Jesus as the cause and source of G*d's saving presence in the world. Knitter prefers the more representational "Logos/Wisdom" christology of John whereby "enfleshed in Jesus, the Logos, is powerfully and lucidly encountered by Christians, but this same Logos continues to be encountered elsewhere, throughout the world" (1996, 42). Knitter's idea here is to locate the particularity, or uniqueness of Jesus within the universality of G*d's

on soteriology and *praxis* as the core from which the understanding of Christ emerges has had a profound impact on those theologians, such as Knitter and Balasuriya, who defend representational christologies. Knitter reminds us that liberation theology's emphasis on emancipatory *praxis* can help put Christian faith in perspective. Knitter writes that

> the sense of most Christian faithful - insofar as they are brought into touch with their own experience through a liberative praxis of their faith - will resonate with the claim made above all that the right practice of following Jesus and working for his kingdom is more important for Christian identity than is the right knowledge concerning the nature of God or of Jesus himself (Hick/Knitter, 195).

The crux of the matter for Knitter, as well as for Pieris, is in *doing* the will of *Abba* (Mt.7:21); it is not simply in *knowing* that Jesus is the one and only that we work to create the Reign of G*d. This G*d-experience through the life of the historical Jesus, has influenced many liberation theologians around the world. Such an approach frames Jesus' authority, as an authority that communicates freedom. Those who lack this kind of authority use oppressive power, a power that dehumanizes. Such authority does not come with titles, but with *praxis* - as in the lives of Sojourner Truth, Mohandas Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Malcolm X, Audre Lorde, Daniel Berrigan, Oscar Romero, and Rigoberta Menchú.

Pieris relates his experience with Buddhists in Sri Lanka for whom the uniqueness of Jesus is quite obvious. Problems surface, Pieris believes, when one proclaims Jesus' uniqueness through absolutizing christological titles. This is a false start to interreligious

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self-revelation (representational) rather than locating G*d's universality within the uniqueness, or particularity of the historical Jesus (constitutive). The contrast is made in order to emphasize the static nature of constitutive christologies which lock G*d's self-revelation in a single time, place, and person. One could argue that Knitter's definition of a representational christology is nothing more than a masked inclusivist theology of which he is very critical.

dialogue for Pieris, and a dead-end for interreligious *praxis*. For Pieris, what "saves" is not in the interpretation, but in the mediating reality itself. Pieris writes that

> what saves is not the "name" of Jesus in the hellenistic sense of the term "name," but the name of Jesus in the Hebrew sense of "the reality" that was seen operative in Jesus, independent of the name or designation we may attach to it. In fact the knowledge of the name or title is not expected by the eschatological Judge, but knowledge of the path is expected (Matt. 15:37-9 and 44-6) (1988b, 133).

Pieris' vision of interreligious *praxis* is an attempt to steer away from academic discourses that do not speak to the poor and marginalized, while providing a methodology that does not collapse into a decontextualized relativism. For Pieris, "tolerance is where mere dialogue begins, and positive participation is where dialogue should culminate" (*ibid*, 18). In Asia, Christians need to engage in the humbly participate in the indigenous experience of liberation. Participation demands that one eats from "the tree that bears the fruit of wisdom" (*gnosis*), a process that leads one within - the direction of voluntary poverty. Participation also demands accountability from "the tree that bares (sic) the cost of love" (*agape*), a thorough and active commitment to end forced poverty and oppression in the world (*ibid.*, 111). Pieris' program challenges Christians *in* Asia toward a prophetic critique from within their own tradition in order to renew and transform their communities into authentic churches *of* Asia (BHCs). A prophetic critique calls for theologians to engage themselves in a core-to-core dialogue with the monks and nuns of their own tradition so as to sensitize themselves to the 'Eastern' or *gnostic* side of their lives. It also calls for an acute critical consciousness that will discern the ways in which sexism, racism, class, homophobia, and colonialism interact with other unjust power relations to create situations of oppression, abuse, fear, hatred, and ultimately, poverty. The Bible documents the religious experience that characterizes a colonized and exploited people. In the Asian context, Pieris believes that "the Bible is the record of a religious experience of a *nonpeople* struggling to be a *people*, a struggle with G*d as an intimate partner" (*ibid.*, 124). Yet all words have silence as their ultimate destiny - as the Buddha understood when he refused to speak about *nirvana*. This is what Pieris suggests when he argues that G*d-talk is made in relation to G*d-experience: the experience of interreligious liberation engineered by the poor, marginalized, and oppressed peoples of Asia through their own contextual ways of knowing and experiencing G*d's salvific work within world.

META/COSMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

I have discussed how Pieris' understanding of inculturation in Asia is based on a particular reading of history, whereby metacosmic and cosmic religions met to form "bidimensional soteriologies." Pieris approaches inculturation with a historical consciousness; he is attempting to subvert traditional approaches toward Christian evangelization and ecclesiology in the Asia away from a disposition of benign superiority in favour of an attitude of humble participation in the 'non-Christian' experience of liberation. Pieris' outline of cosmic and metacosmic mutual cohesion hinges on his dialectical understanding of religious life through the methodology of *prophetic asceticism*. The immersion in the Jordan of Asian soteriologies (ascetic search) and the baptism on the Calvary of Asian poverty (prophetic critique) constitute the foundation of his anthropology of the religious person (Pieris 1988a, 71). In his essay, "Toward an Asian Theology of Liberation," which he presented at the EATWOT III conference

(Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka, 1979), Pieris clearly delineates that cosmic in Asia "represents the basic psychological posture that the *homo religious* (residing in each one of us) adopts subconsciously toward the mysteries of life," while the metacosmic is the "main edifice" that is always contextualized within the worldview of the cosmic dimension (*ibid.*). Pieris bases this bidimensional soteriology on the Buddhist notions of *lokiya* (the mundane) and *lokuttara* (the supramundane) which refer, he argues, to the two dimensions of Buddhist religious experience and self-understanding. Although Pieris is a little vague on the definitions of these Pali terms, they refer respectively to that which is of the world and that which is concerned with the path (*marga*) to the attainment of *nirvana*[12]. Pieris argues that *lokiya* (cosmic) and *lokuttara* (metacosmic) constitute a reciprocal dependence between wealth and poverty, state and *sangha* (monastic community), as well as scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom. Pieris argues that these elements have been maintained in equilibrium within Buddhist history across the Asian continent. Pieris writes that

> the sangha - the monastic nucleus round which Buddhism evolves - is the institutional centre and the spiritual apex of a Buddhist society. It serves the cosmic level of human existence by directing its attention to the metacosmic goal, the ultimate Perfection (*Arahatta*) that consists in an absence of acquisitiveness and greed (*alobha*), absence of oppressiveness and hate (*adosa*), and perfect salvific knowledge (*amoha*). This is the classic description of nirvana (*ibid.*, 75).

Pieris is endeavouring to set the trajectory of Christian inculturation within the parameters of Asian soteriologies - with an emphasis on Buddhism, which he has argued to be not only the most pan-Asian soteriology, but politically the most resilient of Asian religions as well. (*ibid.*, 73). Pieris' refutation of the "instrumentalizing" approach to

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[12]See *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, 1991, p. 128.

inculturation (whether that be in the Greek manner where philosophy was extracted from of its own religious context and made to serve the Christian religion[13], or in the Latin manner where so-called 'pagan' or 'non-Christian' culture was put to the service of Christianity) has led him to envisage interreligious *praxis* from the point of view and experience of Asian soteriologies and the Asian poor. (*ibid.*, 53).

Pieris' methodology of cosmic/metacosmic interdependence must also be understood in relation to his *agape/karuna* and *gnosis/prajna* dialectics which, according to his view, are constitutive of a holistic religious experience. Hence, in interreligious *praxis* , it is important to not only engage with the 'other' religious person, but as well, to participate in the struggles of the suffering 'other,' to unearth the mystical 'other' in one's own tradition, and to prophetically challenge the enslaving aspects of all religious traditions - especially one's own. This is Pieris' understanding of the religious life, which in the Asian context is representative of its most urgent concerns for Christians. Hence the religious life of Asia is the dialectical meeting of the many poor and the many religions from which generate the most influential monastic/renunciate movements in the world. For Christians to be credible in the Asian context, argues Pieris, inculturation cannot be limited to a simple dusting of Asianness, it must incorporate Asian methodologies, epistemologies, and hermeneutics.

Furthermore, Pieris' cosmic/metacosmic understanding of religious life, based on the Buddhist concepts of *lokiya* and *lokutarra*, is also used to historically interpret Christianity's failure to 'evangelize'

[13]A discussion of "instrumentalizing" Marxist philosophy in order to serve Christianity, as was proposed by Dom Helder Camara, is never taken up by Pieris. Is Marxist philosophy exempt from this analysis? Like other liberationists, I think Pieris would argue that the marxism as an all-embracing worldview is for the most part rejected, while certain key ideas such as *praxis*, Gramsci's organic intellectual/hegemony/subaltern, its critique of power and capital, class inequalities, struggle, and conflict have been important contributions to the social sciences, and therefore theology. See Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 1990, pp. 58-69.

Asia. The triumphalism of mercantile Christianity which came to Asia in the sixteenth century - the Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm - could not take root there. Pieris argues that this is because the cosmic religions had been already supplanted by metacosmic ones such as Buddhism and Hinduism - the Philippines remaining the only exception. Therefore according to Pieris, the kind of inculturation which parachutes itself down into the Asian context without first entering the liberative steams of Asian religions is bound to fail. Moreover, the kind of inculturation that immerses itself in Asian religion without encountering its foundation, the popular cosmic aspect, loses sight of the most marginalized in society and their epistemologies of survival and resistance. Pieris laments this split which has produced on the one hand a "small minority church...[that] now wants to 'liberate' Asia without letting Asia liberate it from its Latinity" (ibid., 50), and on the other a "tendency to produce a 'leisure class' through 'prayer centres' and 'ashrams' that attract the more affluent to short spells of mental tranquility rather than a life of renunciation" (ibid., 42).

Pieris' *prophetic asceticism* is a multifaceted and complex weaving of traditionally oppositional constructs. Pieris' methodology is a dialectical weaving together of "fire and water," cosmic and metacosmic, *agape/karuna* and *gnosis/prajna*. By dialectics here, I am referring to the word in both its classical Greek sense, meaning "to converse," as well as in its Hegelian and Critical Marxist[14] sense: namely, a creative theory of action, impelled by conflict and apparent contradiction, that proclaims constant change in place of eternal

[14]By "Critical Marxist" here I am referring to that branch of Marxism which has engaged in a critical re-evaluation of Marx's ideas from Lukàcs and Gramsci through the "Frankfurt School" to Althusser. See McGovern, 1980, pp. 68-82.

unchangeable laws.[15] Leonardo Boff's now famous utterance that "poverty can be cured by poverty"[16] is clearly a dialectical way of thinking and it has proven influential in Pieris' understanding of Christian discipleship. Hence, authentic discipleship for Pieris is a spirituality of struggle, struggle to be poor as Jesus was poor, and to struggle with the poor as Jesus had struggled with the poor. This is Pieris' spirituality of "fire and water" which professes a dialectical relationship, or tension, between the prophetic cry for justice and the ascetic quest for union with G*d (1988b, 12).

While Pieris contends that the religious life of *prophetic asceticism* is based on the relationship of the cosmic and metacosmic interdependence, I want to argue that his dialectic fails to deliver a creative new "unity in duality but without dualism."[17] This is due to the subtle attenuation in his construction of cosmic religiosity and its relationship to the metacosmic beyond. Although Pieris is very emphatic about not regarding his framework as the cosmic "instrumentalized" by the metacosmic, his construct does not allow for the reversal of the order of inculturation. The metacosmic is always constructed to figure above the cosmic foundation. The beyond is not acosmic in the sense that it transcends the now. Pieris writes that "as the prefix meta indicates, the metacosmic stands for a dimension which includes the cosmic and takes it beyond itself" (1996, 21) This is a supposed mirror or macrocosm of the human religious person whose

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[15]In Jose Miranda's *Marx and the Bible* (1974) we find this definition of dialectics: "dialectical thought does grasp the contradiction and instead of disguising and domesticating this contradiction, dialectical thought identifies with it. And this is because dialectical thought believes in hope" (p. 271).

[16]Quoted in Pieris (1988a, 20).

[17]Gutiérrez' dialectical methodology is characterized as such by Jesuit theologian, Bernard Sesboüé, in a discussion with Gutiérrez on his liberation theology. See *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (1990), 40.

quest for immanent liberation (the now) is in equilibrium with the quest for transcendent liberation (the beyond).

A significant symbol in Pieris' work of meta/cosmic interdependence is the Buddhist stupa. Pieris repeatedly depicts the meta/cosmic construct through the use of the Buddhist stupa, whereby the base of the stupa is representative of the cosmic, and the heaven-directed top axis is representative of the metacosmic direction inserted within the cosmic base (see appendix 2). Pieris' use of the stupa analogy not only reifies an important Buddhist symbol, it also overlooks the history of Buddhist stupa architecture in which some of the earliest stupas (from around the third century B.C.E to the first century C.E, such as in Sanchi, India) display a small vertical post with three umbrella shaped circular cylinders rather than a vertical pointing central axis (see appendix 3). These umbrella cylinders, symbols of dignity and veneration, were also meant to represent the three Jewels of Buddhism: the *Buddha*, the *dharma* (the law), and the *sangha* (Craven, 69). The use of the stupa as a symbol for his cosmic/metacosmic construct reveals the tendency of some aspects of Pieris' work to fall prey to essentializing and monolithic discourses that need further refinement and nuancing. His stupa model of bidimensional religiosity does not consider the evidence that in Buddhism, which Pieris constructs as metacosmic, the stupas symbolize the more cosmic "presence" of the Buddha to the Buddhist faithful. Pieris understands Gautama the Buddha in essentially the same way he understands Jesus the Christ: namely, as mediators of liberation, both internal and societal (Hick/Knitter, 1987 162-177). Their difference lies in emphasis. In Gautama's case, the emphasis on *gnosis/prajna* distinguishes him from Jesus' emphasis on *agape/karuna* . Pieris writes this:

> the conclusion is obvious. East and West have each developed a sapiential as well as an affective/active stream of spirituality, the former accentuated in gnostic religions (of both East and West) and the latter preponderant in the Semitic or biblical religions... [These] two poles of genuine spirituality - gnostic disengagement and agapeic involvement - are maintained in their dialectical tension. (1988b, 12)

Pieris is careful to present Gautama the Buddha as an ascetic prophet who created all-inclusive alternative communities of mendicants which upheld human equality in the face of rigid caste laws. The Buddha's prophetic stance against a dehumanizing caste system, an intrinsic part of his religious message, has been obscured by years of negative stereotypes about Buddhism.[18] Yet the earliest stupas do not display the heaven-stretching architectural cylinders that presupposes Pieris' metacosmic definition of Buddhism. These vertical cylinders were a later phase in the development of stupas. Originally, the stupa was a pre-Buddhist funeral mound transformed into a memorial monument for the Buddha and other Buddhist saints, where relics were kept and venerated by the faithful. The stupa has always been a symbol the "present" Buddha in the lives of Buddhists, who venerate the Buddha's presence by circumambulating the monument (Fischer-Schreiber, 210). Buddhist stupas are cosmic in their orientation; thus to diminish this aspect is to diminish the role of the cosmic as a tool for liberation and as a sharp prophetic challenge to caste inequality which is foundational to the organization of the Buddhist *sangha*. Pieris refutes the dualist 'East/West' constructs of Bede Griffiths and the Orientalists, but produces his own in its wake by simplifying the

[18]Still today these stereotypes hold sway. John Paul the II in his *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994) writes this: "the Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively negative soteriology... To save oneself means, above all, to free oneself from evil by becoming indifferent to the world, which is the source of evil" (pp. 85-6). These statements angered Buddhists around the world, especially in Sri Lanka, where they called for a formal apology.

prophetic role of the cosmic in his use of Buddhist symbology. In his most recent writings, Pieris has argued more rigorously on how a distorted view of the Asian religious ethos has generated an "underestimation of the liberative potential of cosmic religiosity" (1996, 158). However, the use of the Buddhist stupa as a symbol of meta/cosmic interdependence presents the cosmic in the same "immature or infantile stage of spiritual development" that Pieris seeks to counter in his writings about the cosmic religion of the poor (*ibid.*). The stupa reproduces that which Pieris seeks to refute because his construct defines stupa in its completeness only when the meta supplants the cosmic. Furthermore, is Pieris' meta/cosmic construct just another form of the *adversus judaeos* tradition cast in a formula of interdependence and mutuality? Pieris' clearly delineated emphasis on the mutual nature of the construct rescues his model from such a critique. However, a suspicion remains as to the potentiality of such a construct to invoke Leonardo Boff's dialectical faith/religion syncretism.

If one is to take seriously Pieris' use of the stupa as an Asian symbol of his dialectical method, how does he account for the fact that the earliest stupas represented the Buddha, or more specifically the Buddha's presence, much more concretely in terms of the cosmic now? More importantly, Pieris clearly defines cosmic religion as being "domesticated" by metacosmic soteriologies such as Buddhism. Pieris states that "cosmic religion [functions] as the foundation and metacosmic soteriology constituting the main edifice" (1988a, 71). This sort of juxtaposition brings Pieris' vision closer to Boff's dialectical syncretism by casting the cosmic as functional and without autonomy and the metacosmic as fundamentally substantive and transcendental. Boff and Pieris utilize a similar method by casting their dialectics as a heuristic of mutual interdependence between the cosmic *now* (religion) and metacosmic *beyond* (faith). For Pieris this constitutes a healthy religious posture as well as an authentic and credible liberative path in the Asian context. However, Pieris' distinction between the "foundation" and its domestication by the "main edifice" points to a method that denies the epistemologies of the cosmic popular religions, because the metacosmic is always projected as the dominant disposition in his mutual construct. It thus becomes difficult to discern what differentiates Pieris' his model of inculturation from the "instrumentalizing" Latin model that evolved in the 'pagan' European context.

It could be argued, as Pieris does with his Asian model, that the Latin form of inculturation also produced a bidimensional religious worldview? How does the historical situation of inculturation in the Philippines differ from the process that occurred in 'pagan' Europe? Was the cosmic worldview of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines domesticated by the metacosmic Christianity of Spanish colonialism? Or was it instrumentalized? I would argue that Pieris' dependence on the notion of domestication, a notion that suggests a paternalistic perspective, blurs the boundaries he seeks to create with the more traditional constructs of Christian evangelization. Moreover, can Pieris' model be utilized to understand the history of colonial Christian missionary efforts in North America? The Canadian Catholic theologian Achiel Peelman rightly points out that "Christianity has not been able to displace the traditional Amerindian religions" (1995, 15). Why has the metacosmic not able to form a bidimensional relationship with the cosmic indigenous religions of North America? Pieris believes that this was the process that enabled the early Church to grow and be "at home" in Europe - even if he would characterize the

European process as instrumentalism (1988a, 54). It would be interesting to hear how Pieris would respond if questioned on the specific historical situation of inculturation in North America. This would help elucidate the differences his Asian perspective brings to the complex history of inculturation.

Pieris use of the Buddhist *lokiya/lokuttara* tradition supports my hermeneutical suspicion about his evaluation of cosmic religion and its relationship to the metacosmic. Pieris' understanding of this tradition serves as a model for dialectical interdependence between state/sangha, wealth/poverty, and scientific knowledge/spiritual wisdom (*ibid.*, 75). However, Pieris' construct again paves the way for an interpretation which reinforces the notion of the dominant disposition of the metacosmic worldview. Although, Pieris intends to demarcate the creative interactions between these domains which have been constitutive of the Buddhist traditions for centuries, the relationship he sets up posits a dichotomy between the small mendicant elite as the religious centre possessing spiritual truth on the one hand, and the cosmic or mundane attachment to wealth, power, and scientific knowledge on the other. Pieris is aware of the importance of popular religious movements in his theology, however his methodology can too easily reinforce the notion that the metacosmic truth is in the hands of a small elite class of monks. Are we witnessing a subtle Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm evolving out of this construct, or is Pieris seeking a more expansive understanding of the *lokiya/lokuttara* tradition that does not make such hasty correspondences to his meta/cosmic bidimensional worldview? His dialectical investigation of gender constructs can help us appreciate more markedly the limits of his methodology.

TOWARD THE *"HUMANUM"*

In his most recent book, entitled *Fire and Water*, Pieris is intent on linking his work to 'Third World' feminist liberation theology, which is completely lacking from is earlier work. Pieris is very genuine in his autobiographical essays on the influence feminist theology has had on him, and on the importance of the feminist critique within religious discourses. Pieris understands feminism, not as a "temporary movement that lasts only until women's rights are restored," but as a "permanent feature of our growth toward the *humanum*," or toward what is most fully human (1996, 12). For Pieris, feminism is a "permanent ideological critique of religion, something that religion cannot do without" (*ibid*).[19] Pieris' presentation of the importance of women in religious history and the importance of feminist or women-centred epistemologies in liberation struggles has been influenced most notably by the work of Chung Hyun Kyung, Virginia Fabella, and Gabriele Dietrich. In *Fire and Water*, Pieris is once more covering the terrain of meta/cosmic interdependence, except this book endeavours to emphasize the role of cosmic epistemologies out of which women have played, and continue to play, an active and important role. Pieris is very conscientious about not falling prey to the patriarchal construct that simplistically equates cosmic=woman and metacosmic=man. Pieris writes that "no misogynic equation such as: *Evil=sensual=woman=cosmic*, which evokes the parallel equation *Good=spiritual=man=metacosmic*, should be allowed to be read into these symbols" (*ibid*., 26). Instead, Pieris again returns to a Buddhist methodology where he finds in some instances the feminist critique already present, insofar as the Buddhist tradition (as well as the

[19]All religions are to be challenged and transformed by feminist hermeneutics. The sentence is not meant to conjure up the faith/religion dichotomies discussed earlier.

Vedantic tradition) has "avoided sexist terms characteristic of a person" when, for example, speaking about the metacosmic (*ibid.*). Yet he also endeavours to show how in many areas, "gynephobia," or the fear of women, is deeply entrenched in all the major religious traditions of Asia (*ibid.*, 12-13). Hence, Pieris is attempting to steer a course, as many Christian feminists have done in Asia, that avoids the extremes of either an all-out rejection or abandonment of the patriarchal metacosmic traditions or an appropriation of a 'Western' "secularist" approach that disregards the strategies of the religious poor (*ibid.*, 11).

Pieris' definition of liberation in his latest book has been refined to simply "the cosmic experience of the metacosmic" (ibid., 52), or more specifically the now-oriented experience of the beyond. The rhetoric of the metacosmic "domesticating" the cosmic is absent from *Fire and Water* because the more recent book is less concerned with mission and evangelization (although still a major element in his work) and more focused on issues of interreligious *praxis* as characterized by his *prophetic asceticism*. Moreover, ideas that constitute the feminist critique of androcentric patterns embedded in notions such as prophetic and asceticism are treated by the author, albeit not very rigorously. Pieris does not consider the male-centred individualism the term 'prophetic' can invoke for many feminist who are attempting to fashion a more community-centred understanding of societal transformation.[20] Neither does Pieris look at the many ways his model of asceticism, based on the figure of John the Baptist, perpetuates a model of voluntary poverty that associates the concept of 'woman'

[20]See Mary E. Hunt's *Fierce Tenderness* (1991), Carter Heyward's *Touching Our Strength* (1989), and Rita Nakashima Brock's *Journeys by Heart* (1988). As well, Rosemary Radford Ruether's essay in *Apostle of Peace* (1996) in honour of Daniel Berrigan, where she critiques the constructs of male individualism and prophetic rage.

with the carnal, or fleshly desires that renunciates seek to transcend.[21] Pieris does however examine certain symbols from the Buddhist tradition, as with the stupa, which are characteristic of the *humanum* - full humanity. The stupa[22] and the sitting Buddha in samadhi[23] are defined by Pieris as "perfect symbols" that are "androgynic" in character (ibid., 26), symbolically representing that which is most completely human (see Appendix 2). Pieris argues that the *humanum* is the interdependence of the male and female in all people; the cosmic and metacosmic, the prophetic and the mystical, *agape/karuna* and *gnosis/prajna* which make up the genuine or authentic experience of being fully human and fully alive. However, I would question how a symbol which is meant to represent the meeting of the cosmic and metacosmic, and which is characterized as "androgynic" cannot but risk the slippery slope of the androcentrism and misogyny he clearly opposes. Can Pieris' domesticated cosmic, made fully human only when it is supplanted by the "main edifice" of the metacosmic, be an undiscerning reworking of the Thomistic understanding of human sexuality which constructs "woman" as the passive fertile ground in which the active generative seed of "man" is planted? Pieris would likely refute such a reading of his work by highlighting his dialectical method as an open-ended process of mutual interdependence.

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21 Gandhi is renowned to have slept in rooms with women in order to test his ascetic resilience. Pieris has no critique of Gandhi on this level. For a good re-reading of Christian ascetic practices see Margaret Miles' *The Fullness of Life* (1981), and for a more women-centred historical study of medieval asceticism see Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1987).

22In *Fire and Water*, Pieris describes the stupa as pre-Buddhist funeral mound, made complete by the Buddhist application of the metacosmic reality. Again we are faced with a pre-metacosmic reality that lacked a future-oriented outlook. See pp. 20-8.

23Samadhi is the Buddhist state of deep concentration in meditation practice; it is the state of non-dualistic consciousness and collectedness of mind on a single object through the calming of the mental activities. This is beautifully rendered in some of the famous sitting Buddha statues from the Gupta period of Indian history - 4th and 5th centuries of the C.E.

However, a question begs to be asked: does Pieris' "androgynic" model reveal the limits of Pieris' dialectical method? Pieris' is vigilant with respect to liberationist usage of simplistic dualisms between faith and religion. Yet his symbolic constructs can lead to those very same dualisms he is refuting. At times Pieris' work reveals the undialectical fissures that plague some the Latin American liberationists. A careful reading of his dialectical method brings to the surface key issues that differentiate the dialectical method from the feminist one.

Chung Hyun Kyung has a great deal of respect for Pieris' Asian liberation theology and she sees her work in continuity with his theology[24]. Chung has been influenced by Pieris' dialectical method and describes his meta/cosmic construct as being informed by complementarity. She is accurate in noting that Pieris focuses on the mutual complementarity of the cosmic and metacosmic, as he does with the other bipolar equations of his methodology. Chung writes that

> "[many male scholars] call cosmic religion primitive , just as patriarchal society defines women as inferior to men. These male scholars perceive cosmic religion as something to be *domesticated* or directed by meta-cosmic religion in order to be moral and historical" (112). Italics mine.

In an endnote Chung distinguishes Pieris from the male scholars she is talking about above (125, n25). And she is quite right to make that distinction insofar as Pieris does not make the equation that cosmic religion is primitive, or that women are inferior to men. However, part of her critique does in fact apply to Pieris' view of the meta/cosmic complementarity, especially in her usage "domestication" as the state of cosmic religion via the metacosmic import.

An important difference between Chung and Pieris's work lies

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[24]It was Chung who introduced me to Pieris' work at a lecture and in discussion with her on April 20th, 1994, at the University of Vermont, in Burlington, USA.

precisely within the area of interreligious *praxis*. Whereas Pieris' dialectical method calls for "symbiosis" (Pieris 1996, 161), Chung's feminist methodology calls for a "survival-liberation centred syncretism" (Chung, 113). This is an important distinction because Pieris defines syncretism as "a haphazard mixing of religions" and symbiosis as a location where each religion is "challenged by the other religion's unique approach to the liberationist aspirations of the poor"(1996, 161). Moreover, syncretism does not really exist among the poor, argues Pieris, but is simply imposed on them by outside observers. Chung argues that syncretism is in fact the religion of the poor in Asia, especially poor women (113). It makes sense that Pieris would oppose syncretism because it cannot function very well in his clearly delineated approach to meta/cosmic interdependence. Syncretism would appear to be too messy for Pieris' dialectical approach. Symbiosis implies the creative and constantly changing ideal of the dialectical model. Yet for Chung, poor women have always woven together diverse religious elements in order to survive in the wilderness. Chung writes that "in their struggle for survival and liberation in this unjust, women-hating world, poor women have approached many different religious sources for sustenance and empowerment" (*ibid.*). Pieris' dialectical approach can limit his ability to confront cosmic religion on its own terms, and it can undermine his attempt to learn from the experiences of the "Third Magisterium." Pieris' dialectics ultimately restrict the methodological primacy he seeks to accord to the epistemologies of popular religion, which are for the most part cosmic oriented and, as he and Chung would argue, women-centred. In the closing chapter, I will return to the question of popular religion and the apparent failure on the part of liberation theology to grant it a positive epistemological value.

In conclusion, Aloysius Pieris has developed an important method of interreligious *praxis* that is rooted in the struggles and experiences of the "Third Magisterium." However, his method subtly implicates him in the same Christ-*against*-Religion paradigm he himself has repudiated. Can a dialectical method truly celebrate alterity while being authentically rooted in one's own traditions and culture? Or do we need to soften the oppositional ethos in order to genuinely meet the 'other.' Such a critique is risky in the face of the forces of sin and evil that enslave the poor, oppressed, and marginalized every day. Furthermore, any attempt at critically engaging with the liberationist method, a method that is deemed overly confrontational by hegemonic discourses, runs the risk of being used to discredit those same epistemologies one is attempting to support. Is Jon Sobrino expressing the same fear when he speaks of the irreconcilable duality of the Reign and anti-Reign in liberation theology (Sobrino/Ellacuría, 43)? As we broach this question, we are confronted with a journey that will take us across borders, that of the *eschaton*. Wilderness and its relationship to the underside of history, or to use Latino theologian Orlando Espín's designation the "vanquished of history," will be the theological landscape I want to explore in the next chapter. Can the struggle of the poor and marginalized in the wilderness of history help liberation theology take seriously the epistemologies of popular religion - in all their complexity, messiness, and interreligious dynamism? Vanquishment in the wilderness is our starting point for this open ended journey.

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them: "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then the Lord said the Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day... When the Israelites saw it , they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what he has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs , an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'"

Exodus 16: 2-4a, 15-16

Vanquishment in the Wilderness

Cosmic religiosity (i.e., tribal and clanic religions, as well as the popular forms of the metacosmic religions...) was looked down upon as an immature and infantile stage of spiritual development. This approach has resulted in a distorted view of the Asian religious ethos. One aspect of this distortion is the underestimation of the liberative potential of cosmic religiosity.
Aloysius Pieris

This last chapter will act not so much as a conclusion, but as a starting point that seeks to address the landscape of wilderness and its relationship to the beyond. Like all Christian theology that turns its gaze toward the beyond, questions of eschatology will conspicuously arise. I use the term beyond here not only to point toward the transcendent reality of Christian faith and *praxis*, but also toward the utopia of liberation for which all liberation theology is concerned and to which all liberationists, including myself, are deeply committed. With Catherine Keller, I too wish to experiment "with an edge of theological discourse, which divests itself of finalities without doubting the powers of closure" (1996, 302). Keller's "counter-apocalyptic" reading of John's (of Patmos) *Revelation* is an attempt at a "dis/closure" of finality that remains open-ended. Her critique of liberationist closure has been an insightful reminder of the manifold ways Christian liberationists utopia can result in disillusionment for Christians and 'non-Christians,' particularly from poor and marginalized communities. In a moving description of a recent trip to El Salvador, Keller tells the story of Maria Benevides, a facilitator in indigenous poor communities, who tries to re-think her spirituality in light of the signing of peace accords which ended that country's long civil war. In the diminishing hope for justice that the peace accords promised, Keller tells us that Benevides has given up on language of "struggle" and feels she no longer wants to be the "crucified." Keller explains that during the war, the Salvadoran people felt united and knew the enemy. Now in a situation where there is peace but no justice and a democracy without liberation, the ongoing resistance work has become more ambiguous (1996, 278). Instead of struggle, Benevides speaks now of "being," and of "living the way." Keller interprets Benevides as having "stepped beyond the apocalyptic cycle of dualism and disappointment, of messianism and martyrdom - out of the oppositionalism of the struggle"(*ibid.*, 280). Yet she has not removed herself from the responsibility to and for those endangered people she considers her "true *pueblo*" (*ibid.*). I want to argue that the wilderness experience of the Israelites can speak to the situation Keller is describing. To 'step beyond' (*ekstasis*) rigid oppositionalism is my hope for a more integral and mutual interreligious *praxis*. The unexpected landscape of the wilderness can be a space in between the oppositionalism of oppression and liberation where the doubt of the vanquished calls forth bread from heaven.

In the last chapter, I examined Aloysius Pieris' attempt to fashion an Asian liberation theology that attends to the two most important aspects of religious life in Asia: the many poor and the many religions. Pieris' attempt at devising a theology of *prophetic asceticism* enabled him to dialectically interpret the relationship between the prophetic work of eradicating enslaving poverty and marginalization, and the ascetic work of renouncing wealth through a liberating practice of voluntary poverty. Pieris' theology of *prophetic asceticism* endeavours to repair the split between liberation (the prophetic *praxis* of eradicating injustice) and inculturation (the indigenizing *praxis* of renunciation) which has plagued much Asian theology in the 20th century. Pieris critically engages with Latin American liberationists, discerning in some of their theologies a crypto-Christ-*against*-Religion theology not unlike the triumphalistic theology of 16th century colonial Europe which sought to wipe out so-called 'pagan' beliefs and impose European civilization in Asia. In certain steams of liberation theology from Latin America, religion became the new enemy of the revolutionary or liberative potential of authentic faith in Christ. For Pieris, such a methodology cannot function in Asia, where Christians are a very small minority, and where liberation is dependent on the epistemologies of the poor and oppressed from 'other' religious traditions. Pieris also critically engages with the Asian inculturationists, maintaining that the Christ of the ashram in Bhraminic theology produces a leisure class of renunciates that disregards the epistemologies of lower caste people and of popular religious movements in India. In both the liberationist and inculturationist methods, Pieris exposes a subtle disregard of the more cosmic and popular forms of religion. The liberationist critique of the cosmic stems from an understanding of popular religion as a form of dehistoricized epistemology that upholds the hegemonic framework of status quo. The inculturationists, as we have seen in the work of Bede Griffiths, uphold Brahminic Vedanta as normative and foundational for Christian theology, and frame popular religion as a corruption of 'official' Hindu spiritual life. In both cases, Pieris argues that popular forms of religion are constructed as deviations from true and authentic

Christian faith.

Pieris is critical of any methodology that disregards the experiences of the "Third Magisterium" - the poor, oppressed, and marginalized - arguing that it cannot be liberative and does not reflect historical Christian discipleship. Pieris has set-out to both reclaim a place for cosmic religion in is his theology, and to recognize the prominent place woman have played in popular forms of religion. Pieris does so by forging a dialectical relationship between "fire" and "water," and correspondingly, between *gnosis/prajna* and *agape/karuna*, which constitute the holistic spiritual life in both the cosmic and metacosmic realms. The cosmic elements of fire and water utilized by Pieris do not only illustrate his dialectical method, but also refer to the natural sacraments of cosmic religions, the "drama of a perennial struggle told and retold in so many ways by so many people" (1996, 8).

However, as we have seen earlier, Pieris' dialectics are hampered by his meta/cosmic construct which subtly essentializes the domesticating role of the metacosmic 'beyond' in relation to the cosmic 'now.' I want to argue that Pieris and other liberation theologians who lay claim to a dialectical method must rethink the positionality of the present-oriented in relation to their beyond-oriented ideal of liberation. With Pieris, I too believe that the Christian monastic tradition has much to teach about liberation. The landscape of the wilderness will be the focus of this chapter as I try to weave together important threads from the monastic, feminist, and liberationist traditions of Christian experience. Locating the wilderness as a site of theological investigation is not an attempt to discredit the notion of liberation in liberation theology. Rather, I wish to explore the wilderness landscape as a theological tool for a more complex exposition of popular religion as a disruptive and survival-centred, and for the most part syncretic, hermeneutic of suspicion vis-à-vis the normative hegemonic theological readings imposed upon it in much liberation theology. We can only begin this journey in the wilderness by looking at what we mean when we say popular religion.

UPHOLDING OR DISRUPTING THE STATUS QUO

Popular religion is a phenomenon that is difficult to define; it takes on varying characteristics which are contingent to its various socio-historical, cultural, and economic contexts. Although it would be reductionistic to define popular religion simply as the religion of the poor, in this chapter, I will focus entirely on specific forms of popular religion that derive from marginalized and oppressed communities. It is important to emphasize from the outset, that this critical examination of popular religion frames the "faith of the people," not as the quaint folkloric practices of unenlightened superstitious people, but as the *locus theologicus* of communities seeking to survive in a hostile environment. All major religious traditions have popular forms of religious practices and theologies, and many of these popular traditions incorporate syncretic elements in their symbolic universes. These practices and theologies have been shaped by, as well as opposed to, the 'official' theologies produced by what sociologist Max Weber has labelled the "religious virtuosi." Groups of "religious virtuosi" are responsible for defining what is normative in religious orthodoxy and orthopraxis. However, the majority of believers do not and cannot have access to these elite pursuits and therefore create a universe of symbols, practices, and discourses that can on one level, reflect the 'official' theological universe, but on an other more significant level, they also create a theological universe that reflects and speaks to their daily realities and experiences.

My understanding of popular religion is informed by Antonio Gramsci's positive appraisal of folklore as a defining factor in the birth of a new society. Gramsci writes that

> folklore should instead be studied as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition... to 'official' conceptions of the world... that have succeeded one another in the historical process... Folklore must not be considered an eccentricity, an oddity or a picturesque element, but as something which is very serious and is to be taken seriously. (1985, 189-91)

For Gramsci, the role of folklore is bound up with his understanding of the "organic intellectual." The notion of the "organic intellectual" in the *Prison Notebooks* , which has been influential for many liberation theologians seeking a more positive appraisal of popular religion, was developed in order to counter what Gramsci perceived to be a reductionistic reading of Lenin's idea of the vanguard party. In Gramsci's view, all people are intellectuals, and therefore he rejects the division of labour that exists between bourgeois intellectuals, who provide theory, and the mass base, or workers, who passively receive it. Gramsci is intent on removing the distinction between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals simply do not exist in his understanding of philosophy. For Gramsci, "all men are 'philosophers,' by defining the limits and characteristics of the 'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody" (1971, 323). However, not all persons "have in society the function of intellectuals" (*ibid.*, 9). The base can produce their own intellectuals or philosophers, who align themselves very closely to popular cultures, to the working classes, to those areas close to the "organic intellectual's" spheres of activity. The "spontaneous philosophy" to which Gramsci refers is the common wisdom, the common sense, the epistemologies of the base which generate themselves out of the experiences of the subaltern. Gramsci refers to Marxism in his *Prison Notebooks* as the "philosophy of *praxis*." On one level this was a euphemism used to prevent the censorship of his work by Fascist authorities in Italy, but on another level it points to his understanding of philosophy: namely, not as a form of professional theory-making by a small number of elite intellectuals, but as a collective engagement in the socio-historical and cultural spheres where all people are involved, whether it be implicitly or unconsciously (*ibid.*, 321). The implicit or unconscious level of the philosophy of *praxis* is what Gramsci calls "spontaneous philosophy" insofar as "spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the history of the subaltern classes" (ibid., 196). The role of the "organic intellectual" is to be dialectically associated with the "spontaneous philosophy" of the subaltern classes. It is in this realm that much of what Gramsci has labelled 'folklore' can be discerned, and what distinguishes the elite philosopher from the organic philosopher is this dialectical engagement with the folklore of the subaltern classes.

Gramsci's dialectical construct of hegemony and its relationship to the subaltern sphere is very important for understanding popular religion. Orlando Espín's theological reflections on Latino or Hispanic popular Catholicism offers a methodology that is deeply indebted to Gramscian dialectics[1]. In Espín's writings, popular Catholicism, and popular religion in general, always conveys a sense of doubt, or suspicion, about one group's hegemonic legitimation in society. In other words, the process of legitimizing hegemonic discourses in society always involves a process of internalization of those discourses

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[1]See especially chapter 4 in *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (1997), pp 91-110.

on the part of the subaltern. However, this process of hegemonic legitimization also produces a margin of doubt. For Espín, popular religion is the concrete symbolization of a hermeneutic of suspicion in relation to hegemonic structures that define it (1977, 99). Hence, it is in this sense that popular religion can be either an accomplice (a palliative that supports oppressive structures) or a challenge (the seed of liberation) to hegemonic structures. Espín maintains that considering the amount of power wielded by the subaltern in society, and the lack of control over hegemonic discourses,

> the more frequent outcome , as least on the part of Latino popular Catholicism, has been a mixture of roles in the subaltern attempt to survive in an adverse context, while somehow hoping for and promoting a favourable change in that context (*ibid.*).

The double dimension of popular religion is not new, having been defined as such at both the Medellín (1968) Puebla (1979) Latin American Episcopal Conferences. Although the Puebla conference had many more positive statements about the role of popular religion in the Latin American context, both Conferences basically defined popular religion as a valid religious expression permeated with the Word of G*d but in need of further evangelization[2]. This was the stance adopted by many liberationists in Latin America, aside from a group of theologians from Argentina who were developing a more popular-centred theology known as the 'theology of the people.'[3] In fact, the Uruguayan Marxist liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo, lamented

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[2]Michael R. Candelaria's *Popular Religion and Liberation: The Dilemma of Liberation Theology* (1990) treats this topic in more detail in the first chapter, pp 1-38.

[3]See Candelaria (1990), chapter 2, where he examines the attitude toward popular religion in the work of Argentinean theologian Juan L. Scannone. Unfortunately, Scannone's work has not been translated into french or english making it impossible to find his work here. Candelaria critiques Scannone's emphasis on populism for being overly romantic in its definition of 'the people' and nationhood. See p. 103.

the Medellín document on popular religion for being anti-liberationist. Segundo regarded popular religion as an expression of alienation. Like the liberationists we looked at in the first chapter, Segundo makes a very clear distinction between faith and religion in his work, whereby authentic Christian faith is the historical participation in liberative *praxis* and religion is an ahistorical quest for magical solutions (Candelaria, 1990, 114). Following Lenin, Segundo does not believe in the spontaneity of the masses and recognizes in Teilhard de Chardin's concept of entropy (not unlike Lenin's "law of least resistance") a fundamental law of human behaviour (*ibid.*, 79). The result is what Michael Candelaria describes as the mass/minority dialectic in Segundo's work. This dialectic positions the masses as objects to be emancipated spearheaded by a vanguard minority that works in mutual relation with the oppressed sectors of society.

Although Segundo represents an extreme example of the negative evaluation of popular religion in Latin American liberation theology, many of his peers have adopted the Medellín and Puebla Conferences' double dimension construction of the popular and folk aspects of culture. Pieris has shown very convincingly that liberative and enslaving elements are at work in all religious traditions - including the 'official' traditions (1988a, 88). Yet the double dimension critique is usually brought forth only in respect to popular forms of religion. Pieris has argued that the double dimension construction of popular religion lacks a rigorous evaluation of the liberative aspects that stem out of the context of popular religious movements. There is no doubt that some forms of popular religion work as palliatives for oppression and enslavement. However, the doubts Pieris entertains about this construct derive from the definitions of popular religion offered by liberationists and, more importantly, their understanding of the role popular religion plays in liberation movements (1996, 158). Chilean liberation theologian Segundo Galilea states that evangelization, or what Gustavo Gutiérrez has labelled "conscienticizing evangelization[4]," is the key to the liberative potential of popular religion. In an essay, entitled "The Theology of Liberation and the Place of 'Folk Religion,'" Galilea writes that

> there is one point - and a most important one - on which all theologians of liberation with any pastoral sense agree: that from whichever point of view one approaches the question, folk religion has to be the object of a process of liberating evangelization if it is to develop a consciousness of change and a spirituality of liberation in the people (Eliade, Tracy 1980, 44).

The "points of view" to which Galilea is referring above are: on the one hand, those who adhere to the Marxist method with its emphasis on socio-economic liberation, and on the other, those theologians who employ a method rooted in popular movements which emphasizes cultural liberation[5]. In both methods, argues Galilea, folk religion is dependent on the aim and effectiveness of "liberating evangelization." Galilea understands this situation as one of the most pressing pastoral challenges facing liberation theology in its attempt to carve out a *theopraxis* that is authentically liberating and empowering for Latin Americans (*ibid.*). Can popular religion be simply reduced to a pastoral challenge? Orlando Espín's emphasis on the element of subaltern doubt, or suspicion, points to a different direction in understanding and constructing popular religion without reducing it to a pastoral

[4]In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez defines "conscienticizing evangelization" as proclaiming the 'good news' of the liberating G*d who preferentially opts for the poor and oppressed, pp. 69-70. Paule Friere defined "conscientization" as the process whereby the oppressed reject the oppressive consciousness which dwells in them, become aware of their context, and find their own tools or language to free themselves.

[5]For a good examination and critique of both approaches to popular religion, see Candelaria's *Popular Religion and Liberation: The Dilemma of Liberation Theology* (1990).

challenge to be overcome.

Not all liberation theologians instrumentalize popular religion as objects for "liberating evangelization," however many liberationists who utilize a Marxist method do not give popular religion epistemological primacy in their work. For Espín, popular religion is popular not simply because it is widespread, but because it is the "people's own." Hence, Espín is resolute in understanding the people's faith as a *locus theologicus* and not simply as a pastoral or catechetical problem. Espín has framed his understanding of popular religion through the concept of the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful. In order to highlight the role of the laity in church life, the Vatican II Council proclaimed the *sensus fidelium* to be infallible[6] insofar as the faith community is a pneumatological community animated by the Spirit of G*d which intuitively or spontaneously grasps the 'truth' of G*d at work in their lives. This is the active charism of discernment at work within the church, the people of G*d, where tradition is mediated through the corporate living of the faith. Espín writes that

> the vast majority of Catholics in the history of the universal Church have always been and still are the lay poor. Consequently, given that Catholic doctrine holds that the Church is the infallible witness to revelation, then this must mean that the lay poor (i.e., the immense majority of the Church throughout twenty centuries) are, too, infallible witnesses to revelation. However, the way these millions have understood, received, and expressed their faith is undeniably "popular Catholicism." Therefore, Christian theologians cannot simply ignore the real faith of the Church any more than they could ignore revelation. Popular Catholicism is the real faith of the Church, whether we like to academically and institutionally admit it or not (2-3).

[6]The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (n.12), teaches that "the body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief..." when it "shows universal agreement in matter of faith and morals." This does mean that the community of faith is never wrong, rather it suggest that the experience of the faithful is an important source of theology and that the laity is an integral part of ecclesiology. Unfortunately, in some contemporary matters of church debate the spirit of the *sensus fidelium* is rather absent and infallibility has become the sole privilege of the Pope.

Espín is critical of the ways both conservatives and progressives instrumentalize popular religion to suit their own agendas, and he is also critical of academic and institutional discourses that seek to both reify the folk aspects and catechize the so-called doctrinal deviancies of the living faith of the people. In Espín's work, popular Catholicism, and popular religion on the whole, is given epistemological primacy not simply because he has framed it in relation to the Catholic doctrine of *sensus fidelium*, but because the sense of the subaltern faithful always entertains an element of suspicion in relation to hegemonic structures.

In christological terms, Espín expresses this idea through the concept of vanquishment. For Jesus, Espín argues, G*d is a caring G*d, a parental G*d who cares for Her/His children enough to intervene in human history in order to make it better. However, as the Gospel narratives show, in G*d's intervention for human liberation, Jesus' personal reality became definitely worse (1997, 14). Espín argues that Jesus' view of G*d "and God's 'Reign' provoked his own personal vanquishment. *Jesus did not just fail, he was vanquished as insignificant*" (*ibid.*). Espín understands Jesus as a preacher of, and worker for, the Reign of G*d. This means that for a person living in first century Judea (Judah) - and especially for someone living in its most oppressed region Galilee - to speak of G*d's Reign had certain political and religious consequences, one of which was the improvement or betterment of the present historical reality. Seen through this lens, the Gospel narrative reveals Jesus as a person who had failed. His preaching was "not acceptable, or not accepted, or both" (*ibid.*). For Espín, Jesus was a victim of the oppressive structures he preached against and was also easily "disposed of" indicating that his social status was insignificant to the powers of the time. Thus the G*d that one finds through Espín's historical Jesus is a G*d who cares for and intervenes in history in order to liberate humans. Yet this same G*d is also a G*d who, in doing so, "encounters failure, rejection, and the victimizing treatment given the politically and religiously insignificant" (1997, 15). Belief in the resurrection reveals that this experience of failure and rejection is constitutive of Jesus' ultimate success. For Espín all Christian attempts at understanding divinity must include Jesus' experience of vanquishment and failure. To claim otherwise is to domesticate and sanitize the historical Jesus and to cast the resurrection in the light of conquest and triumphalism. For the powerful, human failure could not, and cannot be, an analogy for G*d, but for the powerless it was, and is, sustenance in the wilderness. Espín writes that

> the Amerindian and the African in this hemisphere received the Christian message as victims; this occurred only because they had been made victims by Christians... From the very beginning, therefore, the Christianity received and understood by the people (i.e., "popular" Catholicism) was moulded by the experience of vanquishment as its constitutive context (1997, 22).

This is why, believes Espín, much of U.S. Latino popular Catholicism is focused on the cross, on Good Friday, while many Euro-American communities emphasize the resurrection of Easter Sunday (1997, 23-4). The experience of U.S. Latinos is one of marginalization through the intersections of race, class, and gender. Their experience of G*d in light of Jesus' crucifixion is one of victimization and vanquishment. Hence the affinity between Jesus' experience of vanquishment and their own in the U.S. is, Espín argues, the first step in recognizing the liberating seed embedded within popular religion. Vanquishment always carries with it the suspicion of the subaltern who faces daily struggles to survive in the wilderness. Such a doubt must first be recognized and appreciated before liberation theologians seek to intervene with their, albeit important, tools of conscientization. Popular religion is not simply a nuisance; not is it just a pastoral problem; it is more than quaint practices and beliefs for academic study. Popular religion is the symbolization of a hermeneutic of suspicion and it is characterized, according to Espín, "as an effort by the subaltern to explain, justify, and somehow control a social reality that appears too dangerous to confront in terms and through means other than the mainly symbolic" (1997, 92).

Can the notion of liberation be an obstacle for a complex understanding of popular religion? How does the wilderness concretely challenge the notion of liberation in relation to the vanquished? Feminist and womanist theologies have elaborated a new and challenging methodology in relation to the issue of liberation. Survival and a "quality of life ethic" have become a more discernable locations for the experiences of some feminists and womanist theologians.

SURVIVAL AS WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

In a new preface to the 20th anniversary edition of his 1969 book, entitled *Black Theology & Black Power*, James H. Cone reflects on the limitations of his early christological perspective in the context of the Black Power movement of the 1960's. Cone, who like Pieris, was directly involved at the EATWOT meetings in the 70's and 80's. He figured prominently as a critic of the class bias of some Latin American liberation theology and writes of a new awareness of his theology instilled in him by the black womanist perspectives of, among others, Delores S.Williams, Katie Geneva Cannon, and Cheryl Townsend

Gilkes.[7] The womanist critique was not one solely based on gender issues, it also discerned a particularly white European foundation to Cone's work. Cone writes about the painful realization of how his graduate training in a white theological institution never offered him the opportunity of studying black history or theology. Focusing on his training in the dialectical theology of Karl Barth, Cone writes that he began to question the Barthian influence in his theology. He began to see how the Barthian foundation to his work created an atmosphere that was deeply exclusionary of other religious perspectives. Therefore, Cone was forced to re-think his christological perspective from the point-of-view of 'non-Christian' African-American experiences (especially the work of Malcolm X) of racist marginalization in a white supremacist society.[8]

Although Cone believes that one of the important limitations of *Black Theology & Black Power* is the lack of class analysis, for which he was reproached by his Latin American EATWOT colleagues, his realization of the exclusionary threads that ran through his theology is particularly significant for interreligious thought and *praxis*. As I have argued in the first chapter, liberation theologies must attempt to dislodge the dualism that perpetuates the stigmatization of religion at the expense of faith. Liberation theologians must embark on a process that will open their theology to the cries of the truly "uninvited" - the 'non-Christian.' 'Third World' feminist and womanist perspectives have widened the narrow gates of analysis within liberation theologies. As we have seen in the third chapter, a gender analysis has recently

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[7] For diverse perspectives on womanist theology see *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*. Emilie M. Townes ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

[8] See James H. Cone's "Preface to the 1989 Edition" in *Black Theology & Black Power* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) pp. vii-xiv.

entered into the work of Aloysius Pieris. James H. Cone's revision of the European bias of his work, as well as Gustavo Gutiérrez' re-thinking of gender and culture issues in his work,[9] illustrate the importance of mutual dialogue that not only tolerates, but upholds differences. Can liberation theology, however, which constructs a system where liberation and oppression are so mutually exclusive, easily overcome the religion/faith dualism? The responses to evil and oppression in liberation struggles tend take on very dualistic tones. I would argue that this is almost unavoidable in the context of oppression. The theologians who do theology from the perspective of the voiceless advance the notion, as I have shown earlier, that the perpetuation of evil and oppression is the result of a distortion of *vera religio* - which has come to mean faith, or revelation, in contemporary parlance. Barth's dialectical theology was contextual to the situation of the 20's and 30's, where he perceived the Nazi ascendency to power as the quintessential illustration of what he would call "unbelief" - the distortion of authentic revelation into *falsa religio.* How can this dualism be overcome, in a situation where the victims of oppression must speak out against the injustices that are the reality of their lives? In other words, how does one not conceptualize liberation in dualistic tones without falling prey to a lessening of the liberative challenge wielded against oppressive and dehumanizing forces?

In recent women-centred, feminist, and womanist theological perspectives, the context of oppression and marginalization have revealed a somewhat different approach that touches upon aspects of christology, ecclesiology, missiology, and interreligious *praxis.* Womanist theologian Delores S. Williams has articulated a perspective

[9] See Gutiérrez' "Introduction to the Revised Edition: Expanding the View" in *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. xvii-xlvi.

called "survival strategies" in the book, *Sisters in the Wilderness*. Williams speaks directly to the plight of African-American women in the U.S. who have been pressed into the role of surrogacy in white supremacist America. The focus of *Sisters in the Wilderness* is the biblical character of Hagar: the Egyptian slave woman who belonged to Abraham and Sarah (Gen.16), who gave birth to Ishmael from Abraham, and who was dismissed by her slave masters into the desert, where G*d promised her to make Ishmael into a great nation (Gen. 21).[10] Hagar, in Williams' book, is emblematic of the plight of black women in the U.S., before and after the abolition of slavery, who were forced into the role of surrogate mothers for white women, and into sexual surrogacy for white men. Hagar is the symbol of the "wilderness-experience" for Williams, an experience that black people, especially slave women, have had to endure for centuries in America. The "wilderness-experience" that African-American people have had to endure because of slavery, racism, and economic oppression has generated what Katie Geneva Cannon has called a "survival ethic"[11] - especially among black women. In speaking about what the symbol of Hagar represents to poor black women, Williams writes that

> the hope oppressed black women get from the Hagar-Sarah texts has more to do with survival and less to do with liberation. When they and their families get into serious social and economic straits, black Christian women have believed that God helps them make a way out of no way. This is precisely what God did for Hagar and Ishmael when they were expelled from Abraham's house and were wandering in the desert without food and water... In the context of the survival struggle of poor African-American women this translates into God providing Hagar with *new vision* to see survival resources where she saw

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[10] Ishmael is considered the ancestor of the bedouin tribes of the southern wilderness (Gen. 16:12) to which, through Abraham, the Muslims trace their ancestry.

[11] See Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

> none before. God's promise to Hagar throughout the story is one of survival (of her progeny) and not liberation (1993, 198).

In Genesis 16, Hagar refers to G*d as *El-roi*, the G*d of Seeing: namely, the G*d that sees, acknowledges, and ministers to the survival needs of oppressed people. Williams is quite explicit about stating that a "survival ethic" is not opposed to a liberative ethic. The issue for Williams is not which strategy is right or wrong; the issue is about an understanding the biblical G*d that allows the oppressed and marginalized to "hear and see the *doing* of the good news in ways that are meaningful for their lives" (*ibid.*, 199).

A "survival ethic" is also implicitly described in the autobiographical testimonies of Catholic Quiché Guatemalan woman Rigoberta Menchú. Menchú, recipient of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her work among the indigenous peoples of Central America, does not explicitly articulate a systematic survival strategy as a theological enterprise, as does Dolores S. Williams. Menchú may not be a theologian by training in the academic sense, yet she is a theologian in the more Gramscian sense of the word: she speaks of G*d out of her own lived experience and by her *praxis* among the indigenous poor. In the book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, which is a series of recorded sessions about her life as an indigenous Catholic woman in Guatemala, Menchú bears witness to the suffering of her own Quiché people and recounts the creative strategies that have helped them and their children survive under an oppressive Guatemalan regime. Some of these strategies involve indigenous practices and rituals that hold sacred the earth as well as the peoples' ancestors. Menchú's experience with her people has also been a "wilderness-experience," in which the indigenous people of Guatemala are forced off their ancestral lands by wealthy landowners and the government to wander the hillsides and forests in order to find suitable ground to harvest their staple food, maize. Menchú speaks to the importance of her native culture when she writes that

> as very small children we receive an education which is very different from white children, *ladinos*. We Indians have more contact with nature. That's why they call us polytheistic. But we are not polytheistic... or if we are, it's good, because it's our culture, our customs... Our parents tell us: 'Children, the earth is the mother of man, because she gives him food.' This is especially true for us whose life is based on the crops that we grow. Our people eat, maize, beans, and plants. We can't eat ham, or cheese, or things made with equipment, with machines... This is why, before we sow our maize, we have to ask the earth's permission... The prayers and ceremonies are for the whole community. We pray to our ancestors, reciting their prayers which have been known to us for a long time - a very, very long time... We say the names of the earth, the God of the earth, and the God of the water (1984, 56-57).

How does one respond to such practices in the light of the faith/religion dualism, as well as in light of the negative appreciation of popular religious practices that plague some liberation theology? Are the beliefs and practices Menchú describes to be understood as the manifestation of an unenlightened worship of nature and the myth of eternal return that crystallizes class oppression into a monolithic and unchangeable predicament of the poor? Can the practices of the indigenous poor have value within the faith/liberation vs. religion/oppression paradigm? I believe that a deeper understanding of culture, as well as a paradigm shift in understanding how survival strategies are meaningful in the lives of the poor and marginalized can cut through the methodological opposition between liberation and oppression. Menchú believes that the Bible is one "weapon" at her disposal in the ongoing survival of indigenous people. She writes that it is not the Bible "itself [that] brings about change, it's more that each one of us learns to understand his reality and wants to devote himself to others" (*ibid.*, 135). Menchú is also concerned about what Williams has called "quality of life" strategies: namely, the resources available to a people in the "wilderness." These strategies do not only seek liberation from oppressive forces, they also seek a "seeing G*d" who will instill a new vision of struggle and be a support for survival in a hostile landscape.

In a "survival ethic" the path itself is the goal. The path, which creates itself where one treads, is the landscape where survival strategies can take root. Was this not Hagar's experience in the wilderness? A "survival ethic" is not opposed to liberation, instead it seeks to make liberation a lived "way out of no way" rather than a measure of success. Survival strategies do not seek to justify oppression by abandoning faith in the eschatological hope of liberation; they are a protest in the face of injustice. Survival maintains it's quest for liberation, but in a manner that is not as starkly dualistic as some eschatological visions of the Reign. Like Hagar's "seeing G*d," who does not liberate Hagar from slavery (Gen.16:7-15), but instead gives her and her child assurances of survival in the "wilderness," Menchú uses the tools handed down to her from her ancestors, as well as the Bible, as assurances by G*d of the survival of her people. Liberation is an ultimate concern, but in the present moment, a quality of life "survival ethic" enables Menchú to go on living in a hostile environment, which can entail, for example, securing enough food for the daily survival of her children. When the religious strategies of the poor are taken seriously, the liberation/oppression opposition does not always apply so neatly, nor can a rigid demarcation of which emancipatory strategy is right or wrong. This does not imply a relativism that ignores the religious roots of a specific tradition. Rather, the aspect of survival of oppression is the common ground that can serve as a heuristic device in order to dismantle highly dualistic ideas of liberation. A "survival ethic" is the outcome of a lived religiosity in the context of the "wilderness." As we have seen in chapter three, Korean feminist and *minjung* [12] theologian, Chung Hyun Kyung, calls this approach a "survival-liberation centred syncretism" because it is informed by one's cultural traditions in a way that does not lead to relativism (1992, 113).

As we have seen in Pieris' theology, syncretism is a concept that many theologians do not accept as legitimate or serious for Christian faith. It is usually associated with the popular religion of the "unenlightened masses." Chung has generated much controversy because of her emphasis on syncretism. However, one must not forget that Christianity is the youngest religion in Korea, and many poor woman, according to Chung, express their Christian beliefs through Buddhist and Shamanistic symbols and idioms which are indigenous to the Korean ethos. As in the storytelling of Menchú, these symbols and practices give women sustenance and empowerment in a world that oppresses on many levels. Chung is hopeful that the Asian model of interreligious *praxis* will move beyond the more Western concept of inter-faith dialogue toward a revolutionary *praxis* of solidarity with the 'Third World' poor.

Can a "survival ethic" push the boundaries of Christian theology toward a more inclusive attitude of the truly "uninvited" - the 'non-Christian?' Such an ethic challenges liberation theologians to look deeply into their own theologies to see if the pillars of support which make up its core are adequate enough to take seriously the survival strategies and epistemologies of the poor and oppressed - Gutiérrez' "uninvited." It also asks many questions about the nature of christology in such a construct. How does a "survival ethic" christology

[12] *Minjung* is a Korean word that means oppressed and dejected people.

speak of the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus? Orlando Espín's christological concept of vanquishment can help locate a christology that stems out of the experiences of failure, survival, and ultimately, suffering. Furthermore, the newly emerging women-centred survival strategies of 'Third World' and African-American theologians give evidence of a critical reassessment of the notion of liberation for people living the "wilderness-experience." The irruption of the 'Third World' involves the totality of experiences of those who were not invited to the 'Wedding Banquet.' According to Pieris, this totality entails the immersion of Christianity in the survival-liberative streams of other religious traditions, including the more popular forms of religion which weave together a syncretic spiritual perspective. We have looked at what the wilderness experience represents from some womanist and indigenous experiences of G*d. What does the wilderness look like from the point of view of the Exodus experience of liberation?

UNEXPECTED BREAD FOR THE LANDLESS

When the Israelites were freed from slavery under Egyptian rule in the book of Exodus, freedom amounted to forty years of wandering in the wilderness before ever seeing a glimpse of the promised land. In fact, a whole generation of ex-slaves had died off before the Israelites arrived in the promised land (Jos 5: 6). Have liberationists seriously engaged with the landscape of the wilderness in their writings? For the most part they have not. In his book on a liberationist spirituality, entitled *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Gustavo Gutiérrez equates the wilderness experience with the solitude of the desert. The struggle against the "dark night of injustice" is the passing through towards the promised land which is the symbolic rendering of the fullness of life in community (1984, 129). Gutiérrez writes that "God, in other words, does not call us to the desert to wander endlessly there, but to pass through it, in order to reach the promised land" (*ibid.*, 132). The desert represents for Gutiérrez, and for other Latin American theologians[13] who have been deeply influenced by his book, the barren land where "the seeds of a new spirituality can germinate" (19). Gutiérrez finds much sustenance in the writings of John of the Cross, the 16th century Spanish mystic and Carmelite reformer, whose *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *Dark Night of the Soul* describe the process of purification which occurs during the journey towards union with G*d. For John of the Cross, the 'dark night' is not to be rejected as evil, nor is it to be avoided. It is an important, in fact intrinsic, guide for the mystic's journey toward G*d. In John's opening poem, he writes this: "Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn, Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!" (1959, 34). The 'dark night' is the "narrow way", the purifying process by which the human being is transformed by G*d. John understands the whole human journey towards G*d as a 'dark night' that purifies attachments and grasping, even (especially) the grasping for G*d. John's 'dark night' is about a metaphorical reality, the journey of faith, which brings the mystic to an encounter with the awesome divine reality - the Ultimate Reality. John also equates the 'dark night' with the wilderness experience of the Israelites, who, after having built the Golden Calf are ordered by G*d to remove all their ornaments (Ex 33: 5). For John, the soul transformed by the 'dark night' is now a soul differently attired, because it has "put on its other and working attire - that of aridity and abandonment" (*ibid.*, 77); it is a soul purified within the landscape of

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[13]See Casaldáliga/Vigil's *Political Holiness* (1994) and Sobrino's *Spirituality of Liberation* (1988) as examples of the impact *We Drink from Our Own Wells* has had on the development of a Latin American liberationist spirituality.

the wilderness.

In Gutiérrez' work, the 'dark night' is also a spiritual journey; it is "like the Jewish people in the wilderness" (1984, 85). In the end, the 'dark night,' as defined by Gutiérrez, is the following of Jesus in authentic discipleship and in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. However, Gutiérrez narrows his focus on the 'dark night' when he equates it simply with injustice. Hence to move out of injustice is to move out of the wilderness and to move into the promised land of liberation and freedom. For Gutiérrez, the "dark night of injustice," quoting Peruvian theologian Hernández Pico, is the journey " 'of an entire people toward its liberation through the desert of structural and organized injustice' " (*ibid.*, 129).

Should the wilderness landscape be rendered simply as a "passing through" experience, or should it be understood as an inherent location of the liberation experience, where the ex-slaves are called to understand G*d's version of freedom: the freedom of being released from the bondage that ex-slaves continue to carry within themselves. Much Latin American liberationist exegesis of the Exodus story does not spend a lot of time on the wanderings in the wilderness. In one such work, Hebrew Bible scholar and Catholic theologian, Jose Severino Croatto, draws on a Ricoeurian hermeneutical approach in order to understand the Exodus event in light of Christ's "consummation" of Jewish Law. Here again, the *adversus judaeos* tradition in the Common Testament unfortunately becomes the *locus* of liberation for Croatto. His hermeneutic of freedom is a journey from Moses through the Hebrew prophets to Jesus and Paul, who are liberators from the 'old' Jewish-legalistic Law to the 'new' Christian law of love. Christ is the 'conscientizing' program that "consummates the Law and 'gathers up' its salvific sense in love" (1981, 66). The wilderness memory is conspicuously absent in this work, although in his preface to the revised edition of *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom*, Croatto responds to claims made by Leonardo Boff that "captivity" and "exile" should be areas of theological enquiry for Latin Americans. Croatto rejects "captivity" as less important than liberation from it, in order to acknowledge a "faith in a liberating God who can still liberate" (v). For Croatto, liberation is structured as a process of liberation from the bondage of Jewish legalism to faith in Christ. I want to argue in response to Croatto that exile is a legitimate area of theological concern, not so much as distinct from liberation[14], but as a process of unlearning and purification of the ways of the slave-master. Wilderness is also a theological landscape where the *adversus judaeos* tradition can be encountered and unlearned as we move toward the promised land.

In a work, entitled *On Exodus*, by Salvadoran Protestant Marxist biblicist George V. Pixley interprets the roles played by Moses and Joshua in the Exodus story as vanguard leaders, who, alongside "Yahweh the warrior," bring forth the Israelites from oppression to liberation. The wilderness is described as a moment of counter-revolutionary struggle that threatens the liberation project. Published in 1983, *On Exodus* was written at a very turbulent time in Central America when Salvadorans were still living in the shadow of Archbishop Romero's assassination and when the anti-Sandinista Contras, backed by the U.S. government, were making their presence as an anti-revolutionary force in Nicaragua. Pixley's reading of the

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[14]At a recent *Call to Action* conference in Detroit (Nov 97), Michael Crosby O.F.M. Cap., gave a keynote lecture, entitled "Energy In Our Exile," on abandoning the liberation paradigm for one of exile in our work within progressive Catholic communities. My understanding of wilderness, brings liberation and exile in conversation rather than in opposition. For Crosby, the liberation paradigm has brought with it disillusionment and despair in difficult times, therefore exile should be the more appropriate paradigm for the marginalized within the church. But his definition of the liberation paradigm does not bring forth the wilderness landscape as post-liberative in the on going process of liberation.

wilderness landscape should be understood in this context. Revolutionary ferment was strong in Central America and many worried of the danger of falling prey to romantic idealism. In response to the "grumblings" in the wilderness (Ex 16: 2-3), Pixley writes that

> the want was genuine, and the demand for nourishment just. The revolutionary vanguard must have foreseen these problems of transition, and, to the extent that it was incapable of solving them, it deserved healthy criticism. But what we have here is not healthy criticism of defects in the revolutionary process (99-100).

Pixley's emphasis throughout his exegetical work is on the vanguard, and like Croatto, on the importance of proper conscientization or liberating evangelization. Are the grumblings in the wilderness unhealthy criticisms of the liberative journey? Or are we seeing the process of a people trying to shed off the internal chains of domination? Hegemonic discourses are being invoked in the wilderness insofar as the false consciousness of the security of Egyptian bread is being manifest. The landless are worried that they will not have bread to eat, or even to grow, in such a hostile environment. A doubt arises. The security of bread was part of one's reality as slave. As a freed slave, the paternalistic relationship between master and slave is severed. It is a scary transition, and one that needs support and sustenance. Similarly, the prisoner who is released from a long prison sentence must have the support of family and community in order to soften the shock of such a transition. Contemporary punitive systems are not equipped to deal with this situation. The new 'outmate' is made to fend for him or herself. It is not unusual that a newly freed 'outmate' returns to systems of survival that are the only tools available to him or her. The freed slave cannot understand the hostile landscape of the wilderness as freedom; it is not what freedom is supposed to be. The wilderness is a shock; it not the promise of the Exodus. Faith in the liberation process turns quickly to resentment and the false memory of security distorts the real nature of slavery. But the wilderness has its ways. Doubt brings forth manna.

Protestant biblicist Walter Brueggemann describes the wilderness as a "land without promise and without hope" (1977, 29). He likens the wilderness to the formless void and darkness before creation in the Genesis story. Hence, the wilderness is not just an in-between place, as we have seen in Gutiérrez' work, rather as Brueggemann argues, it "is the historical form of chaos and is Israel's memory of how it was before it was created a people" (*ibid.*). The wilderness is part of Israel's "dangerous memory" of displacement, landlessness, and ultimately peoplehood. The wilderness is also the landscape of internal metanoia, or conversion experience, a purification where idolatry (the false gods of the slave-master) is unlearned and where the newly-freed slaves are forged in the flames of genuine liberation. The wilderness experience is that arduous and complex process by which liberation can become a reality in the day to day lives of freed slaves. An important wilderness event occurs when G*d responds to the people's grumblings and doubt with manna, or bread from heaven. "What is it ?" The people respond to G*d's gift of bread with a question. Doubt always evokes faith, its shadow side, while liberation calls the people forth into the chaos of the wilderness. Manna is wilderness bread, which cannot be hoarded, stored, or stockpiled. Wilderness bread, unlike Egyptian bread, is not a bread of security, but a bread of survival and sustenance. The landless are given bread in the wilderness, and if it is hoarded, wilderness bread breeds worms and becomes foul (Ex 16: 20). Manna is a symbol of G*d's desire to break the patterns of the slave/master relationship. G*d teaches the people to unlearn the patterns of domination in the wilderness so that when they arrive to the promised land, the Israelites will govern themselves and relate to their neighbours in a radically new way. Is not the idea of the sabbath, and ultimately the Jubilee, a radically different expression of social relations. On the fiftieth year, the sabbatical year, debts will be cancelled, slaves will be freed, the land will lay fallow, and the landless returned to their land, because says the Lord: "the Israelites are my servants... Who I brought out of Egypt..." (Lev 25: 55). Released from slavery under the Egyptian Pharaoh, the Israelites must face the chaos of the wilderness in order to dislodge themselves from the hegemonic framework of domination and the patterns of slavery. The Israelites carry those structures into the wilderness where they encounter a new kind of bread, bread of faith in the midst of landlessness and hunger. Hunger was what the Israelites were expecting in the wilderness, instead they were satiated with a radically unexpected bread. "What is it ?" It is not the security of Egypt, but the insecurity of a radicalized future. A future that cultivates hope and the willingness to carry on in a hostile chaotic terrain.

To summon up the "dangerous memory" of the wilderness could be interpreted to mean that liberation has already occurred and that those caught within the vicious cycle of oppression and poverty are called to survive in the wilderness and thus uphold the status quo. The wilderness that I am evoking is a landscape that cannot be dislodged from the liberation experience. The wilderness is a marker that points to the daily spirituality of the "wretched of the earth." It is a spirituality of survival in an unfriendly terrain, a spirituality of hope and struggle for a transformed present and future, a spirituality where the poor and excluded can be subjects of history and thus 'drink from their own wells.' Orlando Espín has argued that to understand popular religious expression through the Gramscian framework of hegemony/subaltern, is to assert the notion that the subaltern - having already incorporated hegemonic interests in its own discourse - will continually locate itself within the symbolized landscape of doubt. Doubt abides within the relationship with hegemony; the victor cannot completely erase the doubt of the vanquished. It is that doubt - the doubt of the Israelites when confronted with the wilderness that calls forth the manna of faith - which can enable liberationists to understand popular religious movements, in all their syncretic complexity, with less opposition and with more faith in the liberative potential of the vanquished. Espín does not understand the so-called alienating or palliative aspect of popular religion as a pastoral challenge to be overcome. In this sense, the grumbling in the wilderness cannot be defined simply in terms of a counter-revolutionary threat to the revolutionary process. Espín is fashioning a methodology that gives epistemological primacy to the symbolic language of popular religion. The wilderness is a landscape that I have evoked to support Espín's thesis because I believe that some liberationists wrongly levelled their dialectical opposition to oppression at popular religious movements and at other religions in particular. The wilderness can help bracket the oppression-liberation dialectic in order to discern that process of doubt when faced with radical transformation. For Espín, popular religion must be understood as the *locus theologicus* of the people, where engagement with social reality can appear to be "too dangerous to confront through means other than the mainly symbolic" (Espín, 92). If the wilderness evokes doubt, it is because it is so radically different than the slave's security. The wilderness is a space where the vanquished 'other' is encountered and where doubt points to the emergence of a new future, a new kind of bread. Suspicion of the present means that the present is not all that it should be. The wilderness landscape is not all what the present should be. However G*d satiates hunger with bread, a bread that cannot be hoarded. What kind of future does this bread of landlessness promise?

THE ESCHATON AND THE EMPTY TOMB

In Christian theology it is the eschatological promise that brings the present in relationship with the future. Any discourse on eschatology, the study of the 'last things,' brings forth definitions of G*d's Reign, G*d's plan for creation. Every Sunday, Christians around the globe recite the mystery of faith, which is an eschatological faith: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. This is the eschatological vision with which Christian faith is faced. In Catholic theology in general, and in Karl Rahner's work in particular, the resurrection is the "beginning of glory" (1968, 71). "Easter is not the celebration of a past event," writes Rahner, "but a beginning which has already decided the remotest future" (*ibid.*). Unlike Jürgen Moltmann's more dualistic[15] understanding of eschatology as a 'breaking-in' of the future completely distinct from, yet revolutionizing the present, Karl Rahner spoke of the eschatological reality as a future-oriented present reality. For Rahner, the 'already' and the 'not yet' form a relationship whereby present history is understood to offer a point of contact with the eschatological future which began with Christ. However, Rahner (especially in his earlier writings) does not readily distinguish eschatology from ecclesiology. The Church is the sacrament of the Reign for Rahner. Yet the Reign will come into being at the end of

[15]See Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* (1967): "present and future, experience and hope, stand in contradiction to each other in Christian eschatology" (18).

history as an act of G*d in conjunction with concrete works of love (McBrien, 1996). In contrast to Rahner, many liberationists have sought to move away from a church-centred view of the Reign. Yet in concurrence with him, liberationists have defined the eschatological promise in relation to the work of creating a 'liberative Reign' in the 'oppressive present' as a mutual undertaking between humans and G*d[16]. Although Moltmann's eschatological view of history has recently shifted toward a less dualistic and more present-oriented emphasis, his work has more in common with Latin American liberation theologians than the work of Rahner because it offers a clean division between the present reality, which for the poor is oppressive, and the utopian future to come (Keller, 17). Liberation theology is a Reign-centred theology whereby eschatology is understood through the lenses of the biblical prophets - including Jesus - whose message is promise to the poor and oppressed, and judgement to the rich and powerful. The insistence on a clear division between the Reign and the anti-Reign, clearly rendered in the work of Jon Sobrino, addresses liberal European theologies that tend to spiritualize and privatize the promise of the Reign, thereby leaving intact social structures that oppress and marginalize the majority of the world's population. Gutiérrez writes that

> peace, justice, love, and freedom are not private realities; they are not only internal attitudes. They are social realities, implying a historical liberation. A poorly understood spiritualization has often made us forget the human consequences of the eschatological promises and the power to transform unjust social structures which they imply. The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom (1988,

[16] In *Christology at the Crossroads* (1978), Jon Sobrino describes the reinterpretation of eschatological "tensions" taken up by liberation theologians in light of their *praxis*-based methodology. He writes that "eschatology presents the old tensions basic to classical theology in a new light. Where classical theology had talked about God versus creature, nature versus grace, and faith versus works, we must now talk about the church versus the kingdom of God, injustice versus liberation, the old person versus the new person, and the gratuitous entry of the kingdom versus active effort on its behalf" (356).

97).

In the process of challenging the privativizing presuppositions of the dominant European eschatological imagination, liberationists have imagined a utopia - literally a 'no place' - that is fiercely opposed to the state of servitude in which much of the 'Third World' is dwelling.

Similarly, liberationist[17] exegeses on the book of *Revelation* have recognized in John of Patmos an exiled prophet who contrasts the New Jerusalem in sharp opposition to the oppressive Imperial Babylon/Rome under which Christians were a persecuted minority. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist-liberation methodology describes *Revelation* as a "fitting theo-ethical response only in those sociopolitical situations that cry out for justice." (1991, 139). In fact, she considers *Revelation* to be the only book of the Common Testament entirely devoted to issues of power and justice. Fiorenza interprets the eschatological vision of *Revelation* by maintaining that the cental virtue of this often misunderstood book is not *agape*, as in Paul's letters, but *hyponome* - which she translates as consistent resistance, staying power, and steadfastness (*ibid.*, 51). The challenge facing Christians in *Revelation*, argues Fiorenza, is to remain steadfast and committed in the face of a dehumanizing systemic evil. Furthermore, Fiorenza understands the contents of *Revelation* as a mytho-poetic rhetoric that "seeks to persuade the readers to a certain Christian praxis, one of resistance and hope" (*ibid.*, 36). Like much liberationist eschatological visioning, Fiorenza's commentary on *Revelation* remains firmly entrenched within the parameters of a Reign/anti-Reign discourse. Babylon/Rome and the New Jerusalem are as

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[17]See Alan Boesak's *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective* (1987), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *Revelation: Vision of A Just World* (1991), and Pablo Richard's *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (1995).

incompatible as Egypt and the Promised Land. Both oppositions point to landscapes with a clarity of vision that can be valuable in oppressive and dehumanizing situations, because they are imbued with hope for a future radically opposed to the present context of servitude and oppression. Christian hope reveals the resurrected Christ bearing the wounds of his crucifixion. The wounds lead us to history, or more specifically to the baggage of the historical Jesus: his prophetic ministry among the poor and outcast in the context of Roman imperial oppression and deteriorating living conditions for most lower class and peasant class Jews. The resurrection reveals a hope whereby death and structural sin do not have the last word on history. The resurrection is an irruption into a violent and dehumanizing history (the wounds) and a promise to the victims of history (the risen Jesus) that powerlessness, poverty, hunger, and marginalization are not final. The resurrection reveals an eschatological end. For liberationists, this eschatological end promises a transformed world incompatible with the powers of death and evil at work in this age. This is the Reign of G*d that Jesus preached to the poor and oppressed. This is the land that the G*d of Moses promised to the Israelite slaves. Yet Jesus also reminded his friends and disciples that the Reign is "already among you" (Lk 17: 21), while the G*d of Moses brought the Israelites out of bondage to wander for forty years in the wilderness until the first generation had died out (Jos 5 : 6).

Many liberation theologians and ethicists understand the 'already' aspect of the eschatological dialectic not simply as glimpses of what is to come, but also, as "eschatological actions making parts of the future present now" (Isasi-Díaz 1996, 100). In other words, the future Reign is present, liberationists argue, only insofar as it is being built as a mutual project between humanity and G*d. As we have seen earlier, Pieris' insistence on being poor as Jesus was poor (voluntary poverty) in order to eradicate poverty (forced poverty) speaks to this eschatological vision. However, Pieris' cosmic and metacosmic construct nonetheless posits the transcendent reality as "instrumentalizing" the immanent realm, thereby reinforcing a clear division between Reign and anti-Reign. Pieris' definition of liberation as the "cosmic experience of the metacosmic" reveals this opposition (1996, 52). For Pieris, and like those liberationist readings of John of Patmos, "the cosmos ('heaven and earth') has not only a metacosmic origin (creation by God) but also a metacosmic destiny (a re-creation of a 'new heaven and new earth')" (*ibid.*, 53).

Fiorenza's feminist reconstruction of the Jesus movement in Palestine is much less oppositional than her work on the book of *Revelation*. The Reign, or more specifically the *basileia* of G*d, proclaimed by Jesus in Fiorenza's work is described, not so much as a break with the message of John the Baptist[18], but "as a shift in emphasis"(1983, 119). Her method is evident as well in her understanding of the Jesus movement as a renewal movement within Judaism rather than a break with it. Fiorenza argues that John's message about the *basileia* was linked to G*d's judgement and wrath as a prelude to the eschatological restitution of Israel, while Jesus stressed that, "in his own ministry and movement, the eschatological salvation and wholeness of Israel as the elect people of God is already experientially available" (*ibid.*). The actualization of the *basileia* in Fiorenza's writing is symbolized in the open commensality of the 'Wedding Banquet' (Mt: 22). This signalled a shift from an understanding of the cultic meal as a holy table for the elite toward an

[18]Pieris understands Jesus as a student of John the Baptist who broke with his vision. See *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (1988), p. 48.

understanding of the holy table as a festive open to all. Fiorenza's understanding of the 'Wedding Banquet' is much less restrictive than the interpretation offered by Gutiérrez, as we have seen in the first chapter, whereby rigid lines are drawn around his definition of the "believing people:" the liberative faith of the poor and oppressed. Moreover, the actualization of the *basileia* is made tangible through history, writes Fiorenza, in Jesus' healing ministry. The power of G*d's *basileia* is made available when Jesus casts out demons and heals the sick and outcast, making the uninvited, the newly invited guests of the 'Wedding Banquet.'[19] Fiorenza writes that

> G*d's *basileia* is realized in Jesus' table community with the poor, the sinners, the taxcollectors, and the prostitutes - with all those who "do not belong" to the "holy people," who are somehow deficient in the eyes of the righteous... Jesus' *praxis* and *vision* of the *basileia* is the mediation of G*d's future into the structures and experiences of his own time and people...Not holiness of the elect but the wholeness of *all* is the cental vision of Jesus (1983, 121).

Like her liberationist peers, Fiorenza's methodology is based on the *praxis* of transformational engagement in history against the structures that create situations of marginalization and destitution; it is a *basileia praxis*, which brings the fullness of the eschatological future into the lives of those who are the forgotten ones, the wretched of the earth.

Fiorenza's focus on *basileia praxis* is central to her understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Unlike many liberationist who seek to dialectically work out the relationship between the cross and the resurrection as a model for understanding oppression and liberation, Fiorenza is concerned with the grey area of that dialectic: the empty tomb. Like the wilderness that follows the

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[19]See John Dominic Crossan's distinction between curing a disease, such as AIDS, and healing the stigmatization and marginalization that is associated with AIDS. For Crossan, Jesus healed these divisions in order to make people whole again. *The Birth of Christianity*, pp 293-304.

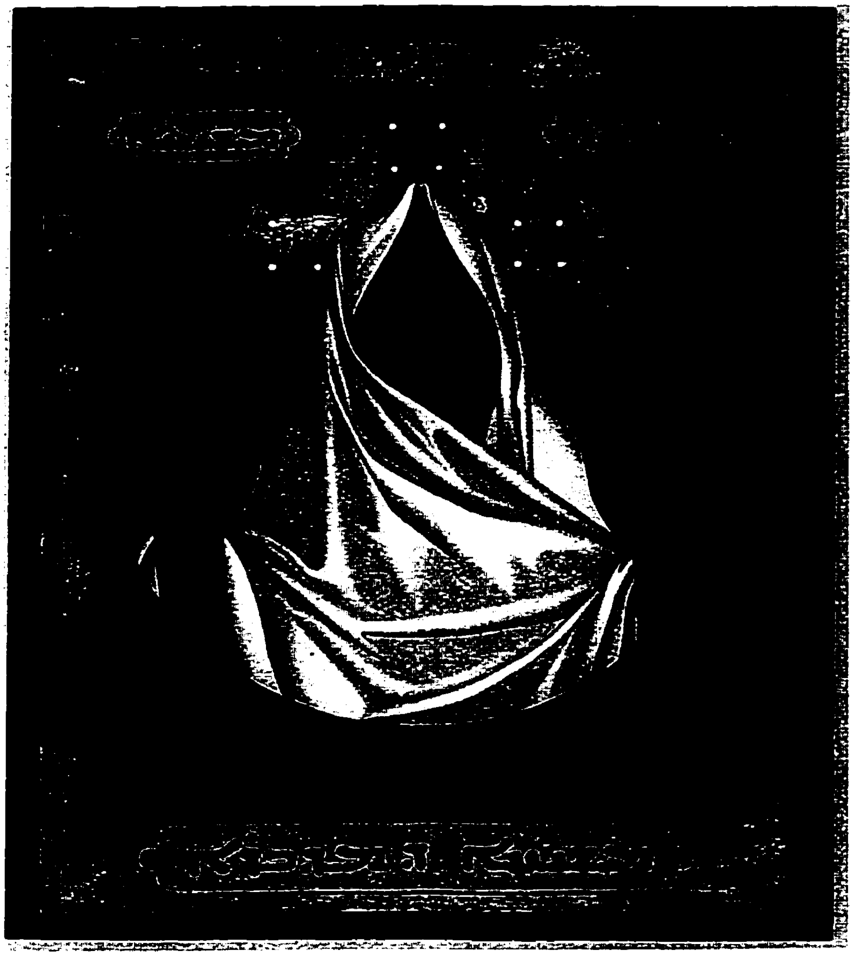
liberation from slavery in Exodus, Fiorenza describes the tomb as the brutal reality, or outcome of Jesus' *basileia praxis*, of his vanquishment. But the tomb is empty. This emptiness is not the brutal end to Jesus' prophetic ministry. The emptiness points to fullness - the reality of the resurrection. Fiorenza locates the empty tomb as a symbol of presence - not as absence - in the ongoing resistance movements in the oppressed region of Galilee. Unlike Paul's confessional formula, in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8, whereby Jesus' 'absence' is understood as his ascension back to heaven where he sits at the right hand of G*d, the Markan understanding of the resurrection is centred on the empty tomb and on the promise that the Resurrected One is going ahead of you to Galilee, the centre of Jesus' prophetic ministry. Hence the empty tomb is the landscape of promise for those who struggle for survival in a hostile environment. Fiorenza writes this:

> the empty tomb does not signify absence but presence: it announces the Resurrected One's presence on the road ahead, in a particular space of struggle and recognition in Galilee. The Resurrected One is present in the "little ones," in the struggles for survival of those impoverished , hungry, imprisoned, tortured, and killed, in the wretched of the earth. The empty tomb proclaims the Living One's presence in the ekklesia of wo/man gathered in Jesus' name, in the faces of our grandmothers who have struggled for survival and dignity. Jesus is going ahead - not going away: so the women in the Gospels, and we with them, are told (1995, 126).

The location of the empty tomb can also help soften the oppositional discourse in much liberationist methodologies which are centred on a cross-resurrection dialectic. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, the women at the empty tomb speak to the situation of many oppressed and marginalized peoples around the globe for whom survival is as important an ingredient as liberation. The empty tomb is also a chaotic void that speaks to the promise of the fullness of life - the central message of the gospels.

I have tried to show that the wilderness and the empty tomb must be taken seriously by liberationists who seek to develop a methodology that listens to the voices of the vanquished 'other' - including the religious 'other.' Aloysius Pieris has developed a methodology that called for *prophetic asceticism*. I have sought to expand on this method by introducing the idea of wilderness as the unexpected outcome of liberation. Some liberationists have had much difficulty in defining the emancipatory potential of popular religion and have positioned themselves in opposition to the epistemological discourses that arise through the symbols of popular religious movements. Even in the more attentive Pieris who seeks to refute reductionistic readings of cosmic religion, this oppositional ethos can be seen to deprecate the cosmic aspects of religion and popular religion. Orlando Espín's work has helped in defining popular religion as vanquishment and in terms of the symbolization of a hermeneutic of suspicion. This understanding of popular religion, argues Espín, gives primacy to the epistemological concerns of the people insofar as the legitimation of one group's hegemony has not fully succeeded - it always leaves a margin of doubt. The landscape of the wilderness is the symbol I have evoked in order to give Espín's thesis biblical cohesiveness and foundation. To support my thesis I have also examined Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *basileia* theology which presents the women-centred tradition of the empty tomb from Mark's Gospel as an open space that can help soften rigid cross-resurrection constructs in liberationist methodologies. The wilderness landscape also softens the oppositional positioning of Pieris' *prophetic asceticism* by proposing that the wilderness not be solely understood as the "passing through" experience of Gutiérrez' work. These following words from a great wilderness prophet of the 20th century, Thomas Merton, are very important for such a path : "we are at the same time in the desert and in the Promised Land. The Psalms are our Bread in the wilderness of our Exodus" (1953, 38). Merton was writing about the importance of the Psalms in the lives of monastic renunciates, however, his understanding of the wilderness experience shows an important refusal to separate the wilderness from liberation.

The wilderness is the landscape of doubt. And it is in that doubt, in the process of open questioning, that the vanquished 'other' can be encountered. Liberationists who are concerned with the plight of the world must share in this doubt if their oppositional discourse is not to be imposed on the religious 'other, ' whether it be understood as "popular religion" or "religion." Interreligious *praxis* will never be authentically embedded in base or grassroots experiences if the base is simply defined as an alienated mass needing liberating conscientization. Wilderness bread is meant to be shared. Will liberation theologians seek out wilderness bread, or will they base their liberation methodologies on Egyptian bread? Doubt is as integral to faith as the wilderness is to liberation. The 'Wedding Banquet' has been proclaimed for all the 'uninvited' to attend. Wilderness is the landscape where the 'uninvited' may be faced with unexpected manna; the manna of survival in the wilderness.



To Walk with Jesus of the Wilderness

I have explored Aloysius Pieris' critique of the appropriation of the faith/religion dichotomy by Christian liberationists in Latin America that tended to distanced their theologies from the liberative epistemologies and *praxis* of 'other' religions. I then examined the work of Bede Griffiths based of Pieris' critique of the inculturationist model, which has been focused on the wisdom of 'other' religions but at the expense of popular movements and liberative strategies of the poor and oppressed, particularly the dalit peoples. Pieris' dialectical methodology seeks to bring the liberationist and inculturationist methods together by proposing a *prophetic asceticism* that is grounded in a baptism of water and fire. Jesus' baptism in the water of the Jordan is a model that represents the immersion of Christianity in the waters of Asian religion and the baptism of fire pertains to Jesus experience on Calvary, the way of the cross in compassionate solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Pieris' *prophetic asceticism* is an attempt at negotiating a dialectical methodology that is grounded in a *praxis* of voluntary poverty as a way to oppose imposed poverty and destitution.

Pieris' dialectical methodology has brought me to consider the landscape of wilderness and the space of the empty tomb as ways to interrogate the highly oppositional construct between liberation and oppression which is inherent to many liberationist methodologies. This oppositional construct continues to fall prey to discourses that subtly belittle the 'other' religions, especially popular forms of religion.

I have sought to invoke the biblical wilderness of Exodus as a landscape of doubt, as a theological representation of a hermeneutic of suspicion whereby the grumblings of a people are turned into the unexpected bread of sustenance and survival. In this landscape of doubt, we are faced with the "dangerous memory of suffering" which in turn brings us to question the ways of knowing and *doing* theology in our own traditions which have been harmful to Jewish people, to women, to indigenous peoples, to the suffering religious 'other' and to practitioners of popular religions. The theological wilderness is a landscape of doubt vis-à-vis the *adversus judaeos* tradition and other dualist methodologies that marginalize and denigrate the religious wisdom and liberative praxis of G*d's chosen people: the poor, oppressed and outcast.

Wilderness, therefore, is not simply a stage on the way to the promised land; it is an integral part of the liberative process that enables the oppressed to undo, to purify, to unlearn the ways of the slave masters, as did the Israelites. Neither is the women-centred empty tomb tradition simply a time in-between the cross and the resurrection. The empty tomb reveals the fullness of life in the struggles of those who are living resurrected lives in the present. Moreover, the wilderness is an open-ended space of doubt and surprise (what is it?) for the poor and oppressed who must survive in an adverse terrain. It is not opposed to the liberation, or the promised land of the Israelites, but it is a space that allows for questions about the nature of liberative struggles and the ongoing process of liberation.

Just as Jesus' first public act after receiving John's prophetic anointing was to go into the desert, the Israelites unexpectedly found themselves in the wilderness after having escaped Egyptian slavery. After being liberated from slavery, Hagar and her son Ishmael were forced to survive in the wilderness. The biblical wilderness has a profound place in liberation. Liberationists need to be more attentive, not only to the G*d of liberation, but also to the G*d of accompaniment who journeys with the poor and oppressed where there is no path. When G*d accompanies the poor and oppressed along the journey, as with Hagar and the Israelites, a path is forged as one walks (Goizueta, 1). The G*d of accompaniment reminds us that the promised land or the resurrection are not simply final victories, but G*d's process of accompaniment and survival in the wilderness of history.

* * *

The icon that opens this section is the work of American icon artist Robert Lentz. It is a depiction of Jesus of the wilderness, Jesus of the desert. For Lentz, it is a meditation on the Middle Eastern roots of the Christian tradition. The inscriptions on the top ("Jesus Christ") and bottom ("Christ of the Desert") are in Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, the language spoken by the historical Jesus. Lentz' wish is to create an image of Jesus the Christ that comes out of a non-Western perspective, and where the dualisms that plague Greek inspired Christian theology fall away. Lentz writes that "the Syriac tradition knows no dichotomy between the mind and heart."

Lentz grew up in the Catholic and in the Russian Orthodox traditions where he developed both a love of the mystical theology of the Orthodox Church and an awareness of the social teachings of the Catholic Church. This lead Lentz to paint a whole series of saints from Dorothy Day, Steven Biko, and Oscar Romero to John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, and Rumi. He has also painted more traditional icons, such as Christ Enthroned, the Annunciation, and Our Lady of

Guadalupe, along with justice-focused icons modeled on the traditional Orthodox style, such as Black Liberator Christ (pantocrator), and Navaho Madonna.[1]. Like the theology of Aloysius Pieris, Lentz has always sought to weave together diverse religious traditions, such as the Christian and the Amerindian traditions. He, too, has been driven by a need to bridge the dichotomy between faith/social justice, contemplation/action, ultimately, the division between the prophetic call to justice and the mystical journey of divine wisdom.

Lentz' "Christ of the Desert" expresses a deep yearning that many liberationists, such as myself, are seeking to realize: namely, a vision steeped in the grassroots wisdom of popular religious traditions that is not divorced from the urgent need to repair a fragmented world. This is also expressed in the Jewish understanding of *tikkun*, to repair and heal the divisions that create oppression and marginalization, Lentz' "Christ of the Desert" is an icon of a praying Jesus in the desert. This is the beginning of his prophetic ministry in Galilee where he will walk with the outcast, the landless, the destitute, the sick, and the sinner. This wilderness Christ has just been anointed by John the Baptist, a symbolic gesture which proclaims Jesus' prophetic role.

Like Pieris, Lentz wishes to immerse his Christ in the waters of the Jordan. This represents the historical context of the Galilean Jesus, and it is a symbol of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea out of slavery and into the wilderness of liberation. However, Lentz' desert Christ also evokes the immanent death of Jesus as he is shrouded in a white cloth. The white cloth is not only a prayer shawl, a symbol of the historical Jesus' desert journey, it is also the burial cloth which is the only remaining evidence of his death in the empty tomb. Here Christ is

[1]A number of Lentz' icons are available on the web, at the Bridge Building Images homepage: http://www.wowpages.com/bbi

portrayed, not as the Resurrected One, for he has no wounds, but as the One to be crucified, the Vanquished One, whose immersion in the waters of the Jordan and journey through the desert brought him in conflict with the power structures of his day.

Lentz' desert Christ points to the fullness of the empty tomb where the Resurrected One is no longer, for He is "going ahead of you to Galilee" (Mk 16: 7) to call forth the "little ones" in their struggle to survive in a hostile landscape. This is the prophetic Christ whose desert experience enabled him to go and reach out to the vulnerable, the hungry, and the sick. This icon is a window to G*d; it is an image of the Holy One anointed for his prophetic ministry and who gave his life on behalf of those whose lives had become disposable. This is an image of the Anointed One whose work for justice and liberation is immersed in the fires of the wilderness, the experience of purification and union with G*d.

Lentz' "Christ of the Desert" is a image of the human yearning for personal and societal transformation. Moreover, the icon points toward the surprise of the empty tomb where eschatological finality is transformed into an open end. This is an icon of the prophetic Christ in the wilderness whose crucifixion and resurrection vindicates the powerless of history. He is the holistic Christ, the prophet, the mystic, journeying the wilderness in order to meet the 'other:' the Holy Other and the suffering 'other.' As members of Christ's body (the church) we are called to this journey, to this kind of discipleship.

To walk with Jesus of the wilderness is to encounter those who struggle for survival in the wilderness. To walk with Jesus of the wilderness is to transgress the established boundaries between us and them; it's to be with the wrong people at the wrong time and in the wrong place. To walk with Jesus of the wilderness is to be accompanied to the edges of acceptability. And in that terrain all who survive yearn for manna, the bread of heaven, sustenance for the landless, and the unexpected for the those who courageously bring forth doubt. This doubt is charged with surprise, the surprise of manna and the surprise of the empty tomb: the fullness of hope and joy. A little bit of doubt from below opens a path for genuine interreligious *praxis* and collaboration. To trust this doubt is to be open to *metanoia*. A *metanoia* to G*d's gift in the wilderness: the manna of faith for G*d's vanquished people.

Appendix 1*

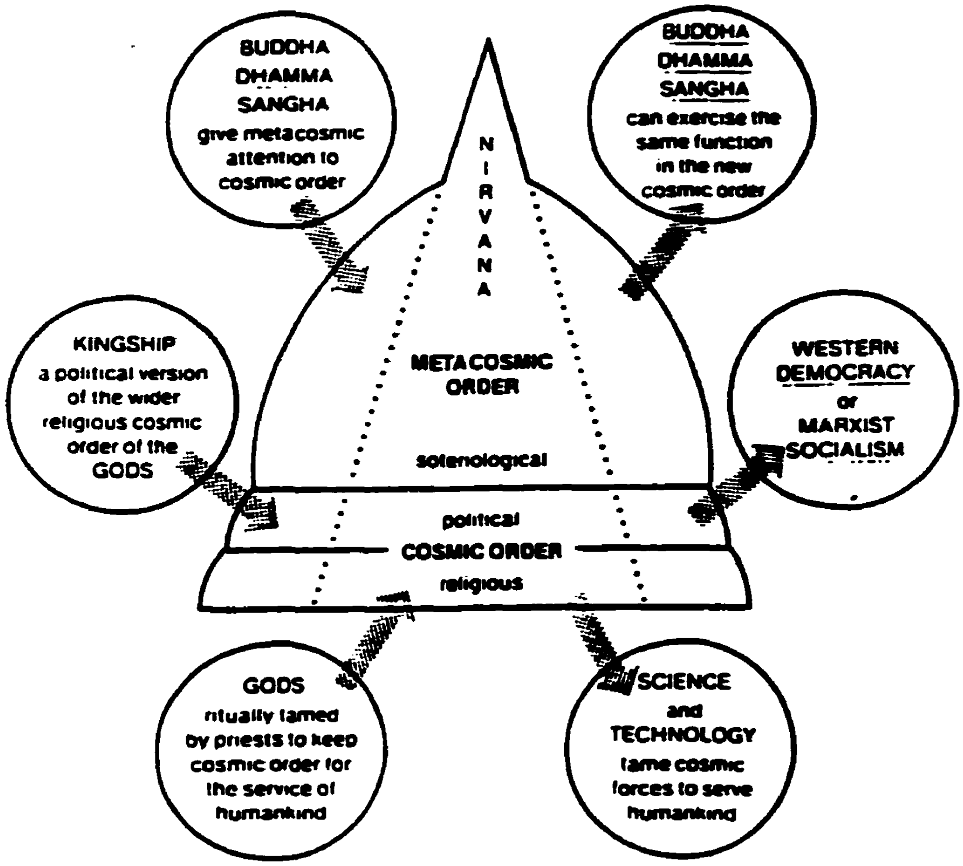
CHRIST AND RELIGIONS

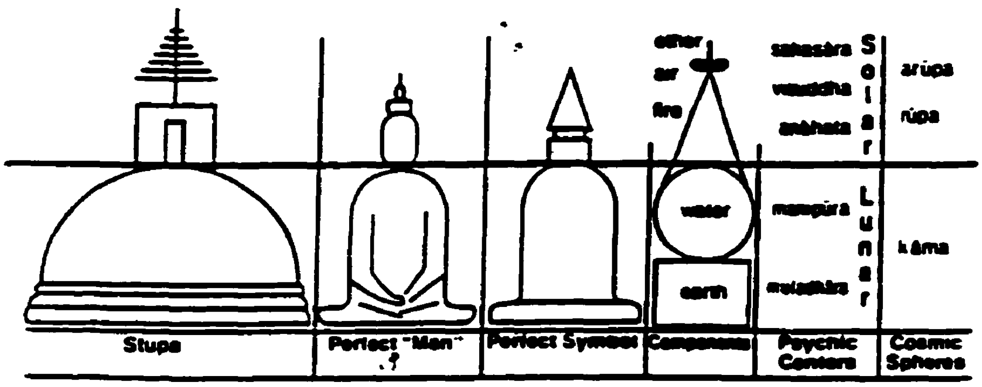
Historical Panorama of a Polarization

Christ AGAINST Religions		Christ OF Religions
SIXTEENTH CENTURY ONWARD The COLONIALIST CHRIST of early Western missionaries conquers non-Christian religions, which are linked with the moral poverty of "colonized" nations. The medium of his action is the Western form of civilization.	1	**NINETEENTH CENTURY ONWARD** The GNOSTIC CHRIST of Indian theologians: beginning of the fulfillment theory of religions. The link between religion and material poverty is ignored.
LATE 1960s The NEO-COLONIALIST CHRIST of the developmentalists conquers non-Christian religions, which are linked with the material poverty of "developing" nations. The medium of his action is the Western model of development.	2	**LATE 1960s** The ASHRAMIC CHRIST of monks and mystics, incarnated through traditional practice of religious poverty —i.e., voluntary acceptance of material poverty (Renunciation, monasticism). The link between religion and structural poverty is ignored.
LATE 1970s The CRYPTO-COLONIALIST CHRIST of the liberationists conquers non-Christian religions, which are linked with the structural poverty of Third World nations. The medium of his action is the structural liberation based on Marxist occidentalism and Western Biblicism.	3	**LATE 1970s** The UNIVERSAL CHRIST of the inculturationists, particularized in cultures through the appropriation of religious structures (idioms, symbols, moods, etc.). The link between religion and liberation struggles is ignored.

*The above diagram is from Aloysius Pieris' *An Asian theology of Liberation* (1988), p. 89.

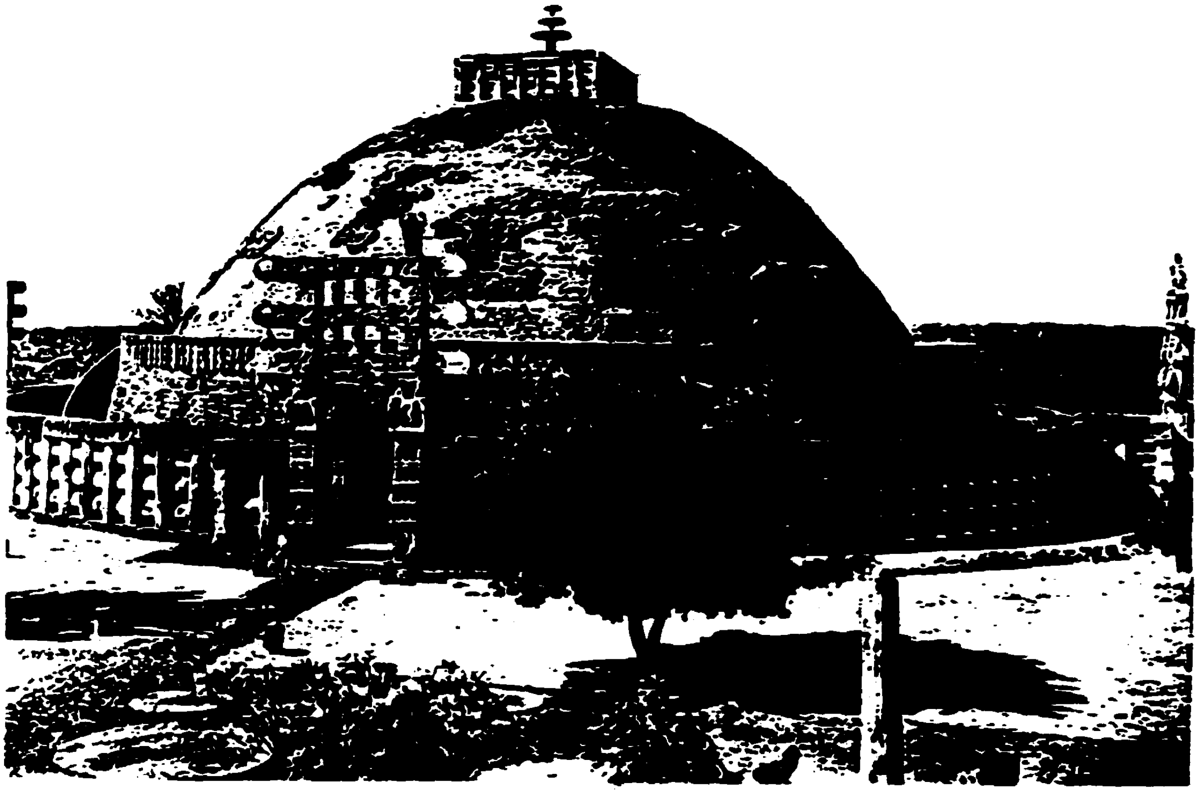
Appendix 2*





*The top stupa diagram is from Aloysius Pieris' *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (1988), p. 73. The bottom figures are from Pieris' *Fire & Water* (1996), p. 23.

Appendix 3*



*The Great Stupa of Sanchi, India. Photograph of the east side of the stupa. Dated between the 3rd century B.C.E to the early 1st century of C.E. From Roy C. Craven's *Indian Art* (1976), p. 69.

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