

# **In His Master's Path**

**About the Author:** John D. Kunnathu is an educator and an author of several books. He has had his higher studies in Linguistics, Literature, Education, and Religion. After being in Africa and in the US for over twenty-five years as an educator, he is now settled in Kottayam, India. His education and life experiences helped him develop a global outlook, which is clearly reflected in his work. He spreads the message of love and peace. He believes that one can be inclusive of all people in the world while having a firm footing in one's own specific culture. His other major works include

1. An Orientation to our Life – A Guide to young men and women
2. Gregorian Vision: Opening a window to the thought of Paulos Mar Gregorios
3. സർഗ്ഗീയ മാലാഖമാർ സ്തുതിക്കുന്നതുപോലെ. ക്രൈസ്തവാരാധനയുടെ ഒരു സാഹിത്യ-ധ്യാന പഠനം

Contact Info:

Email: [Johnkunnathu@yahoo.com](mailto:Johnkunnathu@yahoo.com)

Mobile: 8281670189

# **In His Master's Path**

**Paulos Mar Gregorios  
As A Follower Of Jesus Christ**

**John D. Kunnathu**



**Sophia Books  
Kottayam**

## **In His Master's Path**

**John Daniel Kunnathu**

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First Edition: 2016 November

Published by Sophia Books, Kottayam Mob: 99471 20697

Cover & Printing: Sophia Print House, Kottayam

Price **Rs. 150/-**

# Preface

This is a book on the vision and mission of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, of blessed memory. It was written as a part of my doctoral study in Augustus International University in USA under the guidance of Professor Katherine Macdowell. This study sought to understand the Vision and Mission of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios in the light of the Vision and Mission of Jesus Christ, and the dissertation convincingly argues that the vision and mission of Paulos Mar Gregorios in the past century was a successful adaptation of the vision and mission of Jesus Christ in the first century. The dissertation seeks to clarify the fundamentals of Christian faith to the modern world, and also to challenge the modern followers of Jesus Christ to follow the example of Paulos Mar Gregorios.

Metropolitan Gregorios became a hero to me when I was a teenager, and the bishop continues so even now in my sixties. I have been trying to understand the vision and mission of Mar Gregorios all these years; therefore, when I was asked to choose a topic for my doctoral dissertation, I enthusiastically chose this topic, and I passionately worked on it. To my own surprise I discovered that there is an amazing match between the vision and mission of Mar Gregorios and that of his master, Jesus Christ.

This writer has another published work on Mar Gregorios with the title, *Gregorian Vision— Opening a window to the thought-world of Paulos Mar Gregorios*. Published in 2011 by The Paragon House in USA as well as by Sophia Books in Kottayam, it introduces the thought-world of Mar Gregorios by summarizing the major themes in his work.

I am grateful to Prof. Katherine Macdowell of the Augustus International University for her guidance and support, without which I couldn't have done this work. I am grateful to Fr. Dr. John Thomas Karingattil and Dr. Kurian Thomas for reading the manuscript and suggesting modifications.

I submit this work to the wellbeing and prosperity of humanity, and I earnestly request the readers to join me in further exploring the thought-world of Mar Gregorios.

**John D. Kunnathu**

November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016

(The twentieth yearly memorial day of  
Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios)

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# 1

## General Introduction

A sensitive young boy born and raised in the first half of the twentieth century in British India in a traditional Christian family eagerly hungers and thirsts for the meaning of human existence. He notices that his religious tradition lacks vitality as it pays more attention to preserving its traditions rather than serving humanity. However, he notices some vitality in the western Christianity, especially in its missions abroad. Making use of the opportunity of higher education in the West, soon he discovers that the vitality in the West lacks depth. He digs deep in the Christian tradition for an alternative source of inspiration and meaning, and he finds it in the Eastern Christian fathers of the fourth century. Through Gregory of Nyssa, an eastern father, he receives a very powerful and meaningful vision of Christianity. He found that the vision and mission of Jesus Christ can be a powerful inspiration and driving force for modern humanity. He declared that the mission of today's Christian church needs to be the same as the mission of Jesus Christ. He enthusiastically adapted the vision of Jesus Christ, and applied it in his own mission. He could say along with St. Paul: Imitate me as I imitate Christ!<sup>1</sup>

This man is none other than Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922-96) of blessed memory. Born as the son of a school teacher in a village in South India, he grew up to become one of the most influential leaders of the past century. He provided meaningful leadership to the World Council of Churches to effectively contribute to the solutions of global issues. His command of multiple languages and his mastery of various disciplines of study helped him provide crucial help where it was needed. Being the metropolitan of New Delhi and the president of the Philosophical Congress of India, his advice was eagerly sought out by the rulers of the nation. He was very well accepted and honored behind the Iron curtain in the Soviet Union, which made him a frequent visitor there. He was equally honored and well-accepted in the United States and in other such places where he was a visiting professor in various universities. He

was also well-known and was heard in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Australia.

This writer, in my younger years, was eagerly looking for some kind of guidance regarding the right path to take in life. Born and raised in the same community as Bishop Gregorios, I was also disappointed about the lack of vitality in the traditional Christianity, and was tempted to join one of the new churches from the West that exhibited a lot of vitality. These were churches based on newer evangelical theologies. The one thing that encouraged me to stay in my own community and explore its foundations was the influential leadership of Metropolitan Gregorios. I realized that the Christianity as projected by the evangelical churches was a very superficial one, and it did more harm than good.

Reconciling the information received from the school classes with the information received from the Sunday school classes was not easy for me in those days. Science and religion appeared like parallel lines, never meeting anywhere. It was the thought of Mar Gregorios that helped me solve this puzzle to a great extent. I learned from him that science and religion are not contradictory but complementary. This is just one example of how the thought of Mar Gregorios provided me with the right guidance and orientation in my life. On the one hand, I was saved from falling into the trap of Christian fundamentalism, and on the other, I was saved from falling into the trap of the Godlessness of secularism. I gratefully acknowledge that my life would not have been the same without the guidance from Mar Gregorios. Therefore, this study on the vision and mission of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios is a passion for me.

“Official Christianity sounds ludicrously unintelligent and seems utterly unappealing to the moral conscience of mankind, even to many who have not yet given up their Christian faith.”<sup>2</sup> This is a very revealing statement from Mar Gregorios. Traditional Christianity merely preserves its tradition and hands it over from generation to generation. It is like a huge tree with deep roots, but shows very little signs of life, with very few fruits or leaves. The new churches, mostly evangelical, show signs of life, but they lack the power to inspire and

lead humanity. They are like grass or small plants without deep roots, but with leaves and fruits. They came into existence in revolt against the lifelessness of the traditional Christianity. They have effectively revolted against the lack of vitality in the traditional Christianity, but they have failed in providing an effective replacement. Without deep roots, the new churches hold a very superficial vision of life. They are mostly other-worldly, ignoring the life here and now. Other than saving people for the other world, they do not provide a basis or inspiration for a meaningful life in this world. The traditional Christianity is lifeless, and the evangelical Christianity is powerless. As a result, humanity, like sheep without shepherd, is looking for guidance elsewhere, and Christians are either quitting their religion, or staying within it as nominal Christians.

Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios was born and raised within the traditional Christianity. In his childhood, he regularly attended the Sunday worship and actively participated in Sunday school education. Later as a teenager and in his early twenties he was attracted to the evangelical way of thinking. But the theological education in the United States made him discard the evangelical outlook forever. He became aware of the various, recent attempts made in the West to regain the original Christianity. Secularization, pragmatism, existentialism, the death of God movement, hermeneutical quest, a belief in future movement, liberal humanism, and new Marxism— all these have been such attempts.<sup>3</sup> However, all these movements proved unsuccessful; none of them could replace the original, lost Christianity. This made him look for alternatives within his own eastern Christian tradition. Nicolas Berdyaev and Vladimir Lossky, the theologians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, led him to a seminal thinker of the 4th century who is astoundingly contemporary— St. Gregory of Nyssa. He did his doctoral study on the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, and his dissertation was published as *Cosmic Man in 1982*. Through the lens provided by this church father, Metropolitan Gregorios had a fresh look at Christianity, and he found it meaningful and relevant. He knew that if this Christianity can make a come-back, it will have the power to inspire and lead humanity.

Mar Gregorios realized that ours is a dying civilization, and a new

civilization has to eventually replace it. Every religion and ideology on the face of the earth is presenting itself as the ideal candidate for the new civilization. Mar Gregorios wouldn't recommend any of the contemporary religions or ideologies as the ideal candidate to create a new civilization. He presents the vision of Jesus Christ as seen through the lens of Gregory of Nyssa as a strong foundation upon which a new civilization can be built. Speaking about the mission of the Christian church, Mar Gregorios claims that it has to be the same as the mission of Jesus Christ. The Christian church cannot have any other mission but the mission of Jesus Christ. He expects the Christian church to be a visible embodiment of Jesus Christ. The role of the church is to make Jesus Christ present and visible in the world. This assertion of Mar Gregorios leads us to two questions: What was the vision and mission of Jesus Christ as Mar Gregorios understood it? Up to what extent could he, a church leader, claim that his own vision and mission were the same as that of Jesus Christ? These two questions form the focus of this dissertation. The vision and mission of Jesus Christ has to be the very foundation or essence of Christianity. So the questions may be rephrased as follows: How did Mar Gregorios understand the essence of Christianity, and how successful was he in implementing it in his own context?

Addressing the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Mar Gregorios asserted that he knew of only one person in India who was fit to be called a Christian, and ironically this "Christian" was a non-Christian.<sup>4</sup> He was referring to Mahatma Gandhi. Mar Gregorios defined the term Christian as someone who truly follows the footsteps of Christ and lives like Christ. Although Gandhi was a non-Christian, he followed the footsteps of Christ and lived a Christ-like life, which qualifies him to be called a Christian. Mar Gregorios did not consider himself qualified to be called a Christian, but today when we examine his life, we realize that he was also a Christian. He truly followed the footsteps of Christ and lived a Christ-like life.

This study is made with the hope that the Christian world will find in Mar Gregorios a role model to follow. Also it hopes to encourage the Christian world to consider the vision of Mar Gregorios as an alternative to the present, decadent understanding of Christianity.

This study will be made primarily by examining the written work of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios. He has contributed about twenty-five books and hundreds of published and unpublished papers. A few of his lectures are available in audio form as well. The fond memories of many of his friends and admirers will also be examined. Additionally, the few people who have been fortunate to be his close associates will be consulted for clarification. This study will further examine the view of various theologians who might have influenced Mar Gregorios regarding the vision and mission of Jesus Christ.

This writer was born and raised in the same community as Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios—the Orthodox Church in India. Therefore, the bishop has been looked up to as a role model from very young age by this writer. Such a relationship definitely makes the writer biased toward the bishop. Moreover, the quest for meaning in Christianity by the Bishop has been a quest for this writer as well; as such this dissertation is additionally autobiographical and passionate. Although these factors have a positive effect on the study, they keep it far from being objective.

This study has a very limited scope. It examines the vision and mission of Jesus Christ in the understanding of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios. It further examines the extent to which Mar Gregorios was able to adapt it in his own vision and mission. This study does not examine the entire thought-spectrum of Mar Gregorios. Moreover, this study does not examine the vision and mission of Jesus Christ as it really was; it merely examines it in the understanding of Mar Gregorios. This study does not examine any other theological views in the modern Christian Church. Everything is examined and presented here through the lens of the very limited understanding of this writer, which is the primary limitation of this study.

The thought of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios has direct implications on social changes and on ecology, which will be discussed in the study.

The following words/expressions may be noted:

1. “Paul Varghese” was the name of Paulos Mar Gregorios before he became a bishop. In the Eastern Christian tradition, when someone becomes a bishop, he has to adopt a new last name.

2. “Metropolitan” is another word for bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Churches

3. “Mar” is a designation used for bishops in Syriac which means “Lord”.

4. “Thirumeni” is a word in Malayalam, the language of Kerala, India, which people use to affectionately address a bishop.

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1. 1 Corinthians 11:1

2. Freedom and Authority p. 1.

3. Freedom and Authority pp. 1–25

4. The Meaning and Nature of Diakonia 1988. p. 26

## 2

# Background

### A. The Deviation in Christianity

Soon after the inception of Christianity, a look-alike false form of Christianity grew alongside, and soon became so widespread and powerful that the original form of Christianity almost disappeared from sight. The details of what happened will be examined soon. This reminds us of the well-known parable of Jesus on a farmer letting wheat and weed grow together in his farm. In this case, the weed grew so tall that the wheat almost disappeared from sight, and the weed was mistaken for the wheat<sup>1</sup>.

During the Biblical times,<sup>2</sup> the focus of Christianity was on honestly doing the will of God, and hypocrisy was not tolerated at all. It did not matter what group you belonged to or what you believed; what mattered was whether you did the will of God. For Jesus, the only way to identify a fruit tree is by its fruit. For example, if you get fig fruit from a tree, you can conclude that the tree is a fig tree.<sup>3</sup> Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers’.”<sup>4</sup> Even those people who did miracles in the name of Jesus were not acceptable to Jesus. Even if they were apparently doing the will of God, in the final evaluation, if their acts did not fully conform to the will of God, they must have been doing evil.

There is a well-known passage in the gospels about a man who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus, but was not in the group of the disciples.<sup>5</sup> Jesus’ disciples thought that this was inappropriate, and they even forbade this man. Jesus, however, did not think it was inappropriate. It did not matter to Jesus whether someone belonged to the group of Christians or not, what mattered was whether he/she did the will of God.

Jesus made a clear distinction between reality and appearance. He made it clear that God's view is different from man's view. Man sees what is outside, but God sees what is inside. What appears true to man may be false in God's view. He explained this idea using parables such as that of the Pharisee and Tax-collector praying in the temple.<sup>6</sup> The Pharisee appeared righteous outwardly, but the tax-collector was truly righteous in God's eyes. Those who were known as sinners among men were righteous in God's view. Jesus also explained it using events such as a widow offering two pennies.<sup>7</sup> Although this amount of money appeared nothing compared to the amounts offered by the rich people, Jesus claimed that her offering was more valuable to God, for she offered all that she had.

Writing to the church in Rome, Paul explains how a real Jew is different from a look-alike one. "For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, .... Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart— it is spiritual and not literal."<sup>8</sup> One can be a Jew inwardly or outwardly. Inward is real, outward is false. James warns against outward religion so harshly: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?"<sup>9</sup> John has very strong language about walking the talk. "Whoever says, 'I am in the light,' while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness."<sup>10</sup> Thus in the biblical writers we see very strong emphasis on honestly doing the will of God. Whatever belief or faith one may have is of no value unless its fruit is seen in concrete action. Faith without corresponding fruit is like the faith of the demons. The demons believe with such intensity that they shudder, but it is of no value because their actions do not correspond to the will of God.

Soon after the Biblical time,<sup>11</sup> there slowly emerged a shift in focus. It shifted from what you do to what you believe. Whether you held the right belief became more important than whether you did the right thing. People were classified into those who held the right beliefs (believers) and those who deviated from them (heretics). We can see the roots of this tendency even during the biblical times. By the time the pastoral letters were written, the focus was on the sound



doctrine. The letter to Titus says that the elder of a community “should be able to preach with the sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.”<sup>12</sup> In John's second letter too we see the focus on the right teaching. He writes, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the Antichrist!”<sup>13</sup> Thus we see even within the first century a gradual deviation from Jesus' focus on honestly doing the will of God to holding the right set of beliefs.

By the second century, it was widely believed that a set of beliefs came down from Jesus Christ through the apostles to the succeeding generations. Such an idea has its seed even in the Bible. The letter of Jude speaks about the “faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”<sup>14</sup> This set of beliefs was later referred to as the apostolic faith. Later when some Gnostic leaders claimed to possess certain beliefs that they claimed to be of apostolic origin, fathers like Irenaeus countered them claiming to possess the true set of beliefs inherited from the apostles.<sup>15</sup> The true function of the church was believed to be the safekeeping of the set of right beliefs and transferring them over to the succeeding generations without any alteration.

In the following centuries, we see the church fighting against heretics. Emperors called councils to decide on the right beliefs, and whoever deviated from the beliefs accepted by the majority were excommunicated. Arius, Eunomius, and Eutycus were well known people condemned as heretics and excommunicated for holding different beliefs. The churches in various geographical areas were also against one another on their beliefs. The Greek East and the Latin West were against each other about the belief regarding how the Holy Spirit proceeds. The Eastern Orthodox (Greek) and the Oriental Orthodox (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Indian, and Ethiopian) couldn't agree with each other on the beliefs regarding how the divine and human natures of Jesus stay together. Major divisions occurred in Christian church due to differences in beliefs, and the divisions still continue. Each church claimed to be holding the true set of apostolic faith, and called the other churches heretics.

One wonders what might have caused such a shift in emphasis. How did Christianity change from a religion of actions to one of beliefs? Several people have attempted this question before, and various answers have been suggested.

Adolf Harnack (1851-1930), the German Lutheran historian and theologian, argued that Christianity got corrupted with its creeds and dogmas because of the influence of Greek culture and philosophy. He argued out his case in his *History of Christian Dogma* in six volumes. *The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology* summarizes Harnack's standing as follows:

Traditionally, the Christian Church viewed dogma as the revealed truths of the Gospel. However, the historical study of the Gospel shows that these formulations did not exist in the earliest Christianity but developed later through theological debates concerning Christological and Trinitarian issues. Although dogma had its origin in the Gospel, as it developed the simple message of Christian faith became intertwined with the objectified knowledge of Hellenistic. In other words, Harnack saw the development of Christian dogma as the intellectualization and Hellenization of the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Although Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios does not fully agree with Harnack, he agrees that an alienation of thought from life and worship led to an over-development of theology and speculative philosophy in Christianity. He, however, does not blame the apologists who tried to accommodate the Christian ideas with the Greek philosophy. He argues that it was more in the fight against heresy, especially Gnostic and Arian heresies, that the undue emphasis on right teaching began to take a dangerous deviation. He agrees that Irenaeus had sown the seed for a doctrine of authority which was later to work havoc in the life of the church—that the truth is to be formulated out of the scriptures and by the magisterium of the church. Origen later made this idea even stronger by claiming that the teaching of the church was handed down in unbroken succession from the Apostles. Origen further claimed that a few of the doctrines were left behind by the apostles without clarifying enough for the later theologians to work on.<sup>17</sup>

In order to refer to a dogmatic understanding of God, Mar Gregorios uses the term Cerebration.<sup>18</sup> He does not hesitate to admit that the major weakness of Christianity has been its attempt to cerebralize the true being, to formulate it, and to hold it in words. By doing so, it has deviated from the authentic Christianity. True faith is a friendly relation to the being and will of God. God cannot be reduced to words and concepts which we can control. We can approach the being and will of God only in adoration and worship. We may use words to celebrate God, not to cerebrate God. Mar Gregorios believed that the truth of what ultimately exists is beyond the ability of human brain. Any attempt to conceptualize it is doomed to failure. Humans can celebrate God, love God, honor God, but they cannot conceptualize God.

According to Mar Gregorios, the deviation of Christianity finally reached its culmination in Augustine, the most influential thinker of the classic western Christianity. The thought of Augustine still remains authoritative in the Catholic Church as well as in the Protestant churches. The eastern churches also have been greatly influenced by the west in the modern times due to the colonial expansion. Mar Gregorios refers to Augustine's deviation in several places. John Kunnathu has summarized Mar Gregorios' views of how Augustine has deviated:

St. Augustine (4th century) developed a different view of God, according to which, the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Later the Nicene Creed was altered by the Catholic Church to include this modification. Moreover, the Holy Spirit was seen as the love that links Father and Son. Such a view of Trinity was offensive to the East, which had developed its understanding of the Triune God over several centuries. The East had realized that God is incomprehensible, and that God can be known only through His activities (*energia*) in the world. They spoke of God as Trinity only in relation to the world. However, Augustine's was an objective view of God— an analysis of the essence (*ousia*) of God without any reference to the world. This was in fact a very unrealistic and low view of God.

Augustine also promoted a low view of humanity, according to which human beings are basically evil, and they are incapable of anything good. The world for Augustine was an evil place, and salvation was escaping from the world and going to the heaven above. Adam's sin was inherited by all humanity, which made all people born with original sin. However, Jesus and Jesus' mother were not born with original sin. The dogma that Jesus' mother was born without original sin is called Immaculate Conception. They added another dogma that claimed that Jesus' mother ascended to heaven just as Jesus did. The Eastern fathers claimed that human beings inherited only the consequences of Adam's sin, and not sin itself. Thus no one inherited sin from their forefathers. However, they fully agreed with Paul that all people are sinners, compared to God.

The Roman Catholic Church promoted a low view of the church. Church for them is all the Catholics alive in the world now. A local church is incomplete in itself, for it is a part of the global church. Relating to the old Israel in the wilderness on their way to Canaan, church is seen as a community in the wilderness of the world on its way to the heavenly Canaan. The East views church as the body of Christ, who is at the right-hand of God representing the whole creation, and it consists of all Christians of all times and places. A local church is complete in itself, for it represents the whole church.

The Pope in Rome was seen as the visible representative of Christ authorized to exercise the authority of Christ in the world. The bishops received authority from the pope, and the priests received authority from the bishops. The lay people had no authority at all, and they had to depend upon the priestly hierarchy for their salvation and for receiving grace from God. Thus the Catholic Church promoted a low view of the lay people. The church as a whole was seen by the East as the body of Christ, the eternal high priest. Bishops and priests represent Christ for them in Eucharist. Other than that they do not have any special status before God. The lay people have direct access to God.

Mission for the Western church has been to convert as many people as possible into its fold, for joining the church is seen as a means of salvation. “We are saved people on our way to heaven. If you want salvation, join our group.” This is what the western church has told people. Thus the Catholic Church had a low view of Christian mission. Mission for the east is to continue the mission of Christ. It sees church as the visible embodiment of Christ, and it sees the mission of church as the same mission of Christ— reconciling the whole creation to God. It proclaims the same message Christ proclaimed: God rules. It does not believe in converting people from other communities to the Christian community; rather it believes in converting all communities to God. This was the nature of mission in the original church, in which the non-Jews were not asked to become Jews, but were asked to become a new creation by turning to God.

Eucharist is seen by the West as an opportunity for the lay people to witness the crucifixion of Christ, and accept Christ as their savior. It was also a means to receive grace, the divine power. This is a low view of the Eucharist. For the east, Eucharist is nothing less than Christ standing in the presence of God mediating for the whole of creation. As the body of Christ, church unites with Christ in his self-sacrifice and submission to the will of God.<sup>19</sup>

Metropolitan Gregorios prefers the approach of the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century — Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. They believed that God cannot be conceptually known, for God is not limited by time and space. So God cannot be related to anything in the world. God may be partially known by what He does in His creation. But even that can be achieved only if we get into a friendly relationship with God and with our fellow beings. Thus a dogmatic (conceptual) understanding of God is impossible in their view.<sup>20</sup>

Metropolitan Gregorios also relates the thought of the Cappadocians to that of the Advaita (non-dual) thought of Sankara in ancient India. According to Sankara, nothing exists apart from God.

But unfortunately we mistakenly assume that we exist apart from God, which is the basic cause of all of our existential problems. We live in enmity with God. We need to become aware of the truth that we are one with God, and establish a friendly relationship.<sup>21</sup>

Speaking about his own Asian tradition of Christianity, Mar Gregorios claims that it has its roots in the Palestinian vision of Christ and the Apostles that inspired the great Eastern Fathers. He further claims that this tradition remains unknown and unsung, yet is guarding its treasures in chests to which the key seems to have been lost. However, he is hopeful that a key can be manufactured to open this chest of treasures. It seems that Mar Gregorios himself made an attempt to open this chest of treasures, and this study is an attempt to see how far he was successful.<sup>22</sup>

We may believe that there might have been several reasons behind the transition of Christianity from an action-based one to a belief-based one. The transition might have occurred gradually over a long period of time. The right action, of course, arises from the right understanding. Conversely, if there is the right understanding, it naturally leads to the right actions. Such a relationship between understanding and actions might have been the major contributing factor for the gradual shifting of focus from the right actions to the right understanding. Action is the goal, and the understanding is the means to achieve the goal. It is the goal that decides if the means is right or not. If the focus is on the goal, a variety of understandings that lead to the goal become acceptable. People with diverse understandings can live and work together if they share the same goal. Bearing the right fruit is what matters; it does not matter what kind of tree you look like. This is the approach of Jesus as presented in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus' focus was on doing the will of God, and Paul's was on the fruits of the spirit. James claimed that faith without works is dead. Whatever understanding and beliefs that led to the right actions were accepted. However, if the focus is on the right understanding, a variety of goals will become accepted. If so, it does not matter if you do the will of God or not; for, what matters is whether you hold the right belief or not. Being the right tree is what matters; it does not matter what fruit you bear. Although Jesus focused on the right fruit, later this focus got shifted to the right tree.

Rudolph Bultmann distinguishes between belief and faith.<sup>23</sup> “When the author of the Epistle of James says, combating a purely theoretical belief in God, ‘You believe that God exists? You do well. The demons also believe, and tremble’ (James 2:19), — the conception of belief here expressed is not ‘faith’ according to Jesus.” This distinction of Bultmann between faith and belief is central to our discussion here, and so it shall be elaborated further. All biblical writers affirm the necessity of faith. Jesus himself speaks about the necessity of faith. Faith as little as a mustard seed can move a mountain, according to Jesus. Paul devotes one whole chapter to faith.<sup>24</sup> Of the three things that last, he includes faith.<sup>25</sup> He further explained that with faith as our roots, we will grow the fruits of love. It is the visible acts of love that reveal the invisible faith. Someone with faith in God may be described as a faithful person. Biblical writers encourage all people to be faithful. Someone who trusts in God becomes trustworthy. Thus, when I have faith in God, others can have faith in me and can trust me.

Paul defined faith as the certainty of the unseen.<sup>26</sup> He also asserts, “We live our life not based on our eyesight, but based on our faith.”<sup>27</sup> He contrasted our eyesight with our faith, the vision with the inner eye. It involves the conviction that there is more to the world and to our life than what we can perceive with our senses. Although whatever beyond our sense perception remains unknown to us, our positive and humble attitude of faith acknowledges that the world is larger than how we perceive it with our senses. By the term God, we mean what ultimately exists, and by faith in God, we mean our ultimate trust in what ultimately exists. Placing our ultimate trust in anything less than what ultimately exists is a mistake. For example, it is a terrible mistake to place our ultimate trust in our wealth, our health, our knowledge, or other people.

A belief is also faith, but it is not faith in God but faith in a piece of information. A belief is a statement made in the absence of a fact. A fact is a statement supported with evidences. But a belief has only the support of those who believe it. A belief can neither be true nor false. But a belief may be classified into beneficial, harmful, or harmless. Beneficial beliefs may be promoted, harmless ones must

be discouraged and discarded, and harmless ones may be ignored.

We have our beliefs about God. That God exists, that there is only one God, that God loves us— all these are our beliefs about God. But none of these beliefs can replace our faith in God. However, these beliefs about God can support our faith in God. Someone holding a certain belief may be called a believer. A belief about God is not beneficial unless it supports faith in God. Even the belief that God exists cannot be beneficial unless it supports faith in God. As James says, the belief of the demons that God exists does not support faith in God, and so such belief is of no worth.<sup>28</sup>

Here we have managed to distinguish between faith and belief because we have two different words in English: faith and belief. But unfortunately the same word in Greek in the original Greek New Testament could mean either faith or a belief. To make matters worse, the same word in Greek can mean either faithful or a believer. Hebrew also has the same problem. The same word can mean either faith or belief. My own native language, Malayalam, has the same word, *vishwasam*, to mean both faith and belief.

The New Testament writers originally wrote in Greek. Their readers must have confused between faith and belief due to this reason. When the New Testament was translated to the other languages, the meaning of the words, faith and belief, might have interchanged in so many places. Having the same word in Greek and Hebrew, faith must have often been easily mistaken to be a belief.

According to the Bible, faith gets expressed as fruits of love, but in the absence of faith, there cannot be any fruits of love, but there will only be evil, unrighteousness, and hypocrisy. Thus the visible fruits of love was the mark of the invisible faith. However, beliefs were not expressed by anything visible. Only the open verbalization expressed someone's belief. That is how creeds came into existence. An individual's belief was supposed to conform to the commonly accepted belief of the community. A community's belief was supposed to conform to the belief or understanding that has come down from the apostolic times. Anyone or any community that deviated was a heretic. In the Bible we see evil doers, unrighteous people, and



hypocrites, but not many heretics. Later, when the focus shifted from faith to belief, there were many more heretics than evil doers, hypocrites, and unrighteous people.

## **B. The Quest for the Original Christianity**

There have been diverse attempts to regain the original Christianity ever since it was hidden behind the fake one. It seems that the reformation movements in the history of Christianity have been attempts to regain the original Christianity. This is very much true about the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Adolf Harnack argued that it was an unfinished program. The reformers revived the gospel's independence from moralism, ritualism, hierarchy, and philosophical speculation, yet they themselves continued to adhere to the ancient dogmas and to a dogmatic mode of expression.<sup>29</sup> The recent quest for Historical Christ has been another such attempt to regain the original Christianity.

The talk about Jesus Christ within the walls of Christian churches is primarily about the dogmatic Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, rather than about the real Jesus Christ who lived and walked on the earth. The mainline Christians are generally scared to talk about the historical Jesus, for such talk is often immediately associated with Arianism, the belief that Jesus was a man, not God. The few people who dare to talk about the historical Jesus are mostly in the academic field. Marcus Borg rightly states,

I hear very few sermons about Jesus. Perhaps this is because of the kinds of churches I have most frequently attended (Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian), though I think it is probably the same for most mainstream churches.....Scarcely ever have I heard a sermon about what Jesus was like as a historical figure, or about his purpose as he saw it, or about the way he related to the society of his own time.<sup>30</sup>

Albert Schweitzer (1906) commented: "The critical study of the life of Jesus has been for theology a school of honesty."<sup>31</sup> A lie remains a lie even if the whole world believes it. If the 2000-year old Christian religion has its foundation on a lie, it needs to be exposed. Thus the quest for historical Jesus was started by some well-meaning

and honest people who had the courage to seek after and stand for truth. N.T. Wright (1996) clearly states the goal and purpose of finding out who Jesus was: "For Jesus' followers, finding out who Jesus was in his historical context meant and means discovering their own task within their own contexts."<sup>32</sup>

Rudolph Bultmann, one of the most influential theologians of the past century, claimed that the solution to the problem of dogmatic Christ is not historic Christ, but the Kerygmatic<sup>33</sup> Christ. Other scholars like Martin Dibelius and Karl Schmidt joined him. They believed that the historical analysis of the New Testament is both futile and unnecessary. They thought that the gospels were not reliable historical documents, for the Gospel stories were molded by early Christian preachers. According to them, the theology of the New Testament deals with the Christ of Kerygma, not with the historical Jesus. Honestly seeking the truth in the pages of the New Testament, what we see is the kerygmatic Christ, surrounded by myth. Today living far away in time and place, we may get to the real Jesus by demythologization. Although several people pointed out that it is not a demythologization, but a re-mythologization that we need today, the central claim of Bultmann stands, and it has brought about a radical shift in the understanding of Christ. The church began with a metaphorical understanding of Christ, which later became myths<sup>34</sup> surrounding Christ. Later, with our losing the ability of metaphorical thinking, metaphors began to be interpreted literally, and myths became dogmas.

Burton Mack clearly and effectively summarizes Bultmann's role.<sup>35</sup> Flip Schutte<sup>36</sup> (2006), summarizes Mack's arguments in a review article. The following passage from this review clearly states the role of Bultmann.

All people tell stories about their past that set the stage for their own time and place in a larger world (Mack 2003:11). For some reason early Christians came to think of their own stories of the God of Israel and father of Jesus as true in a way that made all of the stories of other peoples false and dangerous. It was not long before Christians used the term

“belief” to express their acceptance of the truth of the gospel story (Mack 2003:13). Only the stories of the gods of other people were called myths. The gospel story, by contrast, was referred to as the gospel and it was imagined as “true” in ways that other myths were not (Mack 2003:17).

That it was a story of the gods, in some ways like other stories of the gods and heroes known to all in the Greco-Roman age, is clear. But one of its features that Christians were expected to believe, was that the high god of the gospels had plans to expand his kingdom and rule over the whole world, and that the inaugural event happened “under Pontius Pilate”. This introduced a combination of *mythos* and *historia* which is very tight, and especially so in that the event of importance was definitely dated and of recent, not archaic history. This is an exceptionally odd feature of the Christian myth, and Christian apologists have always used it to claim that the gospel is not “myth,” but “history.” However, Mack (2003:13) made it clear in his book that the “setting in history” of the gospel story is one of its more obvious mythic features.

For long it was taken for granted that the gospels were the confused attempts of early Christians to write a biography, and that the task of the modern scholar was to correct their mistakes by critical reconstruction and rearrangement (Mack 2003:27). But according to Bultmann, it was not possible to know anything about the historical Jesus except for the fact that (Dass) there had been an historical Jesus, and that he had proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God (see Ashcraft 1972:47). This point of view was unacceptable for a great deal of American scholars, and a new quest for the historical Jesus started.

Mack argues that what are claimed to be the “true beliefs” in Christianity are really myths. He seems to imply that if only Christians have the willingness to admit it, the problem can be solved to a great extent.

Closely following the quest for historical and kerygmatic/mythic

Christ, one may end up greatly confused without a firm ground to stand on. Christianity has been in existence for centuries with its dogmatic Christ. Then the quest for historical Christ comes along warning us that we might be standing on a false foundation. While the historical theologians were working hard to discover the real historical Christ for us to have a firm foundation, there comes along the new quest for kerygmatic Christ claiming that the quest for historical Christ is not only futile but also unnecessary. So what do we do now? Should we now go back to the dogmatic Christ? A lot of people who get frustrated with the quest might choose this easy way out. But a few might still go on with the quest. Mar Gregorios would probably suggest that we need to move on accepting the corrections the quests have suggested. We cannot blindly go back to the dogmatic Christ ignoring all the findings of the recent quests.

Jesus Christ as the high-priest standing at the right-hand side of God— that was the favorite mythical image of Christ for Mar Gregorios.<sup>37</sup> From that position, Christ acts as a mediator between God and humanity. The historical Christ performed the same role by speaking to people representing God and by representing people before God. Mar Gregorios claims that the Christian church is a group of people who become one with Christ and aligns with this role of the mediator/high-priest. Thus the Christian Church has to do the same kind of things that the historical Christ did. The church stands before God as a high-priest representing the humanity, and the humanity stands as a high priest before God representing the entire creation. Here we see Mar Gregorios bringing the historical and Kerygmatic (mythical) Christ together, making them one. Thus the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith become one and the same for him.

It seems that Metropolitan Gregorios respected the quests for historic Christ and kerygmatic Christ as honest searches for truth. He seems to have admired Bultmann's approach of kerygmatic Christ and his form criticism of the scriptures. The Kingdom of God was a major topic of study for Mar Gregorios just as it was for Bultmann. Mar Gregorios has often suggested that the Latin Western tradition of Christianity was responsible for converting the myths to dogmas. While the Greek (Eastern) tradition was more at home in metaphorical

understanding, the Latin tradition was more at home in literal understanding.

However, Metropolitan Gregorios did not have much respect for the mainstream Theology of his time. He complained that it proceeded within narrow and manageable confines exploring questions unrelated to human existential issues. He thought that such quests do not yield answers to the fundamental questions about human existence. He asserted that whether we study about the historic Christ or the kerygmatic Christ, unless this study is directly linked to the present human existence, it cannot have much relevance.<sup>38</sup> This remark should not be interpreted to mean that Mar Gregorios was against such studies. He merely warns that such a study can be fruitful and meaningful only if it has relevance to our existence here and now.

This stand of Mar Gregorios reminds one of the stand of St. Paul regarding the question of circumcision. When two groups argued with each other for and against circumcision, St. Paul took a third stance without joining either of the warring groups. He said, what matters is neither circumcision, nor un-circumcision, but becoming a new creation!<sup>39</sup> Circumcision was the outward representation of becoming a new creation. Similarly, when the theologians of his time argued in favor of historical Christ or of kerygmatic Christ, Mar Gregorios shifted the focus to human existence here and now. The truth about what really happened in history is important and is good to know. But the need to live a meaningful life cannot be replaced by our wish to know the truth of what happened in the past. Unless the life of Jesus Christ has a direct influence and implication in our life here and now, any kind or amount of study on Jesus is of no value.

This also reminds one of Jesus Christ's approach to Sabbath when he claimed that Sabbath is for man. Sabbath observance can only have the role of supporting a healthy human existence; human existence cannot have the purpose of supporting Sabbath observance. Similarly, the quest for historic Jesus or Kerygmatic Christ has to support and must lead to healthy human existence. As long as the quest serves this purpose, it is well and good. Otherwise, such quest is of no use.

## Conclusion

Just a few decades after its inception, Christianity seems to have deviated from its original vision shifting the focus from faith in God to beliefs about God. No other religions seem to have split into so many pieces like Christianity probably because they do not have such an emphasis on right beliefs. One might wonder if the church would have divided into so many pieces based on their beliefs if the early church had had the advantage of using English with its two different words, faith and belief, rather than Greek with its only word which can mean either.

This is the background of this study on the vision and mission of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios. He insists that today's Christian church has no other mission but the mission of Jesus Christ. By this he implies that today's Christianity has to regain the vision and mission of the original Christianity. It has to shift its focus back from belief to faith. The focus needs to be on doing the will of God just as Jesus did and not on holding the right set of beliefs. Now we will take a look at the vision and mission of Jesus Christ as Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios understood it. By vision I mean one's view of life. By mission I mean what one does with one's life based on the vision.

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- 1 Matthew. 13: 24-30
  - 2 The first century CE
  - 3 Matthew. 7: 15-20
  - 4 Matthew 7:21- 23
  - 5 Mark 9:38-41
  - 6 Luke 18: 9-14
  - 7 Luke 21: 1-4
  - 8 Romans 2: 28-29
  - 9 James 2: 19-20
  - 10 I John 2: 9
  - 11 i.e. toward the end of the first century CE
  - 12 Titus 1:9
  - 13 II John 1:7

- 14 Jude 1:3
- 15 Freedom and Authority p.51
- 16 <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/harnack.htm>  
As retrieved on July 20, 2014
- 17 Freedom and Authority P. 50–53
- 18 Freedom and Authority p. 139–140
- 19 Kunnathu, John. (2011). *Gregorian Vision*. New York: Paragon House
- 20 Freedom and Authority pp. 57-59
- 21 Freedom and Authority pp. 101-112
- 22 Freedom and Authority p. 32
- 23 *Jesus and the Word* (1926)
- 24 Letter to Hebrews ch.11
- 25 1 Corinthians 13:13
- 26 Letter to Hebrews 11:1
- 27 II Corinthians 5:7
- 28 James 2:19
- 29 <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/harnack.htm>  
As retrieved on July 23, 2014
- 30 Borg, Marcus. (1985). *The Historical Jesus and Christian Preaching*. As retrieved on July 25, 2014.
- 31 Schweitzer, Albert. (1906). *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. As retrieved on July 25, 2014.
- 32 N. T. Wright, *The Historical Jesus and Christian Theology*, *Sewanee Theological Review* 39, 1996. As retrieved on July 25, 2014.
- 33 Kerygma is a Greek noun which means preaching. It refers both to the event and the content of Jesus' preaching of the gospel.
- 34 Myth in common everyday usage means false. But it has another sophisticated usage, in which it is a very complex literary and symbolic representation of the reality. Thus mythical can mean poetical. Here obviously, it is used in its sophisticated usage.
- 35 Burton L Mack .(2003). *The Christian myth: Origins, logic, and legacy*. New York: Continuum. As retrieved on July 25, 2014.
- 36 Dr Flip (P J W) Schutte (DLitt et Phil, DTh, PhD) is a research associate of Prof Dr Andries G van Aarde, Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria. [www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/download/349/247](http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/download/349/247). As retrieved on July 25, 2014.
- 37 The Meaning and Nature of Diakonia P. 33
- 38 Freedom and Authority p.16-19
- 39 Galatians 6:15

# 3

## The Vision and Mission of Jesus Christ

Under this heading will be given a summary of this writer's understanding of the vision and mission of Jesus Christ. The historical context of the origin of Christianity will be examined first because this is the general context in which we will place Jesus Christ. From there, we will move on to the historical context of Jesus Christ himself, which varies from the context of the origin of Christianity. Then we will have a look at the mythic/poetic worldview of Jesus' world. Then, we will move to Jesus' view of life. After a general introduction, and an examination of the various currents of thought in Jesus' world, we will take a more detailed look at the various aspects of Jesus' view of life. Under each section we will see how his view of life was reflected in his life and mission.

It was this writer's understanding of Paulos Mar Gregorios' view of the vision and mission of Jesus Christ that helped this writer evolve the present understanding as given here. However, this writer cannot claim that this understanding presented here fully matches with his understanding as well. Although the bishop was the primary influence, he can't be blamed for any of this writer's possible misunderstandings and misperceptions.

### A. The Historical Context of Jesus Christ

Karen Armstrong suggests that the one decisive event that caused the birth of Christianity is the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans.<sup>1</sup> Ancient Judaism came to an end in AD 70 when their temple in Jerusalem was burned by the Romans. Their temple was the center and basis of their life, and its destruction shattered their life to pieces. The foundation on which they had built up their life was entirely destroyed, which brought their civilization down. When they saw their temple burning down to ashes, it was easier to choose death rather than life. It was easier for them to lose hope and commit suicide as a nation rather than make the unlikely



choice of continuing to live. Although a lot of people among them might have chosen death at that time, a few among them made the choice to live. Out of the ashes of the old Israel rose a new Israel. A group of dynamic men and women began to proclaim the good news of a new Israel. It was the good news of faith and hope. The life and teachings of a rabbi, called Jesus, who walked among them a few decades earlier, provided the foundation of this new movement.

Out of the ashes of the temple of Jerusalem grew one more movement besides Christianity— the Rabbinical Judaism. It was similar to Christianity in various ways, but different in various other ways. They had their foundation primarily upon the teachings of Rabbi Hillel, a great Rabbi who lived in the generation prior to that of Jesus Christ. Recognition of the fact that both Christianity and Rabbinical Judaism evolved out of the same event might help develop a better understanding and cooperation between them, which can immensely contribute to peace and unity in the world. However, we will not explore the development of Rabbinical Judaism any further as it does not belong to the scope of this study.

The emergence of the new Israel was a resurrection from death. Identifying with the resurrected Christ, they sensed the power of God in their survival. The death and resurrection of Jesus symbolized the death and resurrection of Israel. Founding upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, this community gradually rose and stretched its wings across the two powerful empires— Rome in the west and Persia in the east. Whoever burned their temple and their civilization was brought to their knees in a matter of two and a half centuries— Christianity, the new Israel, was ruling the known world by the fourth century.

A break with the past had its disadvantages, but it had its advantages too. So many dead customs that were being a burden to the people also burned along with the temple. As fire purifies gold, suffering purified their religion leaving the original essential form of religion that could inspire people and could serve as a foundation to a new way of life. Rather than being the religion of a race, the new Israel became a movement that transcends the differences of race, gender, and class, and became a religion of the entire human

community. It was this characteristic that attracted a lot of non-Jews to this movement.

They drew inspiration from Jesus' story of two paths: one that leads to life, and the other to destruction.<sup>2</sup> While a lot of people hopelessly chose the path of destruction, a few people among them chose the path of life. They also drew inspiration from Jesus' story of two houses—one on rock and the other on sand. The teachings of Jesus provided them with the rock on which they could build up a new civilization. They accepted the scriptures from the past as a precious heritage to give them guidance. However, instead of being bound by the scriptures, they had the courage and creativity to write new scriptures.

Next to Jesus, it was Paul, a well-educated Jew born outside Israel, who provided inspiration and guidance to this movement. He could communicate effectively with the new generation of Jews who lived all over the Roman Empire. It was probably Paul who named this movement the New Israel, and acknowledged Jesus as its Moses, its founder and captain. Besides traveling to the local communities that he founded throughout the empire, he kept in touch with them with his letters.

With the destruction of the temple and Jesus' prediction that it would happen, there was likely a rekindled interest in Jesus. People probably wanted to know what else Jesus had predicted. Thus there was a demand for more information about Jesus. A close companion of Paul, traditionally believed to be Mark, wrote a summary of the gospel messages he heard from Paul and other leaders of the movement. It was further edited to become the Mark's Gospel, in which Jesus was presented as the supreme model to the movement. Jesus suffered a lot, and he was misunderstood and forsaken even by the closest friends. Those who follow him will also have the same lot—that was its primary message to the readers. Thus Mark's Gospel challenged people to stand behind Jesus even if they had to lose their lives.

Someone made a collection of Jesus' teachings and sayings, which also got circulated along with the gospel of Mark. Someone else who

happened to have a copy of both of these documents— Mark's Gospel and the collection of sayings— did the service of putting them together along with more information and stories he privately collected. It began to be circulated in the name of Matthew, a disciple of Jesus. It challenged the readers to build up the new Israel on the firm foundation of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It presented the new Israel as the Kingdom of God, and Jesus as its king, the new David. Somewhat during the same time, someone else also made a historically more accurate work using the gospel of Mark, the collection of Jesus' teachings, and some more stories and teachings of Jesus he privately collected, and this book was circulated in the name of Luke. Later he added a second part to his book, in which he continued the story of the community of Jesus, which is known as the Acts of the Apostles. He explained in his books how the creation of the new Israel was significant in relation to what God was doing in the world. A few years later someone gifted with excellent literary skills presented the life and vision of Jesus in a new perspective. A collection of his sermons came to be known as the gospel of John. It explained how the creation of the new Israel was a cosmic event.

These literary works, which originated in the various parts of the Roman Empire, were later officially accepted to be included in the Sacred Scriptures of the Christian community. Numerous other works of literature also originated during this period, and a few of them were recently unearthed from among the Dead Sea scrolls. These works have documented for us the vision and mission of a great movement of civilization that eventually spread to the entire known world. Many Gnostic Gospels are being extensively researched now to determine their significance in the development of Christianity.

Jesus lived a few decades before the catastrophic event of 70CE. Like a prophet, he predicted that something like that was coming. He rightly analyzed the sickness of his society, but not many people were willing to take him seriously. His teachings survived him in the forms of stories and sayings. We cannot get an accurate picture of the life and teachings of Jesus; we can only get a picture of Jesus as presented by the gospel writers and from the limited information from other historical sources.

The gospel writers had no intention to present a real biography of Jesus as he really lived his life; their intention was to present Jesus as he was seen by the emerging new Israel. They were more interested in the present life of a community rather than in the past life of an individual. The Jesus they were writing about was living as the new community.

The picture of Jesus as presented in the gospels varies. For example, in Matthew's gospel, we see Jesus as he was seen in Matthew's world, and in John's gospel, as he was seen in John's world. We may trace a development of this picture based on the time period in which they were written. Mark's is the first of the four gospels, and so Mark's picture of Jesus is the most original one available to us. As the life and teachings of Jesus began to inspire and began to be accepted by more and more people, the status of Jesus also rose higher and higher in the minds of the people. Mark's Jesus is a very down-to-earth human being— someone who suffers and struggles, and someone who has all the diverse feelings like any of us. In a few years' time, Jesus' picture in human minds became more divine and less human— with more divine powers and with fewer human weaknesses. Matthew's picture of Jesus is more divine than that of Mark, and John's picture is even more divine.

An attempt is made here to recreate a picture of the historical context of Jesus as faithfully as it is given in the gospels. There is no claim to any inerrancy or any authority to this picture. The most popular and common among us is a picture of a Jesus who toured in a peaceful countryside preaching and healing. However, this picture is far from the truth. Bultmann gives us a picture of the historical context of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Jesus lived in a world of pain and suffering. The people of Jesus' world were under foreign dominion, and they were oppressed in every possible way. It was somewhat similar to the one in which India was under British dominion. They did not have freedom of religion. Their high priests were appointed by the Romans. Many patriotic people were made outlaws and were forced to live by highway robbery. We read about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.<sup>4</sup> It was very cruel on the part of that foreign governor to slaughter the Galileans while they were doing a religious

ritual in their temple! Jesus sent out his disciples with a warning that they might be arrested or killed.<sup>5</sup> The government authorities were always in fear of mass riots.<sup>6</sup> There were spies among the people, which is the reason why Jesus talked to the people in parables but in plain language to his disciples.<sup>7</sup>

In the absence of political freedom, the land's economy deteriorated steadily. The gap between the rich and the poor was getting wider. We read in a parable of Jesus that there was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury, and at his gate lay a beggar, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table.<sup>8</sup> In another parable we see a man who could not pay his dues liable to be sold into slavery along with his wife and children to clear the debt.<sup>9</sup> In another parable Jesus speaks about a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.<sup>10</sup> From the story of Good Samaritan we assume that burglary must have been very common.<sup>11</sup> Jesus advised not to store up treasures on earth, where thieves break in and steal.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the political oppression and economic deterioration, the people were suffering from starvation, sickness, and mental illness. We read about a pool in Jerusalem where a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed waiting for movement in the water to be healed.<sup>13</sup> We also read about mentally ill people living in tombs.<sup>14</sup>

In such a miserable situation, the religious leadership of the land had the responsibility to rise and lead the people like a good shepherd. However, the religious leadership had gone blind; and as such how could it lead the blind people? Rather than assisting the people with their life, they imposed even more burdens upon them. The people felt like sheep without a shepherd. The religious leadership approached them claiming to show them the right way. But instead of showing them the right way to green pastures and streams, they led them to deserts and wolves. Often the religious leaders proved to be wolves disguised as shepherds.

In this miserable condition, one prayer rose from the depths of their hearts: Hosanna! This means, God, save us! That is all they could do in their helpless situation.

## B. The Mythic/Poetic Worldview of Jesus' World

We may assume that the prayer, *God, save us*, arose from the hearts of everyone in the Jewish community. Jesus helped them verbalize their groan by expanding their simple prayer so that they could become better aware of what they really sought for. The prayer Jesus taught has come down to us as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer answers such questions like why God needs to save the Jewish people and how God may do so.

A close examination of the Lord's Prayer yields a fairly good picture of the mythic/poetic worldview of Jesus' world. This worldview is specifically called a poetic worldview to distinguish it from a scientific worldview. Geocentric and heliocentric worldviews are examples of scientific worldviews. A mythic/poetic worldview is how a poet sees the world as distinguished from how a scientist sees it. A scientist's world is limited to the world that is perceptible to human senses. But a poet completes it with his power of imagination adding the imperceptible part to it. He uses metaphors to represent the imperceptible part as well as the entire world. The poet's world includes the known as well as the unknown parts of the world. Actually a poetic worldview gives us a better orientation to our life than a scientific worldview.

Here is the Lord's Prayer as it appears in the New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come! Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever.<sup>15</sup>

In this prayer, the world is described as a two-storied house consisting of two levels—an upper level and a lower level—heaven and earth. This cosmological view conforms to the worldview presented in the Hebrew Bible, which is filled with stories of angels coming down from heaven, and of heaven opening to allow people on earth a glimpse of what is happening there. The heaven is seen as

an ideal world — a world of joy, love and peace, but earth has all sorts of existential problems. God is in heaven, and the human beings, who are praying, are on earth. God is the king of heaven, but not of earth, and God's kingdom is heaven, not on earth. God's will is done only in heaven, not on earth. The human beings, who are the children of God, are expressing their wish in this prayer for God to become the king of earth as well. God's kingdom needs to come to earth. God's will needs to be done on earth as in heaven so that earth also will become a part of heaven.

If God is not the ruler of earth, then who is its ruler? Whose will is done on earth? Whose kingdom is earth? The answer to this question can also be found within the Lord's Prayer— Deliver us from the evil one. The earth is ruled by the evil one, whose will is done here. The evil one is a synonym of Satan. Satan, who originally received his authority from God, was another angel like Gabriel and Michael, and his name was Lucifer. He was given the responsibility to assist God in administering the earth, but eventually, he rebelled against God and claimed the ownership of earth. Thus he became an enemy of God. The word Satan in its original language, Hebrew, means rebel or enemy. The people of Jesus' world ascribed their plight to the rule of Satan. Relationship with God and among themselves was broken. People did not follow God's will because their relationship with God was broken. The prayer, forgive us as we forgive others, clearly indicates such broken relationships. Suffering from poverty and from various illnesses, they hoped and earnestly prayed for God to intervene and end Satan's rule.

They sincerely hoped that God would soon send someone to replace Satan as the ruler of the earth. They referred to this person as the messiah,<sup>16</sup> which meant the anointed one or the appointed one, for the appointment of a king was done by anointing with oil. As soon as the messiah arrives, he would conduct a judgment, and Satan and all those people and nations that stand on the side of Satan would be eliminated. The Lord's Prayer includes the prayer: Do not bring us to the time of trial (judgment).<sup>17</sup>

The gospels tell us the story of Jesus in the background of this

cosmic myth. Jesus was believed by the Christian community to be the messiah. During the lifetime of Jesus Christ, there was a fierce struggle between Satan (the old ruler of the world) and Christ (the new ruler). Satan first tried to dissuade Jesus by temptations, but then he began to attack him in various ways. Finally Satan managed to get him crucified like a criminal. But Christ turned death to an opportunity to surrender himself fully and completely to the will of God. Also Christ used it as an opportunity to descend to the world of the dead and liberate them from Satan. On the third day, God raised him from among the dead, and on the fortieth day, he ascended to heaven to assume his office as the ruler of the world. Ten days later, the spirit of God, who guided Jesus Christ, descended on the disciples of Jesus Christ so that they could represent Christ on the earth. Although Satan was replaced by Jesus Christ, people on earth remain under Satan's rule unless and until they choose to be under the rule of Christ after hearing the good news that Satan had been overthrown by Christ. That is why the disciples (apostles) of Jesus went all over the world to proclaim the Good News. When the Good News gets proclaimed everywhere, Christ would return to earth in glory, and a judgment would be conducted to eliminate Satan and all the associates of Satan.

Thus the Lord's Prayer is an expansion of the prayer, "God, save us!" The salvation consisted of the heaven descending to earth converting it to heaven.

### **C. The Thought-Currents in Jesus' World**

The relevance of Jesus' thought can be evaluated better in the background of the thought-currents in Jesus' world. Being in the Roman Empire, Jesus' thought-world was heavily influenced by the Greco-Roman civilization. However, within the immediate context of Jesus, in Palestine, the primary thought-currents were that of the Pharisees, the most influential religious leadership, and that of John, the Baptizer, whom Jesus treated as a guide and a master.

#### **The Pharisees**

Ideally the function of a religious leadership is to serve a human



community by providing it with a strong view of life as its foundation, and help to build up a way of life on it. But often the religious leadership gets corrupted as it deviates from its ideal role and as it fails to keep up with the changes in the community it serves. Rather than leading a community as a shepherd, a corrupted religious leadership becomes a wolf in shepherd's clothing. It becomes the guardians of a set of outdated beliefs and rituals, which are forced on the people. Rather than assisting with their life, these beliefs and rituals become heavy burdens for people.

Jesus realized that the religious leadership of his community was not a shepherd, but a wolf disguised as a shepherd. He tried to save his community from this wolf. He identified the primary mark of this religious leadership as dishonesty and hypocrisy. It pretended to be a shepherd, but was really a wolf. Matthew devotes an entire chapter<sup>18</sup> to list the hypocrisy of this religious leadership. Another mark of this religious leadership was a switching of values— the important ones were treated as unimportant, and the unimportant ones were treated as important. Ritualistic rules were treated important, and the ethical rules were treated unimportant. Jesus correctly identified the primary cause of such corruption as blindness— the blindness of the inner eye. Jesus called the religious leaders blind guides.<sup>19</sup> The people are blind, but the religious leadership that guides them is supposed to have eyesight. But unfortunately, they are also blind. A blind shepherd can lead the entire flock of sheep to destruction. Similarly a blind religious leadership can lead the entire community of people to destruction.

In Jesus' world, most of the people have been robbed off of their self-esteem by the few Pharisees who claimed to be righteous. The majority were called unrighteous or sinners by the minority who called themselves righteous. The few who claimed to be righteous claimed so based on their strict observance of rituals; they didn't care much for the ethical rules, which dealt with relationships. This may be called a religious oppression. Jesus emphasized ethical rules, and marginalized rituals by creating the category of God's righteousness. Accordingly, those who care to keep the relationship with God and with fellow beings are righteous in God's eyes. Paul expounded this idea further

in his letter to Romans,<sup>20</sup> where the good news is about God's righteousness. The good news of God's righteousness proclaimed freedom from religious oppression to the so-called sinners and unrighteous.

A way of life developed by a community is guided by certain rules, which may be broadly classified into two: ethical and ritualistic. Ethical rules are about relationships— with oneself, with fellow beings, with God (the ultimate reality), and with nature. Healthy relationship is essential for existence. A break or tension in any one of these relationships can make existence miserable or even impossible. Ethical rules are universal and are fundamental in all relationships. Ritualistic rules support the existence of the way of life of a specific religious community. They vary from religion to religion, and are secondary to ethical rules in importance. Ritualistic rules exist to support the ethical rules, and not the other way round. Jews have their weekly meeting on Saturday, Christians have it on Sunday, and Muslims have it on Friday. This is an example of a ritualistic rule, and it exists for the smooth functioning of the way of life of a community.

A religion is supposed to have its focus on the ethical rules. Though it will have certain ritualistic rules that support the existence of the community, they will always be subordinate to the ethical rules. A religion that focuses upon the ritualistic rules and ignores the ethical rules orients a community in a destructive path. Whenever a religious community thus deviates from its original focus, we often find a religious reformer arising to bring the community back on track. Most often, a new religious community forms around the religious reformer. Jesus was a reformer within Judaism. He asked people to have their focus back on the ethical rules rather than on the ritualistic rules. "Sabbath is for man," he declared, "not man for Sabbath." Jesus looked for opportunities to break the rules of Sabbath to make them understand that those rules were neither essential nor important. To those who complained that he was breaking the law of their religion, he asserted that he was not breaking them but truly following them. According to him, the primary law was to love God and the fellow beings. The rules of Sabbath were good as long as they remained subordinate and supportive to the primary law. Jesus did not claim

that he taught anything new. He only invited his people to shift their focus to the ethical rules.

In an account of the role of the Pharisees in Jesus' world, William C. Varner<sup>21</sup> argues that of all the various Jewish parties that flourished during Jesus' time, only the Pharisees survived the devastation of 70 CE as an identifiable continuing entity. The reconstructed Judaism of the second and third centuries was, in essence, based on the Pharisaic beliefs and practices of pre-70 CE.

This raises a question: If Pharisaism was of such quality and strength to survive the devastation of 70 CE, why did Jesus speak harshly about them? Varner answers this question convincingly. In the generation prior to Jesus' time, there lived two great Pharisees — Shammai and Hillel. They and their disciples, called the Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel, represented two distinct currents in the Jewish thought—the conservative and the progressive. Generally speaking, Shammai followed a more stringent and literal interpretation of the law, while Hillel expounded a more flexible application of its demands.<sup>22</sup>

Varner quotes an incident recorded in The Talmud,<sup>23</sup> that is characteristic of the differences between the two great scholars. A Gentile came to Shammai with the strange request that he be taught the entire Torah, but that it be done during the time he could stand on one foot! It is recounted that Shammai, a surveyor by trade, chased him away with a cubit stick. When this Gentile approached Hillel with the same request, instead of being scolded for such an impudent demand, he was told, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Torah. All the rest is commentary—now go and study.”

Louis Goldberg<sup>24</sup> argues that the stand of Gamaliel, Hillel's grandson, regarding Jesus' disciples represents Hillel's moderate view. Gamaliel advised that they be left alone, stating that if they were not of God, they would fail. If they were of God and the religious leaders attempted to stop them, the leaders would only “find [themselves] fighting against God.”<sup>25</sup> Varner further affirms that it was the Hillel-type Pharisaism that became the “Judaism” of subsequent

generations. He also suggests that the stringent, hyper-strict Pharisaic scruples that received the strongest condemnation from Jesus might be those most often espoused by the Shammai school.

We read in Luke's Gospel, "The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, 'Get out and depart from here; for Herod will kill you.'"<sup>26</sup> This passage shows that some among the Pharisees admired and respected Jesus. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who become followers of Jesus, were most probably Pharisees, as well as Saul<sup>27</sup>. The parallels with Hillel's statement in the above story are readily recognized in Jesus' similar statement<sup>28</sup> and in Paul's summary of the Law<sup>29</sup>.

Thus we may conclude that Jesus was sympathetic to Hillel's Pharisiasm, whereas he opposed Shammai's pharisasm. Although Hillel was preferable to Shammai for Jesus, he couldn't wholeheartedly accept Hillel's views and join their group either, for there were several aspects in Hillel's Pharisiasm that he couldn't agree with.

Goldberg argues that there were three aspects that Jesus couldn't agree with the Pharisees— regarding women, the common people (am Ha 'Ares), and what are referred to as the "harsh traditions of the elders."

Concerning women, even Hillel, known for his moderation on many issues, once said: "The more women, the more witchcrafts."<sup>30</sup> The gospels indicate that Jesus held a far different position. Luke, in particular, demonstrates the Messiah's high regard for women just by virtue of the fact that he spent time in their company. Jesus stressed that women had worth. He even came to the defense of a woman caught in the act of adultery, charging her accusers to cast their stones only if they themselves were without sin [John 8:7]. Women were a part of the band of disciples, both as ministers and as students.<sup>31</sup>

The am Ha 'Ares<sup>32</sup> and the Pharisees were in contention. One of the mandates of the Pharisees was: "A Pharisee may not eat with an am Ha 'Ares."<sup>33</sup> Jesus challenged this attitude in word and deed. After Matthew became a follower of Jesus, he gave a banquet and

invited his former “coworkers”—tax collectors, who were considered the dregs of society. Jesus attended the gathering because these were the very people who needed him the most. His compassion prompted much criticism by certain religious leaders whose question was more of an accusation: “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”<sup>34</sup>

Another major difference between Jesus and the Pharisees was his concern over some of the harsh rulings on the “traditions of the elders.” In many ways, his lifestyle was consistent with Pharisaic interpretations: he attended synagogue services during the week as well as on Sabbath days, and he observed the blessing before the meals. There were other traditions, however, which Jesus broke. For example, he healed people on the Sabbath. That was when the greatest number of people could hear his message and see his miracles, and it was his best opportunity to help people. When an indignant synagogue official berated him for healing a woman on Sabbath, Jesus replied that if, according to the Law, an ox or donkey can be unleashed and led away for water on the Sabbath, then could not this poor woman, “whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”<sup>35</sup> His point was that human need takes precedence over sterile rules. Rules were designed to help people revere God, rather than themselves becoming the object of reverence. He insisted upon recognizing exceptions to tradition. He cited the example of David fleeing to Nob, where he asked for the consecrated bread from the holy place of the sanctuary to feed himself and his men. Even though common people were not to eat of the bread, the priest complied.<sup>36</sup>

### **John, the Baptizer**

John, the Baptizer, was a major source of influence in the life of Jesus. All the gospels speak highly of him. Jesus himself had great respect for him.<sup>37</sup> It seems that John was the immediate reason for Jesus to leave his domestic duties and set out with the message of the kingdom of God.

John sensed something terribly wrong with the ideas spread by the Pharisees. The Pharisees made the Jewish people feel superior

to the others. They were told that they were a privileged people, though never were they told about their responsibilities. John even called the Pharisees “vipers” because they were spreading the venom of what we today call communalism. The God the Pharisees believed in was a Jewish god, and the Kingdom of God they expected was nothing but a Jewish Empire. John made it clear to them that God has no obligation to the Jewish people for His agreement with Abraham because God has the power to create some children for Abraham from the stones on the ground, and fulfill His promise if He wants to with those newly created ones.<sup>38</sup> The God John believed in was not a Jewish god but a God of all humankind. If God has chosen the Jewish community, it is not to give them any privilege but to give them a responsibility.

John was a prophet in the line of the prophets like Hosea and Amos, who raised their voice for social justice. John asked people to be good and do good in their day-to-day life. Unlike the Pharisees, he didn't tell the people anything about observing Sabbath. He believed along with Hosea that God pleases not in sacrifices but in merciful deeds. If you have two shirts, give one to someone who doesn't have any, he told people.<sup>39</sup>

In order to help the people understand his ideas better, he used the metaphor of a farmer and farm.<sup>40</sup> God is like a farmer, and the world is like His farm. People are like the trees and plants, and the good deeds are like fruits. God, the farmer, expects all people to be fruitful. Those people without good deeds have no place in God's farm. They are like fruitless trees that would be cut down and used as firewood.

The Kingdom of God as John understood consisted of only those people who do good deeds. This is totally different from what the Pharisees believed— a Jewish empire. One doesn't have to be a Jew or has to follow the rules of Sabbath to be in God's Kingdom according to John. One has to turn from evil and do good deeds. John challenged people to come down to him in the River Jordan and accept a ceremonial bath, which symbolized crossing River Jordan and becoming a new Israel with a renewed commitment to God.

Among the people who accepted the teaching of John was Jesus,

who approached John to be baptized. There are reasons to believe that John became a hero to Jesus while he was young. He seemed to have great admiration toward John for his revolutionary ideas. Once Jesus remarked that John was greater than a prophet—the very messenger who prepares the way for Christ as prophesied by Isaiah. He also said that among those born of woman, there had not risen anyone greater than John.<sup>41</sup>

Mark says clearly that Jesus started proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God after John was imprisoned.<sup>42</sup> In this way, Jesus was actually filling the position of John. He started proclaiming the same message that John proclaimed. It seems that Jesus began with almost the same beliefs and hopes of John. We see Jesus sharing the belief of John that the coming messiah would separate the sinners from the righteous as a farmer would separate wheat from the chaff. However, the originality and greatness of Jesus' thought could not let him stay a disciple of John. He soared higher than John, and obtained unmatched clarity of vision.

Although John's vision was so magnificent, there was a flaw in it. Jesus found this flaw and corrected it. There lay the greatness of Jesus' vision. John asked people to do good deeds and to love the fellow beings unconditionally. However, he told them about a God who was very conditional in His attitude and behavior.<sup>43</sup> God had the role of a judge, and He had no mercy to those who deviated from Him. In short, the God John talked about was not a role model for the people. Jesus corrected this inconsistency by making God a role model. Jesus moved God from the seat of a judge to the seat of a father. "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect,"<sup>44</sup> Jesus taught them. "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" because that is exactly what God does. God raises His Sun and gives rain not only to the righteous people but also to the wicked people. Once Jesus made this basic correction, everything else was redefined to suit this.

John provided a few examples of good deeds<sup>45</sup>, but Jesus went beyond that and provided a clear definition of what is good. The primary condition of being and doing good is having the right relationship with God and fellow beings. While John compared the

Kingdom of God to a farm, Jesus compared it to a family. God's Kingdom is, according to Jesus, a family in which all people live together in peace and harmony like brothers and sisters accepting God as their father. If the right relationship is good, then broken relationships must be evil. Loving God and fellow beings is good, and hating them is evil.<sup>46</sup>

Once the ultimate goal is set as right relationships, the next step is to find the most effective means to achieve the goal. A clear understanding of who are involved in the relationship, and of what originally caused a broken relationship is necessary.

There is a two-way relationship: between God and humans, and among humans. On the one side there is God, and on the other side there are humans. God is father, and humans are His children. God knows everything about everything, but humans have very little knowledge of anything. Therefore, if the relationship between God and humans is broken, God cannot be responsible for it because God wouldn't do anything wrong. However, humans keep on doing mistakes and errors out of ignorance. Like a father, God loves all humans all the time. God has no hatred to any human being at any time. God loves humans even if they hate Him in return. God gives rain and sunlight to all people irrespective of how they are. It is always humans who break the relationship between God and humans out of ignorance. First of all, humans are ignorant of how God is. They don't know that God loves them unconditionally. They think that God loves them if they love Him, and hates them if they hate Him. Even John, in his metaphor of farm and farmer, presents such an understanding of God. God knows that humans err out of ignorance, and so God is willing to forgive them all the time. This is clear from Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>47</sup> Once people have such an understanding of God, they accept God as their role model, and love and forgive their fellow beings.

What follows is a more detailed explanation of Jesus' views. We will begin with the question of epistemology (How do we know the truth?) and then move on to the question of ontology (What is the



truth?). Under this we will examine Jesus' view regarding God, man, the relation between God and man, and the relation between man and man.

#### **D. Jesus' View of Life**

A view of life, which occurs within the context of a poetic worldview, specifically deals with the human life. It answers the questions such as why we live and how we should live. It also explains how we are related to God, to the world, and with each other.

Let us imagine two identical buildings standing side by side. There comes a hurricane, which blows hard on the buildings. Once the hurricane passes, you see only one building. The other one has been swept away by the hurricane. One building has withstood the hurricane, for it has quality and strength. The one that has been swept away was obviously of poor quality.

Jesus Christ said this parable of buildings with strong and weak foundation after presenting his view of life in the well-known Sermon on the Mount. He said that those who accept and apply his view of life are like a wise man who builds a building with a strong foundation. Those who accept the shallow views of life that were popular in his time were like the foolish man who builds a building on a weak foundation. He probably had in mind the views of life propagated by Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Their view of life and their way of life represented the weak foundation for Jesus.<sup>48</sup>

The two buildings in Jesus' parable are the two kinds of life we may live. We may have a life of good quality or one of poor quality. But how do we know if our life has quality or not? We will know if our life has quality when we face hurricanes in our life. We will withstand hurricanes in our life if it has quality and strength.

How do we build a life of quality and strength? Being conscious beings, we ask basic questions about our life, such as what we are, where we are, why we live, and how we are related to other beings. We put together our answers to form our view of life. Our life is to our view of life as a building is to its foundation. It is the presence of a strong foundation that determines the strength of a building. Similarly

it is the presence of a strong view of life that makes our life strong.

We do not know whether Jesus had any personal experience in making buildings; however he would have some knowledge and direct experience with constructing buildings that might explain his use of this metaphor. According to the tradition, Jesus' father was a carpenter. This likely played a significant role in his vision of constructing a civilization. Jesus was talking in the parable of the buildings primarily about the life of his community—the Jewish nation. It was a time when this community faced fierce hurricanes. Its very existence was at stake. It was already under the Roman occupation with heavy taxation and without any freedom to practice their traditional way of life. Growing up in that community, Jesus found out that it lacked a strong foundation. Its view of life as propagated by Pharisees and other leaders was too weak to equip his community to face the hurricanes.

Matthew wrote his gospel immediately after the catastrophic event of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Roman army. This event was like a hurricane that swept away the Jewish temple and the way of life it represented. The building that collapsed in Jesus' parable probably symbolized the Jerusalem temple and the religion it represented.

Jesus inaugurated a new community life on a strong foundation, which he called the kingdom of God. It was like a strong building with a strong foundation. But why did Jesus call it the kingdom of God? Though the answer of this question was mentioned in the previous section, it is being repeated here for further clarity and emphasis. The term, kingdom of God, belonged to the poetic worldview of the popular culture, which Jesus used creatively to communicate with the people of his time and place. It was believed that all the evil in the world was due to the rule of Satan, the angel of God who chose to disobey God. This angel was originally appointed by God to take care of the administration of the earth. However, he rebelled against God, and began to rule the earth following his own will rather than the will of God. People were earnestly waiting for God to remove him and install someone else in his place—the Messiah. Jesus, after

accepting baptism from John, had a vision in which he saw the heaven open, and he was appointed as the Messiah by God. Assuming the role of the Messiah, Jesus went straight to the desert to have a face-to-face meeting with Satan. Satan tried his best to shake Jesus' conviction that he was the Messiah (the son of God). Coming out victorious, Jesus began to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. Converting his life into a struggle with Satan, he began to liberate people from the bondage of Satan by casting out demons and by healing the sick. Satan made an apparent victory over Jesus by managing to get him crucified. But by surrendering his will fully and completely to God, Jesus transformed it into a victory over Satan. The victory was further affirmed by his rising from the dead.

Civilization is a modern word. Although Jesus did not use that word, he meant a radically new way of life by the term Kingdom of God. He wanted the present way of life to be replaced by a radically new way of life. He explained to people exactly how the new way of life would be different from the existing way of life. God would be accepted as the ruler in the new way of life. Although there might be human rulers, they would rule responsibly recognizing the ultimate authority of God. The world would be a family of God in which all people would be free as the children of God. There would be no slavery in such a world, and no one would be superior or inferior to others.

The economic system of the new way of life would be far different from the existing one. Jesus proclaimed that there wouldn't be any rich people in the Kingdom of God; only the poor would enter there. By the term "rich" Jesus meant those people who claim the ownership of wealth in their possession. By the term "poor" Jesus meant those who are willing to accept God as the true owner of all wealth. If God is the owner of all wealth, all people must be poor. Those who realize this are the poor in spirit, as Matthew called them in his gospel. It was based on this principle that the Christian church experimented with such a community life in which wealth was held in common. This idea was later adopted as the basis of socialism, in which the means of production is held in common.

Such a political and economic system will provide the necessary background for people to live a life of health, joy, and peace.

### **Jesus' View of How We Can Know the Truth**

The religious leadership of Jesus' world, the Pharisees, claimed the custody of truth. They sat on the seat of Moses, claiming knowledge of God's laws. Jesus called this the righteousness of the Pharisees, which was really self-righteousness as Paul later asserted. Jesus also referred to the approach of the Pharisees as blindness, which is an inner blindness, a lack of awareness. In the parable of the sower<sup>49</sup> Jesus related them to the rocky field, which does not receive any seed. Such people, claiming custody of truth, have closed their minds, and are not receptive to any new knowledge. Jesus, however, did not claim the custody of truth, for he believed in God's righteousness, according to which God alone is right. God alone knows the ultimate truth. This approach will make us humble and be willing to learn from each other.

Jesus knew that we primarily learn with direct experience of life through our five senses. He asked his disciples to learn by observing the lilies in the field and birds in the air.<sup>50</sup> He cared for the blind and the deaf, the ones who didn't have the opportunity to perceive the world like the rest of the people. But he was also aware that there is more in the world than what our five senses can perceive. The world we perceive was real to him. But he also knew that the world we perceive is only a part of the real world. His world included God, angels, and heaven in addition to the world we perceive.

But direct experience is not the only way of learning. We also learn indirectly when others transfer their experiences to us by spoken or written words. Jesus wanted his disciples and others to learn from him. Jesus was aware of the importance of the inherited knowledge. The scriptures were storehouses of precious knowledge inherited from the ancestors.<sup>51</sup>

But receiving information is not enough. The information needs to be processed in the mind. Jesus was very well aware of the power of reasoning. He himself used reasoning in his discourses. Also he

encouraged his disciples to think.<sup>52</sup> He also knew that only a mind that is clear and pure can receive and process information well. The parable of the sower<sup>53</sup> illustrates the importance of keeping our mind clean and fresh in order to receive new and creative ideas. Only by keeping the mind free of worries and anxieties can we keep it free for right thinking. He admonished Martha that she needed to keep her mind steady and clear.<sup>54</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount he sarcastically asks if anyone can add a little time to his lifespan by worrying about it.<sup>55</sup> Jesus claimed that one can even see God with a pure heart.<sup>56</sup> That is probably how God gets revealed to children, with an open mind, but remains hidden from the people who claim to know. Jesus prayed once, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants."<sup>57</sup> Here Jesus probably refers to those people who claim to be wise and intelligent, not those who are truly wise and intelligent.

Jesus was very well at home with the basic epistemological principle that we always learn something new in relation to something we already know. That is why Jesus always used parables to teach. He taught abstract, complex and unfamiliar ideas using concrete, simple and familiar examples. To the peasants and fishermen he talked using examples in their everyday life.

Thus in gaining new knowledge, Jesus was very well aware of the role of the five senses, of the inherited knowledge, of the rational power, and of the previous knowledge.

### **Jesus' View of the World**

We don't know what exactly the scientific worldview of Jesus was. It seems that Jesus' world was slowly moving toward a geocentric worldview from a three-tiered one. Moreover, Jesus' scientific worldview didn't seem to have much relevance to his view of life. So we are not much concerned about his scientific worldview here.

However, it is highly possible that Jesus shared the mythic/poetic worldview seen in the Lord's Prayer. Myth and poetry are the best

media for the unknown and unknowable realities. We have our real world here. Above this world is the ideal world—heaven. Our world has the potential to reach the ideal so that the ideal and the real can eventually become one. When our real world becomes one with the ideal world, evil will not exist anymore. But this change won't happen automatically. There needs to be a conscious effort on the part of the human beings. Because they are related to God as children are to their father, they need to wish and will for a change. God cannot impose heaven upon them.

The events in Jesus' life, as narrated in the gospels, follow this worldview. After accepting baptism from John, Jesus had a vision of the open heaven.<sup>58</sup> He heard the voice of God appointing him as the messiah—You are my dear son. The spirit of God descended on him confirming the appointment. Accepting the appointment, he went straight to meet Satan, the present ruler.<sup>59</sup> Satan laughed at Jesus' conviction that he was the messiah (son of God), and tried to dissuade him from his mission. Satan tried to convince him that he (Satan) was the lawful ruler of the earth, and invited Jesus to serve him. But Jesus overcame this temptation, and continued his mission. He began to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God had arrived, and encouraged people to renounce the rule of Satan and enter God's kingdom.

### **Jesus' View of God**

It seems that Jesus shared the general understanding of his community regarding God. Other than that Jesus didn't claim to possess any special or secret knowledge of God. Whatever he said about God was in relation to Man's nature.

“For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”<sup>60</sup>

“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.”<sup>61</sup>

“Be perfect as your heavenly father in perfect.”<sup>62</sup>

We know that human abilities are limited. In contrast to man, everything must be possible for God, the almighty. Similarly, no human being can claim to be perfectly good, but in contrast, God is perfectly good. We may make more contrasts as follows: We know very little,

but God knows everything. We live for a short while, but God lives forever. Thus the statements made about God are actually deductions from the facts about human beings. They are not independent facts that can be verified. Nothing is known about God, and nothing can be known about God. But the idea of God is used in the above examples as a scale to measure man.

Jesus claimed that someone with a pure heart can see God.<sup>63</sup> Thus knowledge of God is unlike any other knowledge. Usually we get to know something with our five senses and with our power of reasoning. But our senses and our rational power do not give us any knowledge of God. With a pure heart, we get a vision of God, but this vision cannot be translated to thoughts or words. So someone who receives a vision of God cannot tell us anything about what he sees.

Jesus encouraged people to get to know God, not with their senses and rationality, but with their pure heart. With an honest and straightforward approach, people can get into a friendly relationship with God. Human beings can even accept God as their father and as their role model, and follow His example.<sup>64</sup>

The kind of knowledge Jesus possessed about God was described by later theologians as apophatic, which means that we can speak only negatively about God. We can only say what God is not and how God is not like. Whatever was spoken about God was really about human beings and their life. When Jesus explained to Pilate that his authority actually came from God, he implied that people in positions of authority should not misuse their authority. If God is the true owner of all wealth, the so-called wealthy cannot claim to truly own the wealth in their possession. If God alone has life in himself, it means that all living beings receive their life from God. This understanding helps us to overcome the fear of death, and it also helps us to treat all living beings with respect. If God alone is holy, it means that no human being can claim to be holy and look down upon others as sinners. If God alone is omnipotent, with all the abilities, all people have got their abilities from God, and nobody has got all the abilities. So we cannot classify people into able and disabled.

God may be compared to the zero in Mathematics. The value of zero cannot be objectively verified by itself, but mathematics cannot

exist without zero. Similarly nothing objectively can be known about God conceptually, but a meaningful poetic worldview is impossible without God.

### **Jesus' View of Man (Humanity)**

Jesus believed that man is in between good and evil with the freedom to choose between them at every moment. Claiming to be good is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and they needed to be told that God alone is good.<sup>65</sup> Claiming to be evil is the hopelessness found in so many sick people, and they needed the assurance that their sins have been forgiven or that an evil spirit has been driven out of them.<sup>66</sup> Placed between good and evil, man is responsible for his decisions and actions. Regardless of whatever they have done in the past, they have the option to make the right choices from the present moment. Therefore, every sinner (someone who consistently chooses evil) has the potential and the opportunity to become a saint (someone who consistently chooses good), and every saint has the potential and possibility to become a sinner.

Man has the freedom and the opportunity to grow to the perfection of God. But this growth won't come without effort. It involves hard choices between good and evil. It also involves standing against the temptations and trials of the evil one.

### **Jesus' View of God–Man Relationship**

Let us consider this line of argument:

- God is good.
- God loves good.
- God loves good people.
- God rewards good people with health, wealth, and happiness.
- Therefore, if someone is healthy and wealthy, obviously that person has been blessed by God for being and doing good.

This line of argument, which sounds logical and sensible, was the popular understanding at the time of Jesus. Pharisees and other leaders



promoted this view. But Jesus sensed something terribly wrong with this argument.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time believed that God was on the side of the righteous people, and was against the unrighteous ones. Thus health, wealth, and happiness were seen as God's blessings to the righteous people, whereas illness, poverty, misery, and slavery were seen as God's punishments for being unrighteous. The rich people were the blessed, and the poor people were the cursed ones. The rich were already in heaven, and the poor were already in hell. If someone becomes rich, it is a clear sign that he has found favor in God's sight for being righteous. Similarly if someone becomes poor or ill, it is a clear sign that he has found displeasure in God's sight for being unrighteous.

This view was probably developed to encourage people to do good deeds and to discourage and scare them away from doing evil deeds. God was presented as a righteous king who rewards good deeds and punishes evil doers. Although this view looked sensible, logical, and useful, someone like Jesus, with a perceptive mind, could find an underlying problem with this view. If we agree that God rewards good deeds with health and wealth, we will also have to agree that all the wealthy and healthy people have been rewarded by God for their good deeds, and all the poor and sick have been punished for their evil deeds. A close reading of the gospels reveal that the world of Jesus held such views. It was widely believed that the healthy and wealthy have been blessed of God, and the poor and the sick have been cursed of God. As a result, all the poor and sick were looked down upon and the healthy and wealthy were honored.

Jesus agreed that God is righteous, and God wants righteousness. But he couldn't agree that wealth and comfort were the marks of righteousness. Jesus' story of a poor man in heaven and a rich man in hell must have been a shock to his listeners. In Jesus' story of the final judgment, the criterion for judgment is this: whoever that cares for his fellow beings are on the right and whoever that doesn't are on the left. According to the popular view, all the wealthy would be on the right and all the poor and the sick would be on the left. Jesus

declared: Blessed are the poor, and blessed are the mourning. His actions were based on his beliefs, and he always looked for the poor, the sick, and the mourning. While his community excommunicated such people, Jesus held them close to his heart. Thus he was known as a friend of the sinners and the poor.

Jesus told his disciples that they needed to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in order to be in the kingdom of God.<sup>67</sup> By the righteousness of Pharisees, Jesus probably meant what is right in the Pharisees' view. Instead Jesus asked them to seek God's righteousness, which is what is right in God's view.<sup>68</sup> Jesus found that the community around him followed a lifestyle based on Pharisees' righteousness. But Jesus asked his disciples to develop a lifestyle based on God's righteousness.

The term God's righteousness has another meaning as well. Paul talked about God's righteousness as opposed to self-righteousness.<sup>69</sup> God's righteousness is the claim that God alone is right; Self-righteousness is the claim, "I am right". The story of Pharisee and tax collector praying illustrates this meaning.<sup>70</sup> The tax-collector implies in his prayer that God alone is right, but the Pharisee claims that he is right.

Jesus developed his view of the ideal world, which he called the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom in which God is the king. All people in the kingdom submit themselves to God's will. None of them are self-righteous; but they admit that God alone is right. They always seek for what is right in God's view rather than in their own view. They are fully honest, without any pretension at all.

God alone is perfect, and God's kingdom alone is the perfect world. Jesus challenged his disciples to become as perfect as God, and he challenged his nation to become God's kingdom. Although human beings are far from the perfection of God, each individual and community has the potential to grow to the perfection of God. Similarly our world has the potential to grow to the perfection of the kingdom of God.

Jesus proclaimed this good news to his world: The kingdom of God is at hand.<sup>71</sup> "At hand" usually means a chronological nearness,

but Jesus probably meant like this: The kingdom of God is at a hand's length to any human being or community. It is up to each human individual to stretch his/her arm to accept it and enter it. It is open to anyone willing to enter. All it takes is to "repent", which is a change of attitude and a turn of mind. Similarly, if a community as a whole is willing to open up itself with a repentant attitude, it will grow to become the kingdom of God.

Later when Christian church evolved as a world religion, the primary affirmation about God that became its corner stone was that God is holy. This will be clear to anyone participating in the worship of the traditional eastern Christian church. That God is holy is repeated over and over in any liturgical prayer. This affirmation is further clarified in the liturgy of the Eucharist that God alone is holy. It further affirms that no being other than God is holy. If none is holy except God, people cannot be classified into righteous and unrighteous. All people are unholy, unrighteous, sinners. If all are unrighteous, no one deserves the blessing of God.

St. Paul made this idea clear.<sup>72</sup> He affirmed that God alone is righteous, and so all people are unrighteous or sinners before God, and therefore, no one deserves the love of God. If we come before God claiming God's love and blessings, we will have to leave disappointed and unreconciled like the Pharisee. But if we come before God admitting our unrighteousness, we will be reconciled to God like the tax-collector.

### **Jesus' View of Man-Man Relationship**

The religious leadership of Jesus' world looked down upon the poor, the sick, and the disabled. They were seen as cursed by God for the sins they or their ancestors committed. The religious leadership also looked down upon children and women. Jesus, however, always made it a point to find them and bring them to the mainline society. He befriended them, visited their homes, and ate with them.

Jesus warned his disciples against the bad example of those leaders. He even set an example of the leaders becoming servants. At the last Passover meal, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and wiped them clean like a servant. Then he explained to them that they were

supposed to follow his example.<sup>73</sup> Once when two of his disciples requested to be placed in positions of authority in Jesus' kingdom, Jesus explained to them that the positions of authority are really positions of responsibility rather than positions of privileges.<sup>74</sup> Jesus believed that all power belongs to God, and that God assigns the responsibilities to various people. When Pilate claimed that he had power over Jesus, Jesus gently reminded him that his power was given to him from above.<sup>75</sup>

Jesus took a firm stand against discriminating between the rich and the poor. If God is the owner of everything, all people must be poor. But unfortunately, only a few people realize this. Those few people are called "the poor in spirit" in Matthew's Gospel. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>76</sup> Regardless of the amount of wealth in their hands, they are still poor in spirit. Job was poor in spirit, which makes him say, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away."<sup>77</sup> However his wife thought that whatever wealth they had in their hands truly belonged to them. That is why when they lost the wealth, she wanted Job to curse God and commit suicide.

Thus Jesus did not classify people into rich and poor. However, he classified people into two based on another standard: Those who realize that all people are poor, and those who think that only some are poor. In the well-known story of the rich man and Lazarus, told by Jesus, Lazarus goes to heaven and the rich man goes to hell.<sup>78</sup> The rich man probably lived as if he was the true owner of his wealth. He did not realize that God was the true owner, and that he was merely a steward. He believed that he was rich because he was blessed by God, and Lazarus was poor for being cursed by God. So he didn't care for Lazarus.

The story of Jesus cleaning the temple at Jerusalem illustrates Jesus' attitude to the disabled people. Jesus expected the temple to be a house of God, but he found it to be a den of robbers. Once he had the robbers out, the people who truly belonged there came in. Matthew tells us that the blind and the lame came into the temple to

the presence of Jesus. When the robbers were inside, the disabled people were outside. Once the robbers were out, they could come inside the House of God.<sup>79</sup> We see two different approaches and attitudes toward disabilities in this story. The blind and the lame were marginalized in that society, and Jesus brought them to the mainstream. All the disabled people were social outcasts in Jesus' world. It was believed that they were cursed of God because of the sins committed by their forefathers. They were seen as good-for-nothing people. They were considered less human than others. They were haunted by shame, which was strong enough to make them take their own life. When someone takes away his/her own life in such a situation, it is really a murder committed by the community around him/her. Jesus' view of disability was radically different from the popular view. The popular view of disability was very negative, dishonest, naïve, and unhealthy, and in the place of that, Jesus developed a view which is positive, honest, informed, and healthy.

Jesus' inclusion of the disabled in the mainline society might have been based on the understanding that God alone is almighty, with all the abilities, which makes all beings other than God disabled. Those who realize this truth can learn to stop feeling inferior about their own disabilities and can stop looking down on others for their disabilities. They can also overcome their disability to a great extent by developing a symbiotic relationship, a relationship that mutually benefits, rather than a parasitic relationship.

A family was the model of an ideal community for Jesus. In a family no one is marginalized; everyone supports each other. In a den of robbers, some people are marginalized in the name of their disabilities. But in the house of God, all people are valued. Christianity began as a community of disabled people supporting one another.

A human body was the model of an ideal community for Paul. Each organ in the body has its abilities and disabilities. The eyes can see, but cannot do anything else. The ears have the ability to hear, but are disabled in every other way. We all have our abilities and disabilities. Standing alone, we are all disabled. If we stand together as a community, as organs of a body, we can move on successfully

supporting one another. Community life compensates for our disabilities to a great extent.

### **E. Jesus' Activism<sup>80</sup>**

The world of Jesus, which consisted of the land of Palestine and the people inhabited there, was in pain. They were under the yoke of the Roman Empire, and their only hope was that God almighty would miraculously intervene and free them. This hope, though fanciful, had the power to keep them united and moving on each day. Hopes of such a possibility gave rise to the myth of a God-appointed king, messiah or Christ, who would liberate them and rule the land.

Occasionally there arose leaders, raising some hope among the people. But their hope turned into despair when the Romans easily captured them and mercilessly crucified them publicly as a warning to anyone who might ponder such uprising against the empire. Thus they all turned out to be false messiahs.

Growing up in this context, Jesus understood the power of the myth of messiah, which held a nation together, but he was also aware of the failed attempts to save the nation. His own personal experiences and the collective experience of his nation provided him with the training, the will, and the commitment to take over a mighty responsibility—the responsibility of becoming the true messiah and save his nation.

It was John, the Baptist, who was the immediate reason that brought Jesus out of his domestic responsibilities to shoulder the responsibility of leading his nation in a movement for freedom. What John said and what he stood for made sense to Jesus, and he went out to accept the baptism John offered. Coming out of water, Jesus saw a vision—of God anointing (appointing) him as the messiah, the king who would liberate his people. Straight from there he went to a deserted area to have some quiet time with God. At the end of fierce internal struggle that lasted several weeks (the confrontation with Satan), he emerged with a clear goal and a clear plan of action to accomplish the goal.

The ultimate goal was the establishment of God's Kingdom upon

the earth, but what could be done by him was its inauguration, a short term goal. He could initiate a movement, which, although as insignificant as a mustard seed, would eventually grow to become a mighty and powerful movement that would overthrow the Roman tyranny and establish God's Kingdom. As a small quantity of yeast eventually ferments the whole dough, his movement, though small in quantity, would have the quality and power to eventually spread everywhere. He took time alone with God to make sure that his movement would be one of quality and power.

Earlier attempts to save his nation failed miserably and their leaders turned out to be false messiahs because they were not oriented in the right direction nor did they have a strong basis. Although they had the noble end of liberating the nation, the means they adopted was violent. Jesus, however, planned for a nonviolent struggle. There were two different pictures of messiah popular among the people— a violent one and a non-violent one. The earlier attempts for freedom followed the model of the violent messiah, and they tried to overthrow the alien rule by violent means. Jesus, on the other hand, adopted the model of the non-violent messiah. He developed a plan of action for a struggle against the Roman tyranny in which he would die rather than kill anyone.

But first, an elaborate ground work needed to be done. Most of the people of his nation had the model of a violent God and a violent messiah in their mind. Jesus had to break this destructive model first, and establish the model of a nonviolent messiah. Thus he started his teaching mission. He traveled around the nation teaching the people that God is nonviolent and his messiah would be nonviolent too. "Love your enemies" he advised them, for God loves his enemies. God gives rain and sunlight to both the righteous and the wicked. He presented God as father, and the world as a family. The essence of the Law, according to him, was to love God wholeheartedly and to love our fellow beings. He did not approve of any discrimination between human beings such as adult and child, male and female, Judean and Samaritan, rich and poor, and righteous and sinner. All people, for him, had equal status before the heavenly father. He advised the adults to become like children, Judeans to become like

Samaritans, the rich to become like the poor, and the righteous to become like sinners. The people who gathered around him and listened to him were the common masses, and he was one among them. The rich and the powerful were alarmed at his mass support, and they eyed him with suspicion. Those who listened to him from the upper classes were very few, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

Although he was playing the role of the messiah, he was very careful not to reveal this identity publicly. He didn't reveal his plans even to his closest disciples. Had he not been careful, the Roman authorities could have jeopardized his plan right away. Finally when it was time, he made a trip to Jerusalem, the religio-political capital of his nation, where he staged his non-violent revolt. He carefully planned every step of his action. He wanted to make sure that his actions would conform to what the prophets had prophesied in the past about the messiah as much as possible. He arranged his entry to the city like the nonviolent messiah on a donkey as prophet Zachariah prophesied. He entered the temple and drove out the sellers and money-changers— an expression of his God-given authority representing God and the poor exploited masses. It also represented the overthrowing of the present civilization. He arranged a person, Judas, to identify him to the authorities. He arranged all people in the drama— he played the part of the main actor as well as that of the director. He also planned to rise again. He even directed others of what to do after his crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus probably saw his crucifixion as his own enthronement as the messiah, with the cross as his throne. As Mar Gregorios observes, “the inscription ‘Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews’ does not appear on a throne but on the top of a cross.”<sup>81</sup> Thus with this event, God's Kingdom was officially established upon the earth. All that was needed was for people to acknowledge this and be in the Kingdom of God. After his resurrection, Jesus handed over his mission of spreading the good news of the Kingdom to able hands like Paul, Peter, and Thomas. Slowly people began to believe the good news, and joined them. This community called itself the New Israel, and saw itself as the resurrected Christ. It continued the mission of Christ as a community. As this community expanded further, Jesus and his good



news gained more and more acceptance and importance throughout the Roman Empire, and eventually in a matter of two and a half centuries, even the emperor of Rome knelt before Jesus. The new Israel that rose from the ashes of the Jerusalem temple made the entire Roman Empire its temple!

## Conclusion

The primary existential problem is broken relationships at all levels— among people, with nature, and with God. When all relationships are kept intact, such a world is called the Kingdom of God. But the problem can be solved only if people are honest about the problem. The lack of straightforwardness or honesty prevents people from seeking a solution. Instead of being straightforward, people cover up.

But the picture of such a perfect world can never be a reality. It only serves as a scale to measure our real world. The real world will always remain a battleground of good and evil, for only by fighting with evil can good thrive. Jesus made this idea clear in his parable of wheat and tares. A farmer let the tares grow along with the wheat. He expects the wheat to grow stronger by competing with the tares.<sup>82</sup> All that we can do is to stand on the side of good in our choices. Jesus himself became a role model in his choice of good. He asked his disciples to suffer for the sake of righteousness following his example.

In the ideal world of good, God is king, and He doesn't suffer. But in our real world, God is a king only to those who accept His kingship and do good, and He keeps on suffering by those who do evil. In our real world, God invites us to stand with Him and suffer. Jesus had this view of God, which made him accept suffering rather than make others suffer.

Jesus' view of life, of how God, humanity, and world are related to each other, may be summarized as follows: God cares for the world and takes care of it. God raises his Sun and pours his rain on all people regardless of whether they return God's love or not. God takes care of the birds in the sky and lilies in the field. God wants to keep the whole world healthy and beautiful. Although God is a king

to the world, God is a father to humanity. Mankind needs to respond to God's unconditional love by loving God wholeheartedly. Also people need to follow God's example and love each other unconditionally. God is the only one with authority. Once those with authority realize this, they will exercise their authority with responsibility. God is the real owner of all wealth. Whatever we have is entrusted to us as stewards. Once we realize this, we won't exploit one another. All relationships need to be fully open and transparent without the slightest pretension. Prayer has to be real communication with God. In short, in Jesus' view, the world is like a family. God is a father to all people, caring for all. People need to be like siblings to each other caring for one another.

Jesus had to face very strong opposition from the keepers of the current views. They tried to excommunicate him accusing him of rejecting their religious rules and scriptures. But Jesus made it crystal clear that he was fully in support of the scriptures and the laws of God they represented. His objective was to strengthen the foundation upon which his community existed. He was not breaking away from their tradition, but he was repairing the age-old view of life upon which their community was founded.

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- 1 Armstrong, Karen. (2007). *The Bible, A Biography*.
  - 2 Matthew. 7:13-14
  - 3 Bultmann, Rudolf. (1934). *Jesus and the Word*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. As retrieved on July 27, 2014.
  - 4 Luke.13:1
  - 5 Matthew.10: 17-30
  - 6 Matthew.26: 5
  - 7 Matthew.13: 9-13
  - 8 Luke.16: 19
  - 9 Matthew.18: 23 -34
  - 10 Luke.18: 2
  - 11 Luke.10: 30
  - 12 Matthew. 6: 19

- 13 John 5: 2
- 14 Mark. 5:2
- 15 Matthew. 6: 9-13
- 16 Christos in Greek
- 17 The word *peirasmos* in Greek can mean either trial or temptation. Some people think that it refers to the temptation from Satan in this context, and they prefer the prayer, Lead us not into temptation! We read in the gospel that Jesus himself was led by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan. If Jesus was led, others can also be led. So it is more sensible to think that the word *peirasmos* in this context refers to the final judgment by the messiah.
- 18 Matthew. 23
- 19 Matthew 23:16
- 20 Romans. 3
- 21 Varner, William. C.(n.d.). Jesus And The Pharisees: A Jewish Perspective. Retrieved on 6/22/2014 from <http://www.pfo.org/pharisee.htm>
- 22 Varner, William. C.(n.d.). Jesus And The Pharisees: A Jewish Perspective. Retrieved on 6/22/2014 from <http://www.pfo.org/pharisee.htm>
- 23 Babylonian Talmud, "Shabbat", 31a.
- 24 Goldberg, Louis. The Pharisees: Bad Guys or...? Retrieved on 7/15/2014 from <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/v06-n03/pharisees>
- 25 Acts 5: 38-39
- 26 Luke 13:31
- 27 John 3:1; 7:50; 19:38,39; Acts 22:3; Philipians 3:5
- 28 Matthew 7:12
- 29 Galatians 5:14
- 30 Avot 2:7 (The Mishnah, Op. Cit. 448.)
- 31 Mark 15:40,41; Luke 8:1-3; 10:42; John 4:7-27
- 32 lit. "the people of the land" or common people
- 33 Zeraim, Babylonian Talmud. London: Soncino, 1948. P. 266, 267.
- 34 Luke 5:30

- 35 Luke 13:16
- 36 Matthew. 12:3,4; I Sam. 21:1-6
- 37 Matthew 11:11
- 38 Matthew. 3:9
- 39 Luke 3:10-14
- 40 Mat thew3:10
- 41 Matthew 11:11
- 42 Mark 1:14
- 43 Luke 3:9
- 44 Matthew. 5:48
- 45 Luke 3:12-14
- 46 Matthew 5:43-48
- 47 Luke 23:34
- 48 Matthew. 7:24
- 49 Matthew 13:3
- 50 Matthew 6:28
- 51 Matthew 5:17-20
- 52 Matthew 17:25
- 53 Mathew 13: 1-17
- 54 Luke 10:41-42
- 55 Matthew 6:27
- 56 Matthew 5:8
- 57 Matthew11:25
- 58 Matthew 3
- 59 Matthew 4
- 60 Matthew 19:25-27
- 61 Mark 10:17-19
- 62 Matthew 5: 48
- 63 Matthew 5:7
- 64 Matthew 5: 48
- 65 Luke 18:9
- 66 Matthew 9:2
- 67 Matthew 5:20

68 Matthew 6:33

69 Romans 10:3

70 Luke 18: 9-14

71 Mark 1:15

72 Romans 3

73 John 13:14

74 Luke 22:24

75 John 19:11

76 Matthew 5:3

77 Job 1:21

78 Luke 16

79 Matthew 21:12-15

80 This writer must confess here that the information regarding Jesus' activism as presented here is this writer's own understanding which has developed in his mind over a long period of time as a result of extensive reading and reflection. He is not indebted to any one author for this understanding. He is not sure if Paulos Mar Gregorios held this understanding exactly as it is presented here.

81 The kingdom of Diakonia p. 33

82 Matthew 13:24

## **The Vision and Mission of Paulos Mar Gregorios**

This part of the study will present this writer's understanding of the vision and mission of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios. First we will take a look at the historical context of the bishop. Then we will examine his view of life under various headings. Unlike that of Jesus Christ, we have a clearer understanding of the vision and mission of the bishop, for he lived recently, and he has left behind a lot of written work.

### **A. The Historical Context of Mar Gregorios**

Paulos Mar Gregorios was born in 1922, and he passed away in 1996. During this period the world saw the Second World War as well as the cold war between the US and the USSR. During this period, India won independence from Britain. The Christian churches felt the need of unity, which led to the formation of the World Council of Churches. As we take a closer look at these events, we will also see the major events in the life of Mar Gregorios.

#### **The Context of the World**

The colonial powers, led by Great Britain, were ruling the world at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before 1914 Westerners regarded themselves as members of a civilization making constant advances favorable to humanity and, through imperialism, bringing this enlightenment to other areas of the world. First steps were underway in creating international organizations. The First World War was fought from 1914 to 1918. The United States at first remained neutral and sold goods to both sides and made loans to governments. For the first time in its history the United States moved from being a debtor to a creditor nation. Russia, which got weaker due to the war, had a revolution that ended the Tsarist regime and that brought Communists led by Lenin to power. The war weakened Europe. 10 million of its people died, most of which were young men. Severe economic

instability led to global depression in the thirties. The Soviet Union isolated by its Communist-directed economy, escaped depression as it made rapid industrial development without outside capital. The depression contributed to the rise of ultra-nationalist groups. The Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) party led by Hitler came to power in Germany, which made it an authoritarian state with aggressive foreign policy. Italy, led by Mussolini, was already following a similar path. Germany, Italy, and Japan made an alliance, and set out to conquer the rest of the world. By 1940 German forces had defeated Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France. Germany aided Italy to seize Yugoslavia and Greece, and both nations pressed against British and French territories in North Africa. In 1941, Germany attacked Russia, which brought Russia to the war. Japan bombed the Pearl Harbor, which brought US to the war.

Mar Gregorios traces the birth and growth of fascism in Mussolini's Italy, and explains how it later became Nazism in Hitler's Germany, and how Soviet Union singlehandedly saved the world from it.<sup>1</sup> His early training as a press reporter and his later training as a philosopher helped him observe world events and interpret them clearly. He explains how the western nations first perceived Hitler as an ally in their combat against communism. Till the very end of the world war, they secretly hoped that Hitler would destroy Soviet Union. They thought they would turn against Hitler once he does his job of destroying Soviet Union. Soviet Union sacrificed 20 million of her citizens in the combat against Nazism. Mar Gregorios wonders what the world would have been like if Soviet Union had not been there to combat the Nazi terror? The Second World War cost the lives of 34 million people. Of them 20 million were Soviet citizens. Six million lost their lives in Nazi gas chambers. Over 78,000 people died in Hiroshima bombing.

There was a state of political and military tension after World War II between the powers in the Western Bloc (the United States, its NATO allies and others such as Japan) and the powers in the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact), which is called the cold war.<sup>2</sup> It lasted until 1991. It was "cold" because there was no large-scale fighting directly between the two sides. On

each side were the USSR and the US, the two superpowers with their differences: the former being a single-party Marxist-Leninist state, and the latter being a capitalist state with free elections. As they competed to attract the rest of the world to their sides, a neutral bloc arose as the Non-Aligned Movement founded by Egypt, India, and Yugoslavia. The two superpowers never engaged directly in full-scale armed combat but they each armed heavily in preparation of a nuclear World War III. Each side had a nuclear deterrent that deterred an attack by the other side, on the basis that such an attack would lead to total destruction of the attacker—the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD). Aside from the development of the two sides' nuclear arsenals, and deployment of conventional military forces, the struggle for dominance was expressed via proxy wars around the globe, psychological warfare, propaganda and espionage, and technological competitions such as the Space Race.

### **The Context of India**

Mar Gregorios was born in 1922 in the British India, which was struggling for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. While he was growing up, India won independence, but its economic condition was very depressing. The first available written material of Mar Gregorios has the title, *India—The Land of Dying Millions*<sup>3</sup>. This article is important for us in various ways. It tells us the then situation of India and the world. It also shows us the mental make-up of a young man who would later become one of the most influential world leaders.

He presents poverty as the primary problem of India in 1949 as the title of the article says. He diagnosed the primary reasons behind poverty as the rapidly growing population and the primitive ways of farming. Out of the 434 millions of people, 300 million were engaged in agriculture. Still there was not enough food. The population kept expanding, adding 40 million every ten years. During and before the British rule, India had over 400 native kings. As most of them had been irresponsible, they are rightly called white elephants in the article. These white elephants along with the foreign ruler were responsible for the deplorable condition of India. When this article was written,



India had just become free from the foreign dominion as well as from the native rulers. The new national government successfully liquidated the native kingdoms, the white elephants, but the government was corrupt at the top except for a few men like Jawaharlal Nehru.

The article begins quoting a mission advertisement in some Christian Magazine—“India on your Heart—The Lord wills it”. The article is addressed at the American missionaries and those churches that provide them financial support. The writer warns that the foreign missionaries are viewed with some suspicion by the not-too-unsophisticated non-Christian Indian mind that saw the entry by gradual stages of the British Missionaries, Merchants and Militia into the country. They surely don't want to become the colony of another empire. So the writer suggests an alternative. Instead of American missionaries going directly to the people of India, they may want to encourage the native Christians to do the task. Out of the 434 millions of people in India, 8.4 million are Christians (4 mil Protestants, 3.4 mil Catholics, and 1 mil Orthodox). Unfortunately, they are not a great force for Christ; they are merely professing Christians without any evangelistic zeal. The Catholics have a vigorous proselytizing plan. So the American missionaries may want to revive the native Protestant and Orthodox Churches so that they can do the missionary work.

The writer warns that although India is open to the missionaries at the present time, it may not stay open for long. One reason for this openness is the attitude of the Prime Minister, Nehru, who is a man with a very wide outlook towards religion as a whole. Under him the Christians can be sure that they will not be persecuted. But the writer doubts whether Nehru's government would continue to welcome foreign missionaries into the country to do gospel work. Hindus in general are tolerant to Christians. Although Muslims see Jesus Christ as a prophet of theirs, *Isa Nabi*, they are usually unapproachable, for they listen to only what prophet Mohamed has said.

Here we see a very informative picture of India immediately after it won independence, and also an inside look of the heart of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios as a young man. Here he feels one with the American missionaries, who hoped to convert the entire

India to Christianity. In a few years, he would become very anti-American and anti-missionary. He would also develop a radically different approach to Christian mission.

### **Context of the Christian Church**

Mar Gregorios was born and raised in the Orthodox Christian Church of India. He learned the primary lessons of Christian life from his own mother. Later he actively participated in the Sunday school education as a student and later as a teacher. He claims in his autobiography that from very young age he cultivated the habit of conversing with God. When he was in Ethiopia as a school teacher, he had the opportunity to get to know the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. Also he had the opportunity to befriend Haile Selassie, the emperor of Ethiopia.

Once he completed his three-year contract as a school teacher in Ethiopia, he went to the United States as a student, where he studied Philosophy and Theology. He also served as an assistant pastor in an African-American church. Then he was back in India for two years serving in various roles.<sup>4</sup> Once again he was back in Ethiopia for another three years as the personal secretary and adviser of Haile Selassie, the emperor. Then he spent three more years in the US and Europe doing his doctoral studies, exploring the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth century church father. Then he spent five years in Geneva as an associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches. His association with WCC brought him to the center of the world affairs. It placed him in a position from where he could see the entire world and its existential issues. He was the leader of the WCC delegation to USSR, to UNESCO etc.

Even after he left this position, he continued as an active participant of WCC. In his own words, "Even after leaving the staff of the WCC in 1967, I continued to associate myself with that body, as a member of the Central Committee, a member of the Executive Committee, and as one of its presidents from 1983 to 1991."<sup>5</sup>

His association with WCC helped him to get in touch with the protestant churches. He says:

During my five-year tenure as Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, I had occasion to visit and get to know at first hand almost all the main Churches of the Reformation and Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as to lead Bible Studies and conferences and seminars for them. Since most of the Protestant church leaders were also members of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, I got to know them personally.<sup>6</sup>

It also helped him to get to know the Roman Catholic Church. He says:

I have also exposed myself extensively to the Roman Catholic tradition, both through personal friendships with distinguished Roman Catholics and by fairly voluminous reading. During the sixties and seventies I had close relations with the Vatican, first as a Delegated Observer at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and later for twelve years as a founding member of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. I knew personally Popes Paul VI and John Paul I, and likewise know the present incumbent, John Paul II. I have also worked closely with some of the leading theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, in the course of half a dozen unofficial conversations organized by the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna in the seventies and eighties between Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians.<sup>7</sup>

He was rather disappointed about the Christian churches in general. He says, “The net result of my rather extensive ecumenical experience is that I have not been able to spot one Christian Church in the world that is even half faithful to the way of the cross and to the teaching of the Apostles.” This made him look outside the Christian world to see what God was doing. He says:

I see the demand for full manifestation of the freedom and dignity of all human beings— men, women and children— as a major thrust still in the march of history. I see the interreligious movement and the women's movement as significant aspects

of the advance of human history. I can conceive of the peace movement with a socialist commitment as bound to come back soon into the center of things, as the contradictions in the single market global economy begin to reveal themselves more manifestly, quite possibly leading to a world-wide economic crash. Above all I am convinced that until humanity sees that the secular civilization, which denies the centrality of God, has been the greatest mistake in our history, it cannot find the way forward.

He was not happy with what was going on outside the Christian world either. He says,

“I see that I cannot put my trust either in Christian Church activities, or in the work of governments and intergovernmental agencies such as the UN, to begin to lead humanity in the way it has to go.”

He suggests a new leadership for the humanity.

“That leadership has to come from groups of committed people of all religions and of no-professed religion, in all countries and on all continents, working to enlighten the awareness of people and mobilize their power to act in the best interests of humanity.”

After the passing of Mar Gregorios in 1996, scores of his friends and admirers began to write their fond memories of him, which were published in various periodicals and also online. A cursory look at those fond memories gives us some insights into the life of this unique personality. C.G. Pathrose writes:

When Fr. Paul Varghese (The previous name of Mar Gregorios) entered our humble dwelling, our five year old son Sunil was so overjoyed that he rushed out and brought in four or five of his playmates from the neighborhood. Fr. Paul Varghese lost no time to start playing with the boys. Soon he pulled out toffees from his pocket and started distributing them. My son got annoyed as perhaps he was not given the toffee first or he did not get the desired number of toffees for himself! In a sudden fit of anger, he kicked the left leg of Fr. Paul Varghese! We

were all taken aback. I begged his pardon but Fr. Varghese took it very lightly and continued to play with the boys. A couple of days later, Sunil started getting pain and a swelling on his right leg—the one with which he had kicked the father. We thought that the Almighty may have punished Sunil for his mischief. It was all very painful for us. We soon contacted Fr. Paul Varghese and he consoled us by saying that Sunil was after all an innocent child. Asserting that the Almighty would not punish him for the act, he said that he would pray for his speedy recovery. True to his assurance, Sunil recovered within two days without any medication!<sup>8</sup>

This incident shows that Mar Gregorios was someone who enjoyed the company of children. It also shows that he was held in high esteem, even as a saintly person. Professor Ninan Abraham calls him a human wonder. He presents before us the irony of a boy who was forced to discontinue his studies due to the lack of finances later getting chosen to become the president of the All India Association for Christian Higher Education.

The boy of fifteen who had to discontinue studies after high school, and become a post office clerk for want of finances for higher education, was the person found fit to be chosen to preside over the great ecumenical consultation on Christian Higher Education in India, which resulted in the formation of the All India Association for Christian Higher Education. He discharged his duties as president so well and with such distinction that both during and after the event it was felt that Fr. Paul Varghese, as he was then, elevated the level of the consultation by his contribution to it.<sup>9</sup>

Continuing his argument that Mar Gregorios was a human wonder, Professor Abraham informs us that he could use several languages, and he could communicate with any audience of any level.

In addition to English and Malayalam, in both of which he was a masterly speaker, he could handle Hindi, Tamil, Russian, French, German and the Ethiopian language, as well as the Biblical languages of Syriac, Hebrew and Greek. He had the

capacity to pick up in a short time the elements of the language of any area or region in which he found himself. And as a preacher and public speaker he was able to adjust himself to the level required by any audience, whether it was a school assembly or a gathering of the leading scientists, philosophers and educators of the world.

Prof. Ninan Abraham continues to tell us how this human wonder held so many responsible positions.

Starting as an Associate Secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India, he served as the General Secretary of the Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India, and while in Ethiopia, founded an Ethiopian Orthodox Students' Association. By the time of the third assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Delhi in 1961, his standing as a theologian and an interpreter of the Bible was so great that he was chosen to be the Bible Study leader of the Assembly. In the World council of Churches itself he held many very responsible positions. He was Associate Secretary and Director of the Division of Ecumenical Action (1962 to 1967), Member of the Central Committee from 1968 to 1991, and President from 1983 to 1991. He also headed many important delegations of WCC: a delegation to UNESCO in 1966, a delegation to the heads of African States in 1968 and two delegations to the UN General Assembly special session on Disarmament in 1983 and 88.

## **B. The Current Worldview**

Introducing his doctoral dissertation, which was later published as *Cosmic Man*, Mar Gregorios asserts that our civilization has at its base a couple of distorted cosmological perspectives.<sup>10</sup> According to the first, man and world are the only things that exist. They exist in a subject-object relationship. Man as the subject treats the world as the object. Man understands and uses the world for his own good with science and technology. According to the second perspective, along with man and world, God also exists. However, the world has only a temporary existence, and so, only God and man have a significant existence. The first view denies God, and the second one

ignores the world. The first one, which he calls secular humanism, is held mostly by the governments and the institutions of education, whereas the second one, which he calls other-worldly mysticism, is held mostly by the traditional religions. The presence of these two distorted cosmological views and their struggle with each other for dominance are the primary causes of most of the problems of our civilization. Then Mar Gregorios presents before us the ideal view, correcting the distortions of the two above views. According to this view, humanity exists in close relationship with God on the one hand, and with the world on the other hand. It is disastrous to ignore or deny either God or the world.

In *Human Presence*, Mar Gregorios traces the evolution of the current cosmology from the classical one.<sup>11</sup> Like the ancient three-tier-worldview of heaven, earth, and hell, the classical western worldview is also a three-tier one with God, Humanity, and World. At the lowest level is the world or nature, an order with its own constitution. Above it is the humanity, creating culture and history through its actions. The top level is one of super-nature, grace, and revelation. Thus this structure may also be named nature-culture-grace. There is something seriously wrong in the way the relationship between these levels is viewed. These three levels are viewed as antagonistic to each other rather than as an integral system. This is the root cause of the present existential problems of humanity. Such an antagonistic worldview has led to our recent thoughtless exploitation of natural resources and to our unhealthy competition for the resources amassing weapons of mass destruction. One may identify the roots of this worldview in Augustine and in Thomas Aquinas. By 17th century, it evolved further into a “scientific” two-tiered worldview with man manipulating an objectified nature—mechanistic and materialistic. No more super-nature was in the picture.

### **C. The Thought-Currents in Mar Gregorios' World**

Paulos Mar Gregorios called the most dominant thought-current in his world modernity.<sup>12</sup> He understood modernity primarily as a reaction against tradition, with a desire to develop a critical rationality based on reason and experience without any dependence on tradition.

The west was too heavily dependent on one particular tradition—the classical scholasticism born out of Latin rationalization of the Greek classics. In repudiating this tradition, and seeking to start out afresh, led by Kant and Descartes, they have now come to recognize that there is no knowledge possible without tradition. Descartes thought he could demolish the ramshackle<sup>13</sup> intellectual house his generation had inherited, and singlehandedly build a new one. His method was to start from one indubitable premise<sup>14</sup> of the individual consciousness and thence by careful logic construct an edifice of thought. Kant thought that he could analyze the world of mind through which the world of objects was perceived and thereby arrive at sure and certain knowledge. Both of them failed. The process by which the mind itself is made an object of the understanding is not well established or universally accepted. There is no system which honestly establishes the objectivity of the external world. In Hans-Georg Gadamer, the west has come full circle and recognized the inescapability of some dependence on tradition seen as the linguistic, conceptual and methodological as well as cultural equipment that we inherit from our societies and which we carry with us in all acts of understanding. What we need today, according to Mar Gregorios, is a recovery of and reentry into the universal tradition of philosophy as the search for true wisdom.

Modernity repudiated not only tradition, but all forms of external authority such as God, religion, scripture or tradition. It affirmed the freedom, autonomy, and sovereignty of the adult human person with rational power. Immanuel Kant, one of the fathers of modernity, pointed out that private property is an essential condition of the freedom of modern man, for if one is dependent on others, he/she can't be free. From this relationship between ownership of property and freedom of modern man, Mar Gregorios concludes that modernity evolved as the ideology of the newly emerging upper classes that owned private property rather than that of the working classes who did not have any property of their own.<sup>15</sup> They were anxious to overthrow the authority of the feudal lords, or priesthood, and the traditional aristocracy. Mar Gregorios asserts bluntly in very clear and emphatic language,



Neither Modernity nor its enthronement of Critical Reason has any philosophical validity. These were unphilosophical affirmations of a ruling class which wanted to establish its authority over all. There is absolutely no philosophical or scientific justification for the claim that the human being is self-derived, autonomous and sovereign, recognizing no obligation to any higher authority.<sup>16</sup>

Modernity is seen as similar to or almost the same as liberalism or liberal Humanism by Mar Gregorios. Humanism believes that the full development of man is possible and is to be striven for. Liberal Humanist is committed to the unity of mankind and faith in the future of man. The future of man is conceived in simple terms— cultured, secure, with a pluralistic and permissive social structure. Marxist humanist comes in as a critic of liberal humanist, pointing out that the Liberal humanist's ideas only help to give the glow of morality to a corrupt and dehumanizing system.<sup>17</sup> Although Marxism claims to be the ideology of the working class, it remained within the structures created by the upper classes. Mar Gregorios asserts,

At this point, both Liberalism and Marxism, the two aspects of cultural-intellectual modernity, are equally unscientific; their foundations are in human desire and speculation, not in any kind of scientific objectivity. The basic assumptions of both Liberalism and Marxism can neither be scientifically proved nor philosophically justified.<sup>18</sup>

### **Liberal Humanism (Liberalism)**

Liberalism claims liberty from dogmas and tradition. The focus is upon the immediate concerns of human existence— use and practice. An integrating framework of thought as a basis is considered not only impossible but also unnecessary. It encourages a broad tolerance of all beliefs and ideologies as long as they do not threaten the safety and comfort of people. It acknowledges a few general principles like the personal freedom and dignity of the individual, the need for justice, and the tolerance of dissent.

Although this appears good on the surface, its weakness becomes apparent when confronted with a catastrophe or with a self-confident

ideology. Why can't a society like the one in the US tolerate a few Marxist individuals or a Marxist party? It is a well-known fact that Marxists find it so difficult to survive or function in the so-called "free" societies. It shows beyond doubt that although these societies claim to be free and liberal, they are really not so. These liberal societies are more prone to the doomsday psychology of fearing impending catastrophe in the form of a nuclear holocaust, or the outbreak of a third world war, or an ecological catastrophe. Liberalism does not provide the strength to these societies to face such major catastrophes.<sup>19</sup>

The world's market economy system is a product of liberalism. The market economy seems to work well on the surface. It has enlarged the middle class, increased the number of millionaires, and improved the level of the income of the working class. But a closer and deeper look gives us a different picture.

1. There are gross inequalities of income and very high rates of unemployment in all the market economy societies, and they do not seem to have any solution to overcome these problems.

2. The market economy countries seek to prevent the other countries rise to their level. They refuse to help them with technological know-how and capital assistance. For example, when India became independent, she sought the assistance of US, UK, and West Germany to build steel mills, but they all refused to help. She got assistance from the Soviet Union. Once the steel mills began rising, then those countries also offered their help.

3. Those countries keep the two-third world anchored to the market economy system using all means. One way in which they do this is the stimulation of market economy private enterprises in the two-third world through financial agencies like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These agencies propagate a negative attitude toward the state sector, or if it is not possible, make the state sector serve the private sector.

4. The world market economy system effects a steady decline in the two-third world's share in the international trade with unfair trade terms. For example, the purchasing power of the less developed

countries fell by at least \$6400 million between 1955 and 1970. But the income taken out by foreign investors from the less developed grew enormously. Between 1960 and 70 it was 136 percent.

5. The income made by the transnational corporations from the two-third world is much more than what they gave them in return.

6. Arms and know-how are the two primary commodities they trade in the two-third world. The value of imports of weapons by the two-third world countries rose from \$1202 million in 1947 to \$8161 million in 1977.<sup>20</sup>

### **Socialist (Marxist) Humanism**

Unlike liberal humanism, the socialist humanism has built a very strong theoretical basis on which a society can build a way of life. In order to tell us about socialist Humanism, Mar Gregorios quotes from an American writer, Loren Graham.<sup>21</sup>

Contemporary Soviet dialectical materialism is an impressive intellectual achievement. .... It is a sincere and legitimate attempt to understand and explain nature. In terms of universality and degree of development, the dialectical materialism has no competitors among modern systems of thought.<sup>22</sup>

Mar Gregorios reminds us that this appreciation is coming from an American who is not a Marxist. Marxist thought is the closest hypothesis we have in interpreting current socio-politico-economic reality. A better paradigm cannot be made without utilizing the insights of Marxist ideology and integrated scientific theory of society.

In spite of these positive aspects, Marxist thought has a weakness—it is dogmatic about its fundamental assumptions:

1. It believes that matter is infinite, eternal, and self-existent.
2. It believes that what is reflected in the social consciousness of man is reliable.
3. It believes that humanity will reach a stage when it becomes classless.

They claim that these are scientific truths. Blind faith in these

assumptions can make it an oppressive religion. Mar Gregorios calls it Marxist Fundamentalism. If Marxists are willing to admit that these are beliefs and not facts, they would be willing to learn from others, and eventually can build a better system.

#### **D. Mar Gregorios' View of Life**

Mar Gregorios was very well aware of the cracking foundation of the present western civilization. But without letting this vision discourage him, he always proclaimed the good news of a new civilization. He had a clear understanding of the relationship between humanity and civilization. He says:

Civilizations come and go. None lasts for more than a few hundreds of years. But humanity goes on. Values also transmigrate from one civilization to a later one. What we need today is a reaffirmation and re-embodiment of these values — highlighting them in consciousness by symbol and celebration.<sup>23</sup>

In the introduction to *Freedom and Authority*, which he wrote in the sixties, he brings to our attention a major human existential problem as it was clearly visible in the second half of the twentieth century—the crumbling down of the authority structures. He brings to our attention that the human community had been held together by authority structures, but in the twentieth century they were falling apart, which threatened the very existence of humanity.

Children don't obey parents, wives don't submit to their husbands, and employees don't submit to their employers. Students disobey their teachers, laymen do not obey their priests, and even soldiers defy the commands of their officers.<sup>24</sup>

Mar Gregorios asserts that there is no need for alarm. Humankind is going through severe pain, but this is not due to any illness. This is merely the birth pangs that would give birth to a new humanity.

In the preface of his well-known book, *The Human Presence*,<sup>25</sup> which he wrote in the seventies, Mar Gregorios speaks about the present condition of the humanity using the metaphor of a chariot running amok. It keeps moving, but without any clear and specific guidance or purpose. It is already out of its right path and almost about to fall headlong into a deep trench, from where it may not

recover. The chariot is our civilization, and the charioteer is the humanity. Mar Gregorios then classifies the existential problems faced by humanity into three groups:

1. The poverty of billions of people perpetuated by economic injustice and exploitation. We failed in producing essential goods and distributing them equally. This makes us fight and even kill each other to possess the resources.

2. A sense of meaninglessness and boredom among the affluent, raising fundamental questions about the values of the consumer society and the civilization based on it.

3. Challenges to human existence posed by scientific-technological culture such as resource depletion, pollution, possible nuclear war, and possible misuse of artificial gene mutation.

Why cannot this driver drive the chariot in the right direction? There is a problem with the vision of the driver. There is a dense fog, and something has gone wrong with the eyesight as well. Due to the poor vision, this driver doesn't even realize that his chariot is running amok, and a catastrophe can happen any moment. If the driver can rub his eyes and regain some clarity of vision, he may be able to bring the chariot back to the right path.

In his *A Light Too Bright*, published in the nineties, he lists the various conflicts<sup>26</sup> the humanity was facing at that time:

feminist struggle, the conflict between national loyalty and ethnic identity, conflict among US, Europe, and Japan for world economic leadership, conflict due to the local cultures resisting the road roller of technological civilization that claims to be universal, conflicts between those who want to make a fast pile and those who want to maintain a healthy environment for life. As a result, our civilization has become "too destructive of human potential and has become capable of destroying itself and humanity in one blow".

Thus decade after decade, Mar Gregorios did the same thing—he diagnosed the illness of the humanity, and prescribed his remedies. He continued his call for the birth of a new humanity or a new

civilization with a new understanding of life and with a new way of life.

Toward the eve of his life, Paulos Mar Gregorios had a very clear vision of a new civilization, and as a skillful engineer, he mapped its foundation. The details of his plan can be read in his works in the nineties. An excellent summary of this plan was presented by him in a talk he gave at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993. It is entitled "Towards a New Enlightenment" and it is published in the book *Religion and Dialogue*.<sup>27</sup> Mar Gregorios begins with an analysis of the foundations of the present civilization in our world. After pointing out the widening cracks in its foundation, he presents the framework of a new civilization.

The dominant civilization of our world today began in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with a movement called European Enlightenment (EE). That was the seed out of which grew the gigantic tree of our modern civilization. Mar Gregorios calls it the most significant development of the last millennium, and advises us to be thankful for the great contributions of EE.

It is hard to imagine what a miserable place the world could have been if EE had not happened. Humanity would have been disintegrating through ignorance and squalor, thorough plague and pestilence, through disease and natural disasters, through starvation and epidemic. The EE has given to us modern science and technology, the institutes of democratic polity, systems of education, healing, information-gathering, transport and communication, without all of which six billion people could not have lived on this planet.<sup>28</sup>

Although we have to acknowledge and be thankful for all these good things we have received from EE, we can't ignore the one huge drawback it has, which makes the continued existence of the humanity impossible. It is true that it helped us see a part of the reality clearly, but in that process, it made us blind to the rest of the reality. It is a light which is so bright that it makes us blind.

...like bright sunlight that shuts out the night sky with its myriads of stars and millions of galaxies. If we lived 24 hours a day by

the sunlight, who would know that the reality that the sunlight reveals is only a billionth part of the gigantic universe? What we see so clearly by the modern science makes us blind to the mighty mystery that lies behind and beyond what we see and hear.<sup>29</sup>

EE has such a drawback because it has its foundation upon secularism. Mar Gregorios defines secularism as

An ideology which believes that the world open to our senses and our instruments is the only world that exists, and that meaning has to be found in that universe without reference to anything outside of or transcending our field of sense-perception and our rational mind.<sup>30</sup>

The first manifestation of EE was the French Revolution of 1789, which publicly repudiated God and religion. Its two prevailing manifestations today are the western liberal Humanism-Secularism and the western Marxism-Socialism. Both of them see science as the principal way to vision and meaning. Both say “In science we trust”, and regard religion as something that belongs to the childhood of the humanity.

Modern science was created by putting together the Empirical Aristotelianism of Bacon and the logical Platonism of Descartes, and it now takes over the structure of authority from religion and philosophy. It created a new world— a world that is

subject to human reason and human technological manipulation. In that the ruling authority is the secular-scientific ideology, which throws into margin not only religion, but also art and literature, poetry and philosophy.<sup>31</sup>

As a result, the human race now lives in the untruth, caught in the darkness of evil, and dying and killing each other. We pray the Vedic prayer from the bottom of our hearts:

*Asato ma sat gamaya* — lead us from untruth to truth  
*Thamaso ma jothir gamaya* — lead us from darkness to light  
*Mrithyor ma amrutham gamaya* — lead us from death to life

Now Mar Gregorios makes an attempt to understand EE further in the light of Buddhist Enlightenment. The concept of enlightenment is important in all religious traditions, but Buddhism made it its central concept. Buddha means the enlightened one. *Prabuddhatha* (enlightenment) is a state of being and consciousness. The Buddhist enlightenment (BE) is similar to EE in many aspects, but different in certain crucial aspects.

Both were reactions against the misuse of authority by the dominant religion—Brahminism in India and Christianity in Europe. They also repudiated the authority of the accepted scriptures. Both appealed to the human being to stand up in defiance of authority and to think and act for oneself. Both were exhortations to a new way of understanding the nature of the reality and the human mechanism of knowing. Both were regarded Godless by their opponents. Both sprang from deep socioeconomic changes.

But unlike the EE, the BE provides a trans-sensual and trans-conceptual vision of the Infinite Whole, transcending the subject-object dichotomy. EE relies on the senses and conceptual thought for its vision, and subject-object dichotomy is always maintained. BE transforms and heals the human person by putting an end to suffering and desire, by generating a sense of co-being, compassion and friendship for all reality, and by making him/her unpretentious, humble, non-domineering, and capable of transmitting peace, joy, and meaning to others. However, EE gives knowledge-derived power over the object and impels the desire to possess, manipulate and dominate. It gives power to produce goods—both that are necessary for humans and much more that are not only unnecessary but also harmful to all life on earth. It makes war and violence more sophisticatedly destructive.

Now Mar Gregorios tells us that the need of our world today is a New Enlightenment (NE). NE needs to be created taking the best aspects from the BE and EE, and avoiding their harmful aspects. It may begin with a few pioneering individuals as in BE, but it has to become a mass movement that spreads like fire as in EE. NE will be grounded on a three-in-one perception of reality:



1. the transcendent un-manifest reality (God/ Brahman/ Allah/ Buddha nature/Tao),
2. the manifest reality (world/universe)
3. the human entity which participates in both the above two realities , with the mediatorial task of manifesting the un-manifest in the universe, and leading the universe to the un-manifest.

In this perception of reality, the universe is the body of the humanity, and the humanity is supposed to take care of the universe just as we take care of our own body. The dichotomy of manifest and un-manifest exists due to the limit in our power of perception. However, from the perspective of the un-manifest, such a dichotomy does not exist. Thus what appear three to us is really one in reality. Mar Gregorios claims that such a perception of the reality will have earth-shaking consequences in our ways of life.

### **Mar Gregorios' View of How We Can Know The Truth**

As we are part of the universe, we cannot stand above it to get a bird's eye view. Although we can transcend it in our minds partially, we can never do so completely, for our minds are also conditioned by many limits. Mar Gregorios refers to three such limits caused by our senses, culture, and our interests.<sup>32</sup>

Our five senses are not equipped to take in all the data in the universe. A dog sees and hears different things which we don't see or hear. There are radio waves in this room which our sense-equipment does not pick up, but an ordinary radio can pick up and transmit to our ears as sound waves. In fact, with all our sophisticated scientific equipment and technology, we have access only to a very tiny segment of the spectrum of reality. We see reality only "as through a glass, darkly".

Our culture limits our perception. Our ways of looking at and understanding reality is severely conditioned by our cultural traditions, linguistic habits, our educational system by our historical experiences, by our geographical location, by our science and technology, by our religious heritage, and so on.

Our perception is also limited by our interests. We perceive more readily what is useful to us. If there is a gold coin and a piece of tin lying on the floor, we are more likely to perceive the gold rather than the tin. If making money is our main interest, then we will readily perceive the easier ways of gaining profit, and our admiration will be for those who are making piles of money. If power is our main interest, the powerful and their acts will be the ready objects of our perception. If you are a capitalist, you are likely to see more easily the obstacles to the development of capital and profit rather than the problems faced by the poor. Our interest determines our perception and we cannot see some things in the world, because to see them in their true light would demand some difficult and radical changes in our own attitudes and actions. My perception of the world may not agree in all respects with yours, for my cultural tradition as well as my interests may not be the same as those of some of you.

### Quest for Certainty

Metropolitan Gregorios has devoted a book for the topic, how we can know the truth — *Quest for Certainty*.<sup>33</sup> He authored this book in preparation for a national Conference of the Indian Philosophical Congress. It is an introduction to the development of epistemology in the west. Epistemology may be seen as a branch of Philosophy that deals with the question, how we may know the truth. In this book, we are given the opportunity to take a close look at the various philosophical quests in the west through the eyes of Mar Gregorios.

Mar Gregorios believes that In India we have sought truth using three *pramanaas* (measuring sticks) — *pratyksha* (sense perception), *anumana* (inference/reason), and *sabda* (scripture/tradition). The west also used these three until recently, but the modern western philosophy is characterized by its quest for certainty eliminating the third *pramana*, the *sabda*.<sup>34</sup>

In the medieval Europe, *sabdapramana*, consisting of scriptures, traditions, dogmas, canon laws and moral rules, was considered the ultimate authority of truth. There was strict ecclesiastic control of both institutions and thought patterns. As Alec Vidler<sup>35</sup> puts it,

The clergy was a privileged class. The Catholic Church had no

rivals, for since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, Catholics alone had the right of citizenship. The clergy had their own courts, and marriage was under ecclesiastical control. The church possessed immense wealth and property, which was exempt from taxation. It had a monopoly of education and care of the sick.

When this authority structure was finally collapsed by the French Revolution, the bourgeoisie, i. e. the professionals, bankers and others took over power from the clergy-nobility alliance, and both institutions and thought were secularized. The European educational, economic, and political institutions developed in this context. Science and Technology as we now have it developed in this antireligious milieu and bear its marks. They deal with only two realities— Man and World, and use only two *pramanas*— *Pratyaksha* and *Anumana*.

As religious faith was left out, there were only two methods for seeking certainty:

1. Make an analysis of the knowing process and ground certainty on the use of the process or method.
2. Ground all certainty in strict correlation with the external world empirically given.

This is the ground of certainty in science, and Technology gives the pragmatic proof of certainty to the discoveries and to the conclusions of science<sup>36</sup>.

Mar Gregorios lists eight dynamic systems of modern western philosophy. Out of which, existentialism and phenomenology try to ground themselves in subjective consciousness. Linguistic Analysis, Structuralism, and Marxism try to ground themselves in an analysis of external reality. Unlike these five systems, the remaining three systems— Neothomism, Whiteheadian Process Philosophy, and Bergsonian/ Teilhardian duration philosophies— speculate on the basis of the *sabdapramana*. Therefore, these three systems are ignored by the mainline philosophy.

Metropolitan Gregorios tells us in this book the story of the modern human quest for certainty. We are in search of the ultimate questions of existence. We are often frustrated, for finding ourselves in pursuit

of mirages. Can we at least know if we are in the right path? We are denied that privilege either. Perhaps we can never find the answers of the ultimate questions from our dimension of existence. Perhaps we may want to listen to the religions when they tell us that the ultimate knowledge belongs to God. As in the story of the Garden of Eden, the ultimate knowledge seems to be the forbidden fruit denied to mankind. They are allowed to eat from the tree of life, participating in the life of God, but they are denied the ultimate knowledge, which belongs to God. If they eat from the tree of knowledge (claim to have ultimate knowledge), they are denied both — neither can they get ultimate knowledge, nor can they participate in the life of God.

In his well-known book, *Cosmic Man*,<sup>37</sup> which was his doctoral dissertation, Mar Gregorios begins with a clarification of Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of how we gain knowledge. According to Gregory of Nyssa, human beings are endowed with a power to conceptualize and create, which he calls *epinoia*. *Epinoia* is not free from error though, due to the presence of evil. Only as we progressively get liberated from evil can the *epinoia* function better. A community (church) has its own way of understanding which transcends the rational. The subject-object dichotomy is transcended in the Eucharistic act. The creator-creation, matter-spirit, past-future, temporal-eternal, finite-infinite— all these dichotomies are transcended.

### **Against Fundamentalism**

The bishop's approach to the question of how we can know is a far cry from all kinds of fundamentalism. The fundamentalists' most basic claim is that they are in custody of the ultimate truth. Mar Gregorios engaged in dialog with people of various religions and ideologies to help them understand that they are not in custody of the ultimate truth. This reminds us of what Socrates did when he engaged in dialog in the streets of Athens. Mar Gregorios called a meeting of the best physical scientists of the world in MIT in 1979 to help them understand that scientists are not in custody of the ultimate truth. He traveled frequently to the Soviet Union to help them understand that the Marxists are not in custody of the ultimate truth. He engaged in a

dialog with *E.M. Sankaran Namboothiripad*, the well-known Marxist thinker in India to help him become aware of Marxist fundamentalism. He struggled a lot in the Christian conferences to make the Christians aware that they are not in custody of the ultimate truth. Even in a meeting with the Pope, he tried to help him escape from his narrow mindedness. He used every opportunity to help people get out of their narrow-mindedness and fundamentalism.

Striving for the unity of humankind all his life, the bishop realized that fundamentalism is the number one enemy of unity. Heading the World council of the Churches, he realized that each church claimed the custody of ultimate truth. Heading the world conferences of religions, he realized that each religion claimed the custody of ultimate truth. Apart from religions, science and Marxist ideology also made such claims. Mar Gregorios advised all people to forfeit this claim of the custody of truth. We can only be humble seekers and lovers of truth; we can never claim the custody of truth.

The primary reason for the controversies and splits in the church is the claim of the custody of truth. Addressing the parliament of world's religion in Chicago in 1993, Mar Gregorios said,

In each religion there are two levels. One level is exclusivist, and expansionist. That is to say, each religion says, we have the truth and if you want to have the truth, join us. That is the exclusivist, expansionist, lower type of religion. All religions have that lower type. But in religions there is also a higher type, a type which is universal in its orientation, which is all-embracing in its love, which is non-discriminating between members of its own community and those outside.<sup>38</sup>

Mar Gregorios asserts that claiming the custody of truth is lower type religion. It makes people closed-minded, unwilling to listen to and learn from others. Although he made the above statement about religions, it can be applied to religious groups as well. How could these churches claim the custody of the truth about the incomprehensible God? If the churches are honest and open-minded to admit that God alone is in custody of the absolute truth, they will forfeit all claims of the custody of truth, willing to learn from each other and even from other religions.

## Fundamentalism of science

Mar Gregorios spent considerable amount of his time to expose the fundamentalism of science. He points out three different attitudes toward science in our world.<sup>39</sup>

1. A blind faith in science
2. A blind rejection of Science
3. A balanced view

According to the first, Science and technology are potentially capable of solving all the problems of humankind. This view is popular in the developing countries. According to the second, Science is good for nothing because it has been lionized out of all proportion by the necessities of urban-industrial life and by the political opportunism of the technocracy. This counter-culture view is popular in advanced industrialized societies. According to the third view, Science is a useful tool, which helps us to predict certain aspects of reality and therefore to control them. It may also help us partially to understand the nature of reality, but cannot give us an adequate picture of it. This is the view of the philosophers of science from the English-speaking world.

Modern Science is comparatively new in the history of humanity, only a few centuries old. Science had once to fight for survival against the unjust onslaughts of the dogmatic western Christianity. That period is now happily over. Science has overcome the resistance from religion and it can stand on its own. However, Science itself had been tempted to claim certain dogmatic certainties for itself in the light of some of her spectacular achievements in the last century.

Medieval European society unquestioningly obeyed the Roman Catholic Church as the ultimate arbiter of truth in all fields. The notorious medieval dictum: *Roma locuta est, Causa finita est* (Rome has spoken, the matter is settled) represented this unquestioning obedience. A revolt against the medieval church's authority occurred in several stages. First there were the pre-Renaissance protests of peasants against the exploitation of the Church as major landholder. Then came the European Renaissance which counter-posed the authority of ancient Greek philosophers and Classics as an alternative

to the authority of the church, especially in art, music and literature. Then came the Protestant Reformation which lifted Scriptural authority against Papal authority. Finally, the French Revolution and the European Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries fully repudiated the authority of King and Priest, of Church and Tradition, and set up human rationality as the final arbiter of truth. Man became the measure and center of all things, with Humanism, liberal and Marxist, becoming the dominant ideology. This is the context in which Modern Science developed and flourished.

Medieval priests in their black robes and Cross in hand have been today replaced by Modern Scientists in their white smocks and computer at hand. The uncritical devotion of both scientists and lay people to Modern Science and Technological Rationality as the ultimate arbiter of truth is similar to the uncritical obedience of the medieval Europe to the Roman Catholic Church. Today the dictum has become: *Scientia locuta est, Causa finita est* (Science has spoken, the matter is settled).

The scientific rationality assumes dogmatically and unscientifically the givenness of a self-existent entity called 'Nature'. It also assumes that things are what they appear to be. This assumption is called Naive Realism, which refuses to ask questions about the ontological status of phenomena due to the inability of science to answer those questions. Worst of all, it assumes that man, the knowing subject, can stand outside the nature, and objectify, know, and manipulate it. By overvaluing objectivity and underplaying subjectivity, this approach has distorted human personality; disciplining oneself to be always objective renders human beings very inhibited in their subjective human relations.

There have been so much faith and hopes upon Science. Once it was thought by some at least that Scientific Rationality would provide us with the right morality. Every attempt so far has failed to yield the desired fruit. Again, once it was thought that scientific reasoning would open all the doors to all knowledge. We now know that science has its limits, and that much of what we know does not come from science, but from other forms of experience, including human relations, art

and music, literature and drama, pain and pleasure, and perhaps even from religious experience. Many of us believed that scientific knowledge is objective and therefore true, while other convictions, which are subjective, are prone to error. Today we know that totally non-subjective objectivity is unattainable, for subjectivity is an essential aspect of all knowing. And we know that current scientific knowledge is subject to revision in the light of future knowledge, and that there is no “finally proved” status to any scientific proposition.

A ridiculous dogma was held by the 19th century European Positivists that all human knowledge passes through three stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific. It was held that the scientific is the only true knowledge which supersedes the two previous stages, which are the infant and adolescent stages of human evolution. This dogma concluded that science makes all theology and metaphysics obsolete. Today this is recognized as a dogma produced by the European Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Most of the philosophers of science see science as a way of seeing our world using paradigms. The paradigms are in a process of constant revision and change, not in accordance with any rational law, but almost randomly. These philosophers agree that Science is not proven knowledge, but only a way of seeing reality, a very successful way indeed. But no infallibility can be claimed for science, nor can it be given any monopoly over human knowledge. Such a modest evaluation of science is common among the Philosophers of science today. Toward the end of the 19th century, dogmatic scientism was slowly becoming outdated and unfashionable.

The revolt against scientific rationality has only begun. The protest will take at least several decades to mature and gain sufficient momentum to compel attention. When the protest matures, the foundations of a new civilization will also come to light.

### **Openness and Intellectual Honesty in Personal Life**

Mar Gregorios remained fully open and honest all lifelong. He remained a student willing to learn from all. In the article, *My Own Vision of the Ultimate*,<sup>40</sup> Mar Gregorios confesses his need to learn from all. He remained a student his entire life.



I need to learn from all, and have indeed learned from many. My major liberation in life has been from thinking that the Western way of thinking, with its specific categories and modalities, is the only way to think and to know. Now that I know a little bit about the Yin-Yang polarity-complementarity way of thinking and knowing in the Chinese Tao, I do not have to be a slave of the Western subject-object mode of thinking, and the logic of the excluded middle.

From my own Indian tradition I have learned the principle of Ekam advitiam or One without a Second; I know now that all diversity and difference ultimately find their unity in the One without a Second; that One is more ultimate than the many.

My own Eastern Orthodox tradition has confirmed that there is no creation other than God or outside God, because the Infinite Ultimate has neither outside nor other.

I have learned from the Jains the great Anekantavada, which holds that all statements are conditional and qualified truth, which have to be supplemented and completed by other truths; that our Ahimsa or non-violence should extend to other ways of thinking, and not just to other beings.

I have learned from Buddhists that all epistemology is finally without basis; that our perceptions of all things, including the world, are but mental events that happen when our kind of mind -sense and whatever is out there come into contact with each other; that this world which the secular mindset takes to be some kind of ultimate reality is neither real nor unreal, and should be taken seriously, but not so absolutely.

And I have learned much from Jews and Arabs, from Sikhs and Zoroastrians, from Adivasis and Aborigines, from Africans and from the indigenous peoples of America. And I hope I am still learning and will continue to do so until the end.

I have also learned a lot from the communists-that most avowedly atheistic wing of the European Enlightenment; I have learned from their weaknesses and failures just as much as

from their apparent successes. I cultivated them especially for two reasons: (a) their social goals were more compatible with the Christian idea of a just society than that of liberalism and its capitalist ideology; (b) my Christian brothers and sisters in the West, especially the Roman Catholic Church, but also Protestants, were vilifying everything the communists were doing. I found anticommunism anti-Christian, and therefore decided to associate and work with the communists so long as they were committed to just societies in which oppression and exploitation was reduced to a minimum and in which all human beings could live with freedom and dignity. Alas, the communists became as dogmatic, corrupt and power hungry as the Roman Catholic Church and dug their own graves. But I still remain committed to socialism as the nearest alternative to the society I am envisaging as a Christian.

And I have learned much from the Eastern Orthodox heritage: that Eucharistic worship and adoration with thanksgiving are the primary responses to what God has done in Christ-not preaching or witnessing, that the Christian life in the community is more important than Christian talking and doing; that the Christian's personal life is not an individual matter, but the work of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith; that the Holy Spirit of God has been at work in the whole creation from its very inception, and is still work, not just in the Church, but in the whole universe, bringing it to fulfillment according to God's plans; that I can trust the Triune God to fulfill the created order according to His plans, despite many apparent failures and regressions I am privileged to be initiated, by baptism-chrismation, into the great mystery of the universe as God guides it to its destiny.

This is intellectual honesty and openness at its best. In the article, *Ten streams of social awareness which has shaped me as a person*,<sup>41</sup> he lists ten streams of thought that have influenced him. They are

1. The primal vision of the Adivasis and Girijans of India

2. The Vedica consciousness that include yoga and Yagna
3. The Cosmic Sakti, which is Saivism/Dravidian
4. Buddhism as true enlightenment
5. The Upanishadic/Vedantic perspeccive on reality
6. Early Greek Impact
7. The Semitic civilization
8. Persian civilization
9. Western secular civilization
10. Marxist thought

Mar Gregorios includes the western secular civilization within the ten streams of thought that have influenced him. Although it is dominating the world today, it is just one of many streams. It cannot claim to have the custody of truth like any other stream of thought.

In the article, *How My Mind Has Changed*,<sup>42</sup> Mar Gregorios lists the major changes that happened to him as a result of keeping his mind open. He claims that he gained radical insights on Augustine's thought, the power of words, freedom, missions, the relation between society and sacrament, and destiny of mankind.

### **Mar Gregorios' View of the World**

Mar Gregorios claimed that we can only have a partial knowledge of the world. Living inside the world as a part of it, we can never have an objective view of the world. The only way we can think and speak about the world as a whole is by using metaphors.

Mar Gregorios identified two prevalent views of the world as defective. One view claims that there is a supernatural world in addition to the natural world. The second view evolved as a revolt to this view, according to which the natural world, which is perceptible to us, is all that exists, and nothing exists beyond our perception. Mar Gregorios rejected both of these views in favor of a third one, which asserts that there is only one world, which includes not only the part of the world that is perceptible to us, but also what remains imperceptible to us. The first view has a commonly accepted name—other-worldliness, and Mar Gregorios has used it. The other views don't have any commonly accepted names. Mar Gregorios has merely

explained these views without naming them. Here this writer has taken the liberty to name the second view, this-worldliness, and the third view, one-worldliness.

### ***Other-Worldliness***

According to this view, there are two worlds: the physical world and the spiritual world. They are also called natural and supernatural. The physical world is temporary, and the spiritual world is permanent. The physical world is meant to be ultimately destroyed. The spiritual world exists in two parts: heaven and hell. This view is often referred to as Other-Worldliness, for it gives undue focus on the other world, and ignores this world. People with this view do not care for the wellbeing of this world; in fact they rejoice at the destruction of this world. Moreover, this view always gets into conflict with science, for its claims about spirit and spiritual world, which are beliefs and opinions, are treated as facts. It was believed that the world is made of five elements: earth, water, air, fire and spirit. No one knew what exactly spirit was, but its existence was blindly believed in, and a spiritual world was also imagined. Other-Worldliness is the most widespread view, and it is expressed very powerfully in the extremist and fundamentalist groups in most of the religions.

### ***This-Worldliness***

This-Worldliness is a view that arises in revolt against Other-Worldliness. According to this view, only the world that is perceptible to our senses exists. Nothing exists beyond what we can perceive. This is a naive solution to the problem of Other-Worldliness. It tries to resolve the problem by denying the existence of the other world, for if there is not another world, how can there be Other-Worldliness?

The assertion that nothing exists beyond what we perceive is a belief or opinion without any verifiable evidence. Moreover, if the perceptible world is all that exists, the meaning of existence cannot be explained or the rules that govern human behavior cannot have any basis. Empiricism, materialism, and atheism are expressions of this view. This is the worldview that controls most of the governments today, and it is spread mainly through the educational institutions.

### ***One-Worldliness***

Other-Worldliness focuses on the other world, and This-Worldliness focuses on this world. These two views are always at friction with each other. The solution is to rise above these views, and assume a higher view, which I like to call One-Worldliness.

Unlike Other-Worldliness, this view affirms that there are not two worlds, but only one. Unlike This-Worldliness, this view affirms that the world is more than what appears to our senses. Only a part of the world is perceptible to our five senses. If we had a sixth sense, we would perceive the world differently. The world may be existing in several dimensions or levels, but still the world is one. Unlike this view, Other-Worldliness views the imperceptible part of the world as another world. This-Worldliness denies the existence of the imperceptible part, but One-Worldliness affirms its existence. Thus One-Worldliness effectively resolves the issues of Other-Worldliness and This-Worldliness.

This view honestly acknowledges the limits of our senses. It divides the world into perceptible and imperceptible parts. It honestly admits that our knowledge about the imperceptible part of the world is very limited. Thus this view does not get into a conflict with science. Moreover, it encourages science to explore the imperceptible part further.

One-Worldliness is the view held by almost all the authentic religious traditions in the world. Although you may find Other-Worldliness at the surface of any religious tradition, if you dig deep enough, you will discover One-Worldliness. Thus you can discover both Other-Worldliness and One-Worldliness in the same religious tradition— at the surface and at deep levels.

One-Worldliness is not easy to verbalize, but Other-Worldliness is easy to verbalize. Even if we hold One-Worldly view, we often find ourselves speaking in terms of Other-Worldly view. While One-Worldliness remains a philosophical view, Other-Worldliness is expressed as a poetic view. For example, even if we know that the Earth rotates around its axis, we still say Sun rises and sets. Hence, we may use the language of Other-Worldliness even if we hold One-

Worldliness. Thus we may recite the Lord's Prayer with its Other-Worldliness even though we hold One-Worldliness.

In the paper, "The Unity of the Grand Continuum"<sup>43</sup>, Mar Gregorios makes a critical evaluation of the Gaia Hypothesis, according to which the earth's biosphere, that thin and fragile membrane, sandwiched between the planet's seething molten interior and the vacuum of outer space which sustains life in all forms known to us — flora and fauna, whales and weasels, bacteria and bison, mice and men,— constitute a single inter-connected and inter-dependent system with its own feedback loops and cybernetic self-regulation, a system which itself shares in the properties characteristic of life as we know it.

Mar Gregorios argues that the hypothesis needs to be extended to the entire universe, not just to the earth. The universe is to be seen as a dynamic continuum of non-life, life, and consciousness. He concludes, "We go beyond the Gaia hypothesis and the planet management concepts— to a revolutionary and creative consciousness of that universal reality which carries us, to which we are responsible, and from which we have been alienated".

Following the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, Mar Gregorios asserts that the world is not a self-dependent entity. "Matter is the manifestation of God's *energeia*, contingent upon his will and word, dynamic and changing."<sup>44</sup> He also asserts that in spite of all the apparent divisions and diversities of the world, it is a single unit. "What emerges is one universe, with man inextricably interlocked within that system. It is this notion of the creation as one inter-related web of space and time as merely aspects of it and not any kind of medium or vessel in which realities exist, which is affirmed by the authentic Christian tradition". Mar Gregorios challenges the objectifying approach of modern man. "The universe, though subject to death, has relation to the new heaven and the new earth, and so has transcendent significance; man is an integral part of that universe, and cannot stand outside of it, making himself the subject and it the object. The universe is not an object, nor is it made up of particular and independent objects. Man is not merely a resident in the universe, surrounded by different objects which he is free to manipulate. He is an inextricable part of that universe, and has emerged from within it."

## Mar Gregorios' View of God

Following the Cappadocian fathers, Mar Gregorios asserted that we cannot have any conceptual grasp of God. We can only say what and how God is not; we cannot say what and how God is. However, that does not prevent us from having a friendship with God.

By the term “God,” we mean what ultimately exists. God is the Being behind all beings. The one primary aspect we affirm about God is that God is transcendent, which means that God belongs to a category that is different from that of all beings. This implies that God is incomprehensible to us. No facts are available about God. We can only have beliefs about God. Theology is not the study of God; it is only the study of our beliefs about God.

We think about God in relation to the world and to us. The world exists within the limits of time and space. Existing beyond these limits, God is infinite. All beings, that exist in time have beginning and end, or birth and death. God, existing beyond time, has neither birth nor death. So we say God is immortal. Compared to what we know, God is all-knowing—omniscient. Compared to our limited abilities, God is all-powerful—omnipotent.

Thus we can speak only negatively about God. Such negative talk about God is often called apophatic theology. Even if we make a positive (cataphatic) statement about God, it implies a negative (apophatic) statement. For example, the assertion God is Holy implies that all beings are unholy. That God is Holy is not really a description of God, for God cannot be objectively described. It is merely derived from the fact that all beings are unholy.

No adjective with which we describe a being can be used to describe God, the Being. For example, we use the word “good” to describe anything. But when we use this word to describe God, it cannot have the same meaning. Even the word ‘one’ cannot describe God. How can we say one God in the same sense we say one apple and one cat? God cannot be limited within our numbers.

This-worldly view denies God. Other-worldly view limits God to the other world as a being that controls everything in the world. One-worldly view views God from two different perspectives: Looking from God's view, God is infinite, and nothing exists apart from God.

Looking from the world's view, the world is like a flame, and God is like an infinite source of energy that keeps it burning.

### **Mar Gregorios' View of Man**

Mar Gregorios did not approve of man usurping the seat of God. This is what the God-denying secularists do. When man claims that there is no one above him, he himself assumes the seat of God. The bishop did not approve of casting man out of God's presence either. This is what the western Christianity did. He wanted man to be in his right place— as a mediator between God and the world.

#### ***What is a Human Being Made of?***

This question is answered differently by people according to the worldview they hold. The religious people who hold the Other-Worldly View believe that a human being is a soul that resides within a body. The body is merely a cover of the soul. The body, which is physical, is temporary, and its existence is limited to the physical world. But the soul, which is spiritual, exists for ever either in heaven or in hell after its temporary existence within a physical body. The nonreligious people who hold this-Worldly View believe that a human being does not have any soul that survives death. Even the existence of a mind is doubtful.

Those who hold the One-Worldly View believe that a human being is more than what appears to our senses. Also, unlike Other-Worldliness, it affirms that a human being is a unity, not a combination of two different parts. Gregory of Nyssa, who held this worldview, believed that man is an integral body-soul organism.<sup>45</sup>

#### ***What is the Basic Nature of Man?***

Answering this question, two defective views were rejected in favor of a third one by Mar Gregorios.

1. Man is basically evil
2. Man is basically good

Mar Gregorios held that Man is basically neither good nor evil, but in between them with the freedom and ability to choose either.



Mar Gregorios discusses this question in detail in *Freedom and Authority*.<sup>46</sup> According to him, freedom is the power to think, feel, speak, and act following one's own will. If I am prevented from following my own will, I don't have freedom. If I make someone follow my will, he/she is a slave to me. A master exercises coercive authority upon his slave. A slave is not allowed to follow his own will. If he does, it is considered a crime in the system of slavery. In an ideal healthy community, every human individual has freedom. However, one's freedom is limited to his/her own life. One has no freedom to interfere in the life of another person. The freedom to live is a privilege of every human individual. Along with that every human individual has the responsibility to let others have the same freedom. There is no privilege without responsibility.

When we have the freedom to live, and when we let others have their freedom to live, we create rules and willingly submit ourselves to them. Road rules are excellent examples. Where there are road rules and where people strictly follow them, people have the freedom to travel around with very few casualties. A society cannot function without rules. In an authoritarian society, someone creates and enforces rules on the rest of the people. In a democratic society, all people participate in the creation of rules, and all people willingly submit to the rules. Let us imagine heaven, the ideal world. Are there rules there? Yes, there are rules, for without rules no society can function. However, all people willingly and habitually create and follow the rules, and it makes life smooth and joyful for everybody. In contrast, hell may be imagined as a place where no one follows any rules. In heaven, the ideal world, all people are mature, free, and responsible, but in hell all people are immature, bound, and irresponsible.

Our real world is a mixture of both kinds of people. There are mature and immature people, responsible and irresponsible people (those who choose good), and those who choose evil. The presence of good and evil in our world presents an excellent opportunity for people to grow in freedom, maturity, and responsibility. People lack such an opportunity in heaven and in hell, and so there is no opportunity to grow in either of those places.

God is free, and out of his freedom flows only good; no evil.<sup>47</sup> God has granted freedom to humankind— the right to choose good or evil. Until humankind attains the maturity and perfection of God, humankind will continue to make wrong choices. There might be free beings elsewhere in the universe and also in other dimensions. Our religious traditions call them angels and demons. They also have the freedom to make choices. Thus though good originates from God, evil originates from the wrong choices of the free beings in the world.

So what is our present situation? We are created free. However, we need to grow to maturity— as perfect as the heavenly father is perfect. We are always surrounded by evil, tempting us to choose evil just as Adam and Eve were tempted to make the wrong choice. Jesus himself was not immune from such temptations. He was tempted by Satan to make wrong choices. Nobody is free from such temptations. We have to consciously overcome the temptations and make the right choices as our Lord did. If we do not fall to the temptations of evil, then we will be attacked by the evil forces in various ways. Temptations are internal, but such attacks are mostly external. We need to stand with God and face the powers of evil in our everyday life. Life is a battle with evil.

Augustine, a fourth century father of Latin Christianity, asserted that mankind is basically evil, and so we are not capable of making any right choice at all. Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine, revolted against this view by going to the other extreme. He claimed that mankind is basically good. Along with a low view of Man, Augustine also promoted a low view of this world as well by holding the other-worldly view. The western Christian world, which includes Catholic Church and protestant churches, still suffers from these distorted views of Augustine. Backed up by political power, the western Christianity spread its influence throughout the world in the past few centuries, and even the eastern Christian churches were not free from this influence.

According to Gregory of Nyssa, God, being the source of all good, is basically and fully good, and man can be good if he stays close to God. If he rejects God, he also rejects good and chooses

evil. Although evil exists, it does not have a positive existence. Augustine thought that man is basically evil, and countering his view, Pelagius thought that Man is basically good. Gregory of Nyssa corrected both of these false views asserting the third view that man is between good and evil.<sup>48</sup>

### **Mar Gregorios' View of God-Man Relationship**

Most of the religious people in the world understand the God-man relationship based on their worldview—otherworldliness. God creates human spiritual soul, covers it with a physical body, and places it in the physical world. Human beings are expected to follow the will of God. At death the soul leaves the body and either enters heaven or hell depending on their following the will of God while in the physical world.

Most of the nonreligious people have the worldview of this-worldliness, according to which God doesn't exist, and so man is on his own.

In the ideal worldview as presented by Mar Gregorios, one-worldliness, Man has a mediatorial role, representing the world before God and God before the world. Man is God's image for the rest of the creation, which makes man the visible representation of God for the world. Humanity as the microcosm represents the world, the macrocosm, before God. This makes man responsible and his existence is made purposeful. This relation is clearly visible in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, where Adam (humanity) becomes God's image for the rest of the creation. As mediator, the creation sees Adam as God, and God sees Adam as the creation.

Mar Gregorios explains how Gregory of Nyssa made the fullness of humanity in space-time the visible manifestation of God, who is beyond the limits of time-space.<sup>49</sup> The image of God means participation in the very characteristics of God—to the perfection of all good, beauty, love, wisdom, and power. This rather than sin is the basic nature of humanity. Sin is the discrepancy between how man is now and how he ought to be. The image and the original match perfectly in Christ. Only when the humanity becomes like Christ, it truly becomes the image of God.

### **Mar Gregorios' View of Man-Man Relationship**

Gregory of Nyssa saw humanity as the image of God. The value of an individual human being is in being a part of the humanity or in representing the humanity. This gives enough reason to treat every human being with respect. In relation to God and world, all human beings have equal status. Mar Gregorios believed that human beings should not be discriminated based on anything such as class, caste, race, color, nationality, religion or gender. He made a strong stand against apartheid in South Africa, against treating two-third world inferior to the rest of the world, against treating women inferior to men, against treating children inferior to adults, against treating minorities inferior to the majorities, and against treating people with disabilities inferior to the others.

Mar Gregorios quotes Gregory of Nyssa making an eloquent attack on slavery as he interprets Ecclesiastes 2:7:

Him who was made to be the lord of the earth, ordained to rule, you bring under the yoke of slavery, thus rebelling and fighting against the very order established by God! ..... How much money have you estimated as the value of a rational being? How many *obols* would you regard as a fair price for the image of God? .....who will sell him and who will buy him? Only God can do this. Or perhaps not even God. .... If even God does not enslave the free, who is that regards his own authority as greater than God's?<sup>50</sup>

Mar Gregorios challenged humankind to stand united in order to face the perils it was facing. Referring to two people who couldn't agree with each other on several matters but could agree against a common enemy, the British imperialism, Mar Gregorios asks the entire human race to get united against a new imperialism.

The recognition of British Imperialism as a peril united Sir C. Sankaran Nair and Mahatma Gandhi in a common effort to remove the British yoke. Will the recognition of the new imperialism that frightens the world and holds it prisoner, unite all of us in humanity to a common struggle against it? That is the question. I said the peril that faces humanity today is a

composite one. It has many elements in it, but I shall refer only to four of these:

- i. The Space and Nuclear Threat;
- ii. Poverty and The Captivity of Science and Technology;
- iii. The nature of the Military-Industrial-Financial-Communication Complex
- iv. The cultural-educational imperialism that saps our vitality.

These are four aspects of a single peril which I submit is a spur from God, from history if you prefer, goading us on to find a new way of making it possible for all human beings to live together as a single humanity on this planet, in dignity and freedom.<sup>51</sup>

### **Mar Gregorios' View of God-World Relationship**

Most of the religious people understand the God-World relationship based on the other-worldly view, according to which, God is like a king, and God's will is fully done only in the spiritual world. The presence of evil in the world is explained by the claim that the physical world is ruled by a force that is in enmity with God.

For the non-religious people, the perceptible world is all that exists, therefore, God is a meaningless word. If there is no God, the world cannot have any relationship with God.

In the One-worldly view, the world, which is within the limits of time and space, exists within God, who is infinite. From God's viewpoint, the world does not have a separate existence from God. From the world's point of view, it depends for its existence upon God, and apart from God, it has no existence. The world is like the flame of a lamp that is lit forever using an endless source of energy. The existence of the flame depends every moment on the energy supply. God is the source of the endless energy that keeps the world alive and dynamic like a flame. Mar Gregorios says about the thought of Gregory of Nyssa:

The *diastema* between the creator and the creation in Gregory has another unique feature—namely that it is a one-way gap. From the side of God, there is no gap. All creation is immediately present to him in all its extension of space and time.<sup>52</sup>

Mar Gregorios presents the Christian vision of oneness as follows:

The Christian vision of God attempts to bring all reality together in inter-relationship, without blurring the distinctions. God is no longer seen as a reality 'outside of' or apart from the reality of man and nature. Man and nature can exist only in God. They cannot be outside God for God has no outside. Only finite entities, beings with boundaries can have an outside. Outside God there is only nothing. All that exists, whether man or nature, exist only in contingent dependence upon God, whose loving will sustains them in existence. God, man and nature are thus seen not as three separate realities, but as one reality.<sup>53</sup>

### **Mar Gregorios' View of Man-World Relationship**

For most of the religious people, who hold the other-worldly view, the world is like a container for human beings to exist. The human body can exist only in the physical world, but the soul can exist either in the physical world or in the spiritual world. The physical world and the physical body are often seen as prisons for the soul, which makes people look forward to an escape from physicality. The life in the physical world is seen as temporary imprisonment, but life in heaven, the spiritual world, is seen as everlasting freedom in one's own home. Life in hell is seen as everlasting imprisonment.

For most of the nonreligious people who hold this-worldly view, the world is a container as well as a set of objects humans manipulate and exploit for their existence. Humans live on earth like the lice that live on the body of a cow. They live by sucking its blood. A cow's body provides the lice not only a place to stay but also its food. Human beings are to the world like the lice are to a cow. This is a parasitic rather than a symbiotic relationship. It is this view which made humans plunder the nature, and pollute it.

In the One-worldly view, which Mar Gregorios held as ideal, human beings are seen as integral parts of the world. The human beings to the world are like cells to a body. The whole world is seen as one organism. According to this view, the world is not just a container for people to exist. Nor is it like a cow the lice suck blood from. It is an extension of our body. The world is seen as an integral whole in the

original, biblical view. This picture is clearly seen in Genesis 1 where we read how God creates the world with human beings as its integral parts, and in Psalm 104 where we read how God manages the world with human beings as its parts. Such a view of the world can be seen in the Stoic Philosophy (Greek) where the world is referred to as a macrocosm, which breathes together. Such a view helps humanity to take care of the nature just as we take care of our own body.

Mar Gregorios asserts without the slightest doubt that what we need is a unitary vision in which man and nature are seen together as one.

Only a unitary vision of man as an integral part of creation can be faithful to the reality we know. To think of the non-human world as something which is out there, to be an object of our scientific knowledge and technical manipulation, is not only wrong, but has disastrous consequences as the ecological crisis is already showing. Man is part of the eco-system, and his actions by their impact on that system, can be self-destructive if such actions do not have regard for the system.<sup>54</sup>

Following Gregory of Nyssa, Mar Gregorios affirms that according to the Christian tradition, man's relation with the world includes three aspects:

1. Man's participation in "nature" as integral to it; (Adam is Adama (earth))
2. Man's representation of "nature" as its priest, so to speak (Man is crown of creation); and
3. Man's transformation of "nature" to conform it to the good. (Man is co-creator with God)<sup>55</sup>

In an eco-meditation, Mar Gregorios gives voice to the groaning of Mother Earth:

My children, she says, something has gone wrong with them.  
They act as if they want to kill themselves, along with me,  
their mother,  
And all life I have born and brought up through the millennia.

They are full of insatiable greed, she complains:

Their cupidity knows no limits.

They are so aggressive that they would like to blow each other up with nuclear weapons.

Their greed is such that they would exploit their own brothers and sisters.

Their cupidity is so limitless that they would rape and torture, kill and trample on their fellow-creatures' dignity, just to satisfy their perverse lusts and mad desires for gratification.

Listen, she stops, and she moans again, weeping for her mindless children in pain and agony ... Ah, now she takes up her complaints again ...

They are my precious children — these human beings to whom I have given birth.

And yet, they now have power to destroy me and all my children, all living beings, including themselves.

Have mercy on them and on me, Lord ...

They would upset the balanced habitat in which I seek to nurture them.

They burn up all the oil and gas and coal that it has taken me thousands of years to develop in my womb.

They do not think of future generations.

They release carbon dioxide, methane and nitrogen monoxide, and other gases which heat up the atmosphere which it has taken me millions of years to develop for their sake, and for the sake of all life.

They disrupt the soil microbial communities, and release more of these greenhouse gases.

The polar ice is melting.

The ocean level has risen.

The ozone which guards them from the harmful rays of the



sun is already depleted. Their rain is acid: so is their snow and fog even.

So many life forms, my children, are becoming extinct every year; the desert spreads, but they keep on mindlessly felling trees.

They empty billions of tons of toxic waste into the oceans and rivers and kill off tens of thousands of seals and millions of fish and other marine life.

I am tired of complaining, says the earth and weeps again; now she speaks, in a different tone.

Have mercy upon them, she says.

They are my children. I love them, even when they care not for me.

They need help, Lord, she now says. Not for my sake, but for their own sake.

Teach them compassion, Lord, she now prays, compassion for themselves, for their fellow-humans, for future generations yet to be born, for trees and plants, for birds and fish, for all life in earth and air and sea.

Teach them to respect life, to practice justice, to desist from oppression and exploitation, to learn war no more, to pursue the paths of peace, to care, to restrain their greed and lust, to grow in love, to seek fulfillment in inner discipline, compassion and prayers, rather than in gratification of lust and greed or in violence and oppression, in drugs and consumerism.<sup>56</sup>

## **Mar Gregorios' View of Religion**

### ***Religion as Dharma***

Mar Gregorios prefers the Sanskrit word Dharma instead of the word religion, for it retains the original meaning of religion. Dharma involves four aspects: understanding, self-discipline, worship, and compassionate service.<sup>57</sup>

1. Understanding: This is the awareness of the truth of existence.

Dharma means that which holds or sustains the reality. The awareness of the unmanifest reality that holds the manifest reality is fundamental. Based on a Dharmic understanding, a life-style will be developed in relation to oneself, to the Ultimate, and to the fellow beings.

2. Self-discipline: We practice Dharma in relation to ourselves mainly in the form of self-discipline. We have to learn to control our senses, passions, drives and desires.

3. Worship: We practice Dharma in relation to the Ultimate as unconditional surrender and obedience to the ultimate. The highest honor will always be given to the Ultimate.

4. Compassionate Service: We practice Dharma in relation to our fellow beings by unconditional love and service to our fellow beings. We will honor every human being as a dwelling place of the ultimate.

This original meaning of religion is found in the Latin word *religio* which meant a life bound by a rule of life or *regula*. It is something that serves as the very foundation of human existence. But the cultural movement in the past few centuries known as the European Enlightenment cast away this corner stone of life as a worthless one. It placed man on the throne of God, and treated human rational power as the only reliable means of knowledge. It declared that man has attained adulthood, and so he does not need religion any more. Thus in human growth or evolution to adulthood, religion, which was useful once, became a useless appendix that occasionally gives us trouble, and can be surgically removed. Thus religion, which was once seen as the head of a community or culture or human life, was demoted to the status of a useless and trouble-making appendix.

With diverse religions, we have diverse ways to talk about the ultimate truth. Diversity is an advantage. Diversity in religions is like diversity in languages. No one religion can claim the custody of the ultimate truth. Whatever religion we belong to, we need to openly speak to others what we believe to be true, but at the same time we need to humbly listen to others willing to learn from them. Diversity in religions is very similar to the diversity in healing systems. Two

different healing systems may approach the same sickness with entirely different diagnosis and prescription. However, all healing systems have the same goal—to cure the sickness. All religions are healing systems—they try to heal the sick humanity. If they are willing to cooperate and willing to learn from one another, they can serve the humanity better. Inaugurating the centenary celebrations of the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, Paulos Mar Gregorios made his view of the goal of interreligious dialog crystal clear.<sup>58</sup> The unity of humanity with cultural diversity without any domination by any one part of humanity is the ultimate goal of interreligious dialog.

Although what is above is his general views of religion, his views of religion were more specific in his views of the church. Church, he believed, has to play the role of a good shepherd to the humanity.

### ***The Identity of Church***

What is church, and what is its mission? This question can be answered from the view of an outsider or an insider. An outsider view, a sociological one, would describe church as an institution or as a voluntary organization of Christian believers. This approach will certainly yield valuable information about the churches today. However, here the question is answered from an insider view, which is theological. Paulos Mar Gregorios approaches this question extensively as an insider in a number of his published papers and books.<sup>59</sup>

The role of the church is explained in the New Testament using a number of metaphors such as a family, a kingdom, a building, a body, an army, a flock of sheep, etc. The one metaphor Mar Gregorios uses most meaningfully is that of a body. He is never tired of repeating over and over that the church is the body of Christ. Christ, who is invisible to us, continues his mission today through his visible body, the church. Before attempting an examination of the view of Mar Gregorios, we may trace the evolution of this metaphor in the New Testament.

At the very beginning of Church, it understood itself as the new

Israel. The church claimed that the old Israel proved irresponsible to God, so God replaced it with the Christian church, the new Israel. Jesus was seen as a new Moses, saving people from the captivity of Satan. The church believed that it was living in a world of sin and death. Under the leadership of Jesus, the new Moses, the church has claimed freedom from sin and death. However, as long as they are in the world, they are like the Israelites who were in the desert on their way to the land of Canaan.

As a development to this thought, Jesus was seen as a new Adam in contrast to the first Adam. Adam was the beginning of a human race that disobeys God; in Jesus starts a new human race that obeys God. "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24). "For neither is circumcision anything, nor un-circumcision, but a new creation" (Gal 6:15). Someone becomes a new creation when Christ lives in him and he lives in Christ. Thus this model of new creation, which evolved naturally from the previous one, was found much more meaningful.

How are people who have become new creation related to each other? If Christ lives in them, and if they all live in Christ, obviously they are related to each other as the organs of the same body. Thus there evolved the concept of church as the body of Christ. "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (I Cor. 12: 27). As the members of a body, the members of the church are supposed to live and work together in perfect unity. Thus this metaphor, which naturally evolved from the previous ones, seems to be even more meaningful.

Paulos Mar Gregorios claims that the Eastern Orthodox Churches, with their central emphasis on the Eucharist, have always seen church as the body of Christ.<sup>60</sup> The Roman Catholic Church has been willing to accept it as its official view in the Second Vatican Council.<sup>61</sup> The Protestant Churches, however, haven't yet understood the significance of this model; they still seem to operate with the previous models.<sup>62</sup>

### *Church as the Body of Christ*

Mar Gregorios has elaborated on this topic primarily in a series of Bible studies given to the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and later published in a book namely, the Meaning and Nature of Diakonia.<sup>63</sup> Mar Gregorios argues that being the body of Christ, the mission of church is to continue the mission of Christ, and the role of WCC is to assist the church to perform this mission. He quotes a few passages from the New Testament to assert that the mission of the church is the continuation of Christ's mission.

Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."<sup>64</sup> Christ sends the church to the world just as he was sent to the world by the Father. "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."<sup>65</sup> The mission of Christ was to attack the kingdom of hades, the world of disobedience and death, save people from there, and let them enter the kingdom of heaven, the world of obedience and life. Christ handed over the same mission to his church.

After briefly elaborating upon the three-fold ministry of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, Mar Gregorios asserts that the church has the same three-fold ministry. As a priest, Jesus Christ gave himself as a sacrifice to the Father, and he rose again, victor over sin and death. We celebrate this sacrifice and victory in the Eucharist, in which, we get united with Christ, and we sacrifice ourselves to the father.<sup>66</sup> "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>67</sup> Israel was called to serve as a priestly nation in a community of nations— a nation that stands before God on behalf of the community of nations interceding for them. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you

out of darkness into his wonderful light.”<sup>68</sup> Peter reminds the Christian church that it has the same calling to be a priestly nation. Whenever the church stands before God, it does so on behalf of the whole world.

As a priest, Christ turns to God on behalf of the world, and as a prophet, Christ turns to the world on behalf of God. Church continues the same mission of speaking on behalf of God. The protestant churches give this ministry more importance than the others. But we need to remember that only by facing God in silence, we will be empowered to face the world to speak on behalf of God. The prophetic ministry has to happen as a natural outgrowth of the priestly ministry.

As a king, Christ rules and guides his people on behalf of God. Christ preferred to call himself a good shepherd rather than a king. He lays his life for the sheep. It is on his cross that we see the inscription, the king of Jews. Cross is the throne of this king. Church is called to be a good shepherd to the world. Christ lists three qualities of the good shepherd: knows the sheep by name, leads the sheep out to find pasture, and lays his life to protect them.

The church has to care for the people in the world as a shepherd cares for his sheep. “When the church hates any group of people, be they people of other religions or other ideologies, the church loses its credentials as good shepherd.”<sup>69</sup> Like a good shepherd, the church has to “open doors that confine people in oppression, injustice and exploitation, to lead the nations to where they can find the just societies of green pastures and the still waters of peaceful and secure national and international situations.”<sup>70</sup> The church does not hand out peace and justice to the nations. From a relationship of trust, church should be able to lead the nations away from injustice, war, oppression, exploitation, terrorism, and environmental decay. As the sheep move toward freedom and justice, the wolves come. As the church oppose them, the wolves, the oppressive structures of the world, advance on us to tear us apart. If the church takes up a fight with the wolves, it will lose much of its privilege and power. Therefore, most of the time, the church, like a hireling, flees for life, hypocritically leaving it to God to bring justice and peace in the world.

### *Church as Mediator*

This picture of the church having the same mission of Christ needs to be seen in the context of a wider framework which spells out how church is related to the humanity, and how the humanity is related to God and creation.

Mar Gregorios would define church as a human community that performs the role of a mediator between the creator and the creation. Following Gregory of Nyssa, Mar Gregorios thinks that God is all that exists viewed from God's side, but viewed from the side of the creation, God exists apart from the creation. The creator is infinite, but the creation exists within the limits of time and place. "The creation is multiple in form, and the capacity of each form to respond to God varies. Inorganic matter responds less freely than the plants and the trees; the animals are more conscious, and mankind even more than the animals, but the church is more aware of the creator than mankind in general."<sup>71</sup> Being a part of mankind, church is a part of the creation, but the most conscious part. Being the most conscious part of the creation is a position of privilege indeed; it is a position of great responsibility as well. Although the privilege of being aware of God is open to all mankind, only a part of them actually rise to the level of such awareness. Those few people do not feel superior to the rest of the people who do not rise to such awareness. Instead they would humbly serve them, and would represent them before God.

The church has the privilege to be aware of the goodness of God. God's wisdom gives the knowledge of the good, God's freedom chooses the good, and God has the power to perform it, which is expressed as love or as self-giving. This awareness of God's love makes the church respond by similar self-giving love to God. This response takes the form of adoration and unconditional surrender and obedience. As a result, the church becomes the visible image of the invisible God for the rest of the creation. Actually the whole of mankind is called to be the visible image of God; those few who respond become the church. The church does this in union with Christ, and following his lead. Thus the mission of church is nothing but the mission of Christ— uniting with God in unconditional surrender representing the creation, and manifesting God's goodness to the rest of the creation.

The church can perform such a mediator role between the creator and creation only by constantly engaging in self-disciplinary practices and exercises. The mysteries (called sacraments in the west) are effective ways of self-discipline. The Eucharist is the supreme mystery of the church symbolizing church's uniting with Christ. It dramatizes the events in Christ's life, and by taking part in this periodically, the church internalizes Christ at the subconscious level, and becomes one with Christ. Baptism makes one a member of Christ's body. Chrismation or Anointment lets one share the anointment of Christ as king, priest, and prophet. The liturgical year lets the church participate in the saving events in Christ's life.

The living church, performing such a role, will be a community united by love to each other. It will appear as the visible image of God's unconditional love to the world. The members of this community will always be driven by the motivation to serve, and not to be served by others.

### **E. Mar Gregorios' Activism**

The entire world was the field of activity for Mar Gregorios. He worked tirelessly to establish peace in the world— between nations, churches, religions, races, and genders. Mar Gregorios always took a very firm stand on the side of the poor and the suffering, empowering them. He stood on the side of the so-called third-world countries, but he preferred to call them the two-third world, for the value and importance of this part of the world lies in the fact that it has two-third of the world's population.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the world lived in constant fear of an imminent third world war. The uncontrolled increase of population was another major problem before the humanity. Today, in the twenty-first century, we don't live under the fear of a third world war. The population growth is also under control. But many other problems continue to exist. During the cold war, the US, Soviet Union, and other nations amassed nuclear weapons as much as to destroy all life on earth several times over. When the extreme danger intrinsic to nuclear war and the possession of nuclear weapons became apparent to all sides, a series of disarmament and



nonproliferation treaties were agreed upon between the United States, the Soviet Union, and several other states throughout the world. Many of these treaties involved years of negotiations, and seemed to result in important steps toward creating a world free of nuclear weapons. Behind the peace that the world is enjoying today is the influence of organizations like WCC and the dedicated work of numerous humanitarians like Paulos Mar Gregorios.

In 1979 he organized and moderated a global conference of scientists in MIT on behalf of WCC with the theme, Faith, Science, and our Future. He made the scientists aware that they should not use their knowledge and talents to invent weapons to destroy the humanity, but to make discoveries that benefit humankind. In a letter to his friends in 1979,<sup>72</sup> he wrote,

The World Conference on Faith, Science and the Future at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass, U.S.A. (July 11-23) was some sort of an achievement; hundreds of Scientists and a few theologians speaking to each other for two weeks. We asked questions like: What is science? What does it do to human societies? What is its relation to faith? Can the two cooperate instead of fighting? What kind of ethical issues does science raise? What about energy, particularly nuclear energy? Should science be used for human mutual destruction? and so on. We hope the more than 30 papers presented and the fifteen or so documents produced will soon be available for study and discussion in local groups. I was privileged both to be Chairman of the preparatory committee and to moderate the conference itself.

Mar Gregorios always spoke on behalf of the humanity, and took a stand against anything that was against its wellbeing. He was never afraid of the imperial powers. In a letter to his friends in 1979,<sup>73</sup> he speaks about Fidel Castro with great enthusiasm:

The media seem determined to paint the blackest picture of Cuba, but what I saw was different—full of promise and hope, a heroic achievement of a heroic nation. Will I shock you if I state my personal opinion that Fidel Castro's speech in the

U.N. (representing the non-aligned) was more to the point from a Christian perspective than Pope John Paul II's presentation, both of them in October this year? Castro is really a world leader. I admire him and the Cuban people's achievements in eradicating illiteracy, in health distribution, in equalization of income, in eliminating unemployment, in resisting the economic blockade and military attacks from the U.S.A., and in building the foundations of a just economy and an international socialist outlook in the people.

This approach of him gained the disfavor of the WCC. He writes in a letter to his friends in 1992<sup>74</sup>:

I have laid down my responsibilities, such as they were, as a President of the World Council of churches—in Canberra in February 1991. It was not a particularly creative situation for me—WCC leadership was afraid that I was not conforming to their expectations, and of course I had the same worries about the WCC.

Elsewhere he writes the events that led to this final departure from WCC.

In 1983 the Vancouver Assembly had chosen me to be one of its presidents, a desperate move on the part of the WCC establishment to keep me out of power in its policy making and running. A president of the WCC is always a decorative figure, supposed to represent the WCC on unimportant public occasions, a senior figure who generally keeps out of all controversy.... There seemed to be more dirty politics in that Christian body than in most nation-states. I served as president until the Canberra Assembly in 1991, but I was systematically kept out of all important decision making, and was seldom allowed to represent the WCC at any important public function. Whenever I announced that I was going to do something on my own, not as president, the establishment grew fearful and tried to stop or circumvent me. When I announced for example that I was going to Managua for the sixth anniversary of Nicaragua's liberation, they decided to send two more presidents

and additional persons to hedge me. They were afraid I would say something inappropriate in favor of the Sandinistas.

I did in Managua (Nicaragua) what I thought was right. In the first place I went to the place where Foreign Minister d'Escotto was fasting in protest against the American threat of aggression and sanctions. I spent a day with him, fasting in sympathy. I saw President Daniel Ortega, and asked him very politely why the Sandinistas had been so racist and mean in their treatment of the Misquito Indians. I still remember Ortega standing up from his presidential chair and with bowed head saying to me, 'I confess before God and before you that the Sandinistas did wrong. We are doing everything possible to recompense the Misquitos.'

I went to other Central American countries such as El Salvador and the Dominican Republic and visited the people who were being tortured and massacred by powerful pro-US fascist forces. I made a firsthand report on what I saw to the Central Committee meeting in Argentina, and the resolution on Central America was approved without any discussion, partly because of the heavy emotional impact of my report.

I was very grieved that the progressive Latin American Christians, who deplored the oppression in Central America, were not aware of what they themselves had done to the original natives of that continent. Even the so-called liberation theologians are still today unable to establish rapport with the indigenous people whom they have uprooted and decultured."<sup>75</sup>

Mar Gregorios worked tirelessly to bring better agreement among Christian churches around the globe. He organized dialogs between various Christian groups such as Catholics and Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, etc. About the role of WCC, he wrote in a letter:

The WCC promoted better understanding between the Orthodox and the Protestants, helped transform the Roman Catholic Church, and served also as a forum for the Protestants

to act globally. At times it provided such forum for the Orthodox also. Without the WCC, we Orthodox would have been too isolated from each other.<sup>76</sup>

While in the staff of the WCC, Mar Gregorios became aware of the unchristian attitude towards other religions fostered by reformed thinkers such as Barth, Brunner and Kraemer. Mar Gregorios took the initiative to set up a sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Other Faiths in the WCC. Despite the strong inhibitions of a culturally narrow-minded European Christians, they were able to organize several small significant interfaith consultations, which laid down some of the rules and principles for fair and honest interreligious dialogue. They also ventured into the experience of praying meaningfully with people of other religions in the course of these seminars and consultations. This caused a lot of furor in European Christian circles. A German professor, the late Dr. Margull, almost lost his chair in the university, on the charge that he, a Christian, had participated in the prayer services of Muslims. At the Nairobi Assembly of 1974, they invited a select number of observers from the great religions of the world and devoted a whole section of the Assembly to interreligious dialogue, in the hope that along with the environmental issue being highlighted at Nairobi, the issue of cultural pluralism and interreligious dialogue would move from the margins of the WCC agenda to its center. Mar Gregorios was asked to chair that section on dialogue, with the distinguished non-Christian guests present.

Their hopes were soon to be dashed on the hard rocks of European cultural parochialism. In response to the presidential remarks, a Norwegian Lutheran bishop, asked, 'In what sense does the Chairman find the revelation in Jesus Christ so insufficient that he has to go to the non-Christians to learn the truth?' Mar Gregorios responded, 'In this sense that the Chairman is not as fortunate as his friend, the bishop from Norway, who seems to have so mastered the revelation in Jesus Christ, that he is so totally self-satisfied and does not feel any need to learn from others.'

The Assembly decided that the WCC was not to engage in any more multi-religious dialogue, but to stick with bilateral dialogues in which Christians kept the control. Mar Gregorios came to the

conclusion that neither forms of Western Christianity, Roman Catholic and Protestant, were mature enough to engage in dialogue Christians could not control and manipulate.

Once he realized that WCC wouldn't take the initiative of genuine inter-religious dialogs, he began to look for other avenues. In his own words in a letter addressed to his friends in 1992:

I devote more time these days to interreligious work. I am now on the Council for the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago), and was privileged to give the inaugural address at the 1990 opening ceremony in Chicago for the four yearlong centenary celebrations of the first so-called World Parliament of Religions (1893), where Swami Vivekananda made a big splash in the West. 1993 is going to be a big year for interreligious relations special events in more than thirty countries.

I am also Executive President of the Inter Religious Federation for World Peace, as well as Patron of the International Religious Foundation and the Council for the World's Religions. These three are organizations founded and funded by the controversial Revd. Sun Myung Moon of Korea. He is also head of the Unification Church, which claims to continue the unfinished work of Jesus Christ, but is not accepted as a Christian Church by most Christians including myself. Many allegations are made against Mr. Moon and the Moonis as his disciples are called, pejoratively most of these charges have been found to be totally baseless.

He organized an interreligious conference in Rishikesh, India, in 1994, in which people of various religions prayed and meditated together rather than talk to each other on their beliefs. There was not even one speech in that conference. He always respected people of other religions. Saintly people were greatly respected by him regardless of what religion they belonged. He was a close friend of Dalai Lama. He closely associated with Baba Vir Singh, the Sikh Guru.

Mar Gregorios believed that in the new civilization, no one religion or ideology should dominate. In a mono-religious culture there is no

way to keep the clergy from dominating and misusing their powers. The varied religions will learn to create institutions which will promote the better, the more pro-human side of all the religions and regulate the religions from straying into anti-human pursuits and activities. He says:

No religion would be allowed to monopolize the culture of a nation. The dominant religion, whether it be Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or whatever, will have to recognize other religions as equal partners and give them full democratic freedom to function.<sup>77</sup>

Mar Gregorios was active in the field of education. He served as the principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kottayam even when he was in charge of his diocese in New Delhi. He was successful in implementing a common Sunday school curriculum for the Oriental Orthodox Churches. He initiated a theological education for lay people, called *Divyabodhanam*. He also started a liturgical music school along with the seminary. He founded an association for Christian Higher Education in India, and remained its chairperson for a long time.

Toward the eve of his life, he actively promoted holistic healing rather than the dominant western medical system. He argued that the western medical system, which was based on a mechanistic worldview, was incapable of effective healing. He called for a new medical system based on a new view of the world as an evolving, conscious, living being. His views on this topic were put together in a book, *Healing—A Holistic Approach*<sup>78</sup>.

That Paulos Mar Gregorios did not oppose publicly the emergency declared during the reign of Indira Gandhi caused severe criticism. While Dr. M.M. Thomas, his colleague in WCC publicly opposed the emergency, Mar Gregorios didn't. Later in an interview, Joice Thottackad<sup>79</sup> raised this question to Mar Gregorios, and he provided a satisfactory explanation. If he had publicly opposed Mrs. Indira Gandhi, he would have been treated as a member of the group of people he had no respect for, such as Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, and Jayaprakash Narayanan. He did not share the opinion of M.M.

Thomas that all problems in India would be solved by removing Indira Gandhi from power. Although he was not happy about Indira Gandhi's rule, he thought that she was much better than the other possible candidates. Moreover, he had made an agreement with Mrs. Gandhi that he would not criticize her publicly, in return for listening to his advice and suggestions in private. Although Mar Gregorios did not criticize her publicly, he used every opportunity to persuade Mrs. Gandhi to withdraw emergency as quickly as possible.

What follows is some of the fond recollections from a few people who were fortunate to become eye-witnesses of his activism.

“Is it right for the priests to take an active part in the social reform & or support communists? What is your opinion of the Archbishop Romero who was assassinated?”

This is a question asked to Paulos Mar Gregorios by a participant in a student Conference in Kottayam in India in 1980. This is how the bishop answered as reported by the participant:

No servant of Christ is absolved of the responsibility to his fellow man. If you see oppression and injustice, and if you do not openly support those who fight that injustice, then when you are up before the bar of final justice, you will be found guilty as an accomplice to the crime being committed by the perpetrators. This applies to all especially to those who are in His Service, and in Episcopal roles. If we the bishops do not speak out for the liberation of the masses, we are not true bishops. In fact I envy that Arch-bishop. He will have the right to claim from Our Master the title “Good and Faithful Servant”... I would consider it the best gift we (the bishops) can have from Our Lord —the chance to lay down our lives for justice and liberty.<sup>80</sup>

Because of his unconventional way of doing things, Mar Gregorios was often misunderstood as a not-so-spiritual bishop. Here is a comment from Mr. K. Varughese:

In the 70s and 80s, I attended a few gatherings where Gregorios Thirumeni also had addressed. I used to think that thirumeni

was an intellectual giant, but probably not spiritual enough to be a bishop. For example, I still remember vividly my annoyance when I saw the photograph of Thirumeni, in the newspaper, at *Adi Shankara's samadhi*, accepting *prasadam*. I was also annoyed for the newspaper reports of *Thirumeni* resigning from Diocese charge and later on withdrawing the resignation. However, as I began reading whatever books I could get, authored by *thirumeni*, my perception about *thirumeni's* spirituality changed. I read the unfinished autobiography after *thirumeni's* demise, and that was quite an experience. After reading various articles in GSC<sup>81</sup> by different people who were more fortunate to have been associated with *thirumeni*, my perception now is that *thirumeni* was a spiritual giant as well. Yes, in my heart, *thirumeni* is a saint.<sup>82</sup>

Here is an incident from C.G. Pathrose, which shows that Mar Gregorios had the courage to break a commonly accepted practice to uphold human dignity.<sup>83</sup>

We particularly remember an incident in the early eighties when a member of our church committed suicide and His Grace promptly visited the house and consoled the family members. According to the conservative practices of our church, suicide was held to be sacrilege and such cases were to be treated with disdain. However *Thirumeni* held the position that the tendency to commit suicide was a 'disease' and should be considered by the church only that way. Therefore he ensured that there was no difference in the burial service. The body was thus buried in the common cemetery and not in the '*Themmadikuzhi*' where non-communicants were buried.

Mar Gregorios was fully open to other religions. Here is what Kabir Saxsena, a Buddhist scholar says about Mar Gregorios:

I can easily picture Father in ancient Athens, engaged in erudite and joyful dialogue with the great philosophers of the day. Socrates would have been happy to include Father Gregorios among his debating partners at the Academy. And it would have been Father who would have astonished all and sundry



with his breadth of awareness and knowledge, quoting effortlessly from the known thinkers of the day as well as a few that the listeners would never have heard of. Father once gave a talk on Dharmakirti and Dignaga at our Tushita Meditation Centre in Delhi. It was stimulating to say the best. Here was an ostensibly Christian Father, discoursing on the intricacies of Buddhist *Madhyamaka* philosophy with flowing gusto. To think of Father Gregorios is to remember that the world needs many more like him, with the willingness to investigate beyond the confines of their adopted faiths and with a concern to better the lives of their fellow beings. It is for these reasons that I love and admire Father Gregorios and pray that he will stay with us for a longtime to come.<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Mohindar Singh says about the bishop's influence in Russia:

I had the privilege of visiting Moscow as a member of the delegation led by him in 1987. While participating in the Round Table in Moscow, I discovered how much influence the Bishop wielded in the Church hierarchy.<sup>85</sup>

Dr. Mohindar Singh continues about the bishop's openness to other religions:

I would also like to narrate two incidents demonstrating catholicity of his faith. I once accompanied him to the *Gurdwara Bangla Sahib* in New Delhi. While taking him around I told him about the *Gurdwara* and the history connected with it. While coming out there is a tradition that we all take *Prasad* and the holy water. Whenever I take non-Sikh guests with me I explain the significance of the two but do not insist that they partake of the same. What surprised me was the fact that even before I could explain to him about these he had already partaken of the *Prasad* and the holy water like a devout Sikh. A few years later he developed acute back pain. Somebody suggested that he visit *Gobind Sadan* to get the blessings of *Baba Virsa Singh*. The Bishop was quick to visit the place. *Babaji* advised him to start reciting the *Jaap Sahib*. I was surprised to find a few months later the Bishop quoting

verbatim from the *Jaap Sahib* at a function held to release the English translation of the text. This was his sense of devotion and belief in the Universality of faith. Our best homage to this great man of faith would be to work for the ideals and institutions that the Bishop built and nourished.<sup>86</sup>

Raymond Edward Stewart, a co-worker of Mar Gregorios, writes about how active Mar Gregorios was as a peace activist, and how he tried to avoid the Gulf War.

I have observed Paulos Mar Gregorios for twenty years and came to know him personally about eight years ago when I became executive Secretary of the World Peace Council my respect and admiration, for his abilities led me to seek his advice and guidance on matters of global peace whenever I could.

I found him a truly international human being who transcended east-west and north-south, global boundaries and all levels of any society. His mind could reach into the farthest corners of almost any discipline, across boundaries between disciplines, and formulate solutions to problems that ordinary men and women of this world could comprehend and understand. He cared and in caring gave his all, often to the detriment of his own health.

He cared deeply about the reality of daily life for ordinary people and argued their case at all levels of society, in all forums locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. He saw, only too clearly, that the worst of the social problems of today, the gross inequities in society, were the result of fundamentally flawed economic and political, systems that dominate human activity in most countries. He devoted his life to developing new ideas and approaches that would change or minimize the impact of these contradictions on the lives of ordinary people. He took every opportunity to talk his ideas over with a wide cross-section of people, always seeking to add to his vast store of knowledge and to reflect in the development of his ideas the practical experiences of others as they strove for a better life and a better world.

I was often fortunate enough to observe his role at important global events, or major international or regional meetings. He spurned all doctrinaire approaches and sought to find those elements that would build a greater sense of human achievement for the broadest constituency represented, avoiding sectarian selfishness. So deeply rooted in his beliefs, the very essence of human goodness was expressed in his every word and deed.

Of the many occasions I have watched in awe this great man at work, none was more memorable than the time we traveled together in November 1990, on the eve of the so called 'gulf War'. We visited all the leaders and governments or their representatives, of the Arab countries involved. Using his skill and wisdom, based on a vast knowledge and understanding, of the religious, cultural, social and political elements of the region, he crafted a proposal that balanced the needs of all parties to this dispute. The results were welcomed by all, but regrettably events outside the region superseded the implementation of these plans.

It is with some regret that other major world trouble spots could not have benefited from his abilities to find the key elements that would lead to solutions and minimize the suffering of all involved. More efforts must be made to involve the very best of humankind to lead those who have become misguided or lost, in their search for a better life.

The ongoing contribution of Paulos Mar Gregorios, reflected in his writings and work, are a reminder of how precious our most talented human beings are, and a challenge that daily we must strive to emulate all the goodness that is a reflection of this great and wonderful man

The Metropolitan was easily the most respected peace thinker and activist I knew in those days. Peace was a magnificent obsession with him. This subject loomed large in our discussions every time we met...I owe my own peace activism to a large extent to the Metropolitan's influence.<sup>87</sup>

*Rev. Valsan Thambu* admires the catholicity of his vision and the clarity of his thought.

What impressed me most about this great soul was his ability to hold the spiritual and the secular—the Word and the world—in harmony. He had an integrated vision large enough to embrace the whole world in love. Sure enough, he was firmly and deeply rooted in the spirituality of the Orthodox tradition. For that very reason, he was able to rise above the parochial and exemplify a freedom of spirit and generosity of heart that spoke winsomely to people across continents, cultures, classes and creeds. He was like the parabolic mustard seed. He took root in a context and sent his branches truly unto the end of the world. The result was a catholicity of vision, a universality of interests and a versatility of mind that only one word in the English language can do justice to: genius. Believe me, this man was a genius. A true genius!

Clarity of thought and expression was the hallmark of this great man. He was a brilliant communicator. Give him a pedestrian subject or the most complex idea; he will couch them in expressions so transparent that even a child can understand. He was a man of enormous scholarship; but he carried his knowledge light. He never sought to impress; he was keen only to express. He did not hide behind the arras of authority to make up for deficiencies in understanding or apologetics. Instead, he made sure that he explored the argument in depth and expressed it with power and precision. Almost always when I listened to him, I would remember the words from Genesis, “Let there be light”! He proved that simplicity of expression and clarity of thought are the two legs on which profundity walks into human hearts.

Then, he was truly creative! He was a sculptor of ideas. And he thought in depth. Small wonder the West listened to him with respect. He could synthesize the best of the East and the West. He could do that, I suspect, because he was so deeply rooted in the Eastern tradition of spirituality. The mark of a creative mind is its ability to bring out hidden possibilities and

resources. This makes such a person at home in every context, as the Metropolitan was. Give him any subject or context; he would transform it into something beautiful. He could see what most others could not. Yet he could share his insights with us in words that were wholly our own. The Metropolitan was truly a world citizen. Beyond that he was a spiritual statesman.”<sup>88</sup>

Here is an excerpt from a sermon preached by the Rev. Thomas C. Davis, III, at the Hanover Street Presbyterian Church in USA on December 30, 2001 on Mar Gregorios who visited him years before. He refers to him as Grandfather Paul because Mar Gregorios introduced himself as Grandfather Paul to the children of Rev. Thomas Davis.

Oh, the exotic tales he told! Funny thing is, I don't remember even one of them. Don't remember anything he said to presbytery either. I remember only him, feeling immediately attracted to this earthy, impish and yet wise and unfathomable man, but not just in terms of friendship. There was something deeper than that, something soulful. Remember that passage in scripture where Jesus is walking on the beach and he says to the fishermen, James and John, “Follow me!”, and they do? Well, I dig what they must have felt, for I felt it with Grandfather Paul, a mystical attraction, a feeling which I, denizen of a secular society, had never felt before. Grandfather Paul was with us scarcely twenty four hours. And yet, when the time came to put him on a plane for his next stop, I didn't want to let him go. Some mysterious electricity of his had got hold of me. I recalled Mary of Magdalene's clinging to the risen Jesus in the garden, not wanting to let him go, either.”<sup>89</sup>

Dr. Cherian Eapen writes about his experience of watching the bishop in Moscow:

I had the proud privilege for watching him in Moscow, sitting on the moderator's chair of a top secret discussion held between the Nuclear Scientists of both USA and Soviet Union sometime in 1985. It was one of the glorious contributions towards world peace, using his position in the WCC.<sup>90</sup>

Paul Albrecht,<sup>91</sup> the co-worker of Mar Gregorios in the WCC writes about the bishop's stand for justice:

He was not neutral between East and West—he was anti-West: for its racism and for its conservative political-economic influence on world social and economic development. Some mistook his concern for the church in the Soviet Union and his participation in the Prague-based (and Soviet-influenced) Christian Peace Conference as a sign of a pro-communist stance. But he joined the majority of the executive committee in voting for a statement that was sharply critical of the USSR when it invaded Afghanistan in 1980.

Gregorios was made moderator of the working committee on Church and Society and thus leader of the preparations for the world conference on “Faith, Science and the Future”, convened at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1979. With more than 400 official participants and an additional 400 press and invited guests, this was undoubtedly one of the most significant WCC-sponsored encounters of the 1970s, and the metropolitan responded to the challenge brilliantly: as chairman of the conference he captivated the assembled scientists and technologists and the MIT community by his understanding of the social ethical problems in their disciplines. Undoubtedly it was one of his greatest contributions to the life and work of the WCC and to the witness of the ecumenical movement in the contemporary world.<sup>92</sup>

Anne Schandorf, a Danish Physician and a friend of the bishop, expresses her fear that he could have been assassinated like M.L. King.

I have not said much about the fear and anguish I had often felt. Especially his dangerous travels and meetings with controversial figures such as Fidel Castro, Desmond Tutu, many other famous persons. The fear was there, I can say for my part, and I am sure that many friends felt the same sort of worry. The minute Paulos became more famous and influential, also came a new fear: somebody may assassinate him, as

happened to Martin Luther King.

In the Danish Christian Daily I read in 1991 about one of Paulos' speeches at a conference, where he talked about Christian Unity and Peace once again. The Middle East was the topic. 'The situation may call for martyrdom', he remarked at another occasion. It is my opinion that many of those peace measures which have shown to be fruitful in later years, have grown and come into reality due to Paulos' peace missions.<sup>93</sup>

As Dr. Cherian Eapen rightly comments,

Nobody in the world had ever done such an attempt to bring all the Christians together than him. He was disappointed on many occasions, but he was praying and every day working in that direction. Many occasions, his intellectual deliberations were not accepted even by his own Church. He taught the politicians that they should learn from the Enlightenment liberalism, Imperialist pragmatism, and Socialist humanism, while avoiding the down-side of these philosophies.

Anne Schandorf asserts that she often feels the spirit of Mar Gregorios comes around and gives her advice in difficult matters.

It is sometimes as if part of Paulos' spirit comes around — to whisper good ideas. I am trying to say it that way. It can be like a bird passing by. I can also be a bit annoyed with him: he left us too early! Maybe almost everyone who knew him has that feeling off and on.

A big problem in my country is a lot of refugees and "foreigners", coming from Bosnia, Somalia, Pakistan and other Muslim countries. Anyway they are all Muslims, they are crowding everywhere in our area here, totally helpless, it seems. They are on the welfare bill, and the Danish welfare bill is not so bad.

They are also crowding in my clinic. I often feel discouraged and burned out. In these cases, it is a sad feeling for a doctor. Especially the Muslim ladies are very helpless. I went around my secret "telephone" to Paulos.

“What shall I do?”

“They are brothers and sisters,” he said.<sup>94</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios obtained a vision of Jesus Christ through the lens provided by Gregory of Nyssa. This vision helped him to answer the basic questions of human existence. He translated the vision and mission of Jesus Christ to his own time and place, and followed the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

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- 4 such as lecturer in UC College, Bursar of Alwaye Fellowship House, and General secretary of Christian Student Movement
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## **Paulos Mar Gregorios as a Follower of Jesus Christ**

Paulos Mr Gregorios claimed that the mission of the Christian church should be nothing but the mission of Jesus Christ. Here we are making an attempt to see if this bishop practiced what he preached. Was his mission the same as that of Jesus Christ? If Jesus Christ had lived in the same historical context, would he have said and done the same things Mar Gregorios said and did?

Jesus' vision and mission were conditioned by his historical context. If Jesus had lived in the twentieth century world, he would have slightly modified his vision and mission according to the new context. Closely examining the life of a community, Jesus would have diagnosed its illness, and would have traced its root causes to its very foundation— its defective views of life. He would have struggled against the popular views of life that cause ill health, and propose a healthy view of life. The content of his proposal may not be the same for all communities of all time. It will vary from situation to situation just like a doctor's diagnosis and prescription vary from patient to patient.

### **A. The World of Jesus and of Mar Gregorios**

Jesus lived two thousand years ago in the Middle East. He didn't have motor cars or airplanes as we have today. He didn't even use a horse to travel from place to place. Once he rode on a donkey. Other than that his travel was on foot. He didn't have internet or telephone as we have today. He didn't have computers or typewriters, or even paper or books as we have today. Scriptures and other important documents were laboriously copied into scrolls by professional scribes. Reading and writing were specialized skills only a few privileged ones had. So the world of Jesus was limited to walking distance around the city of Jerusalem. He probably walked 50 km to the north, 50 km to the south, about 25 km to the east, and a few km to the west.

The world of Mar Gregorios consisted of the entire Globe with all the human race in the twentieth century. During his lifetime, the means of communication and transport were getting swifter, and the world was gradually becoming a global village. Telephone was very common, and internet was slowly coming to use. This enabled Mar Gregorios reach Moscow from New Delhi much easier and faster than Jesus could reach Jerusalem from Galilee. Thus Mar Gregorios could visit The Soviet Union forty times as he claims in his autobiography. Just as Jesus was concerned about the well-being of his world, Mar Gregorios was concerned about the well-being of his world. Just like Jesus did, Mar Gregorios diagnosed the illness of his world and prescribed his treatment.

Along with faster means of communication and transport, the Twentieth century developed more efficient means to produce food, clothing, and shelter, and more effective ways of healing. Life became far more comfortable and easier in the twentieth century than in the first century. However, the human existential issues of the world of Mar Gregorios hadn't changed much from that of Jesus' world. It was also a world in pain. Evil ruled alike in both worlds, which was primarily expressed in broken relationships. Relationships remained broken at all levels— between God and man, between man and man, and between man and nature. People in general were unwilling to seek forgiveness or to forgive. The people of Jesus' world were made slaves in their own soil by the super power— the Roman Empire. The people of Mar Gregorios' world found themselves in a world in which the super powers were fighting with one another like wild elephants at the cost of millions of human lives. The ones that survived the wars had to suffer severe poverty all around the globe.

Such broken relationships perpetuate injustice and poverty. When some people amass more than what they need, most of the people don't have enough to survive. Unjust structures cause illnesses— physical and mental. A lot of people are born disabled physically as well as mentally, and many more become disabled in one way or other. With the breakdown of man-man relationship, we are unwilling to see the humanity as a family or as one organism. Instead of cooperating, we were annihilating each other. We were building walls

of nationality, race, caste, color, and gender. World military expenditure was skyrocketing in the world of Mar Gregorios. With the breakdown of man-nature relationship, humanity as a whole was facing extermination by global warming, pollution, lack of resources etc. Humanity itself had become an endangered species.

However the greatest threat to human existence in Mar Gregorios' world is a sense of meaninglessness. The primary requirement of human existence is a will to exist. Such a will depends upon how we view our existence. Existence appeared meaningless to the humanity in the world of Mar Gregorios because it seemed to have no purpose. This is so because the humanity relied on a world-view that makes its existence meaningless and purposeless.

In such a miserable situation, we normally expect that the religious and ideological leadership would take some initiative to help the humanity to get out of the miserable condition. But unfortunately, they were not in a position to lead the way because they themselves had gone blind. The poor sheep, discovering the wolves hiding within the disguise of their shepherds, were fleeing for life. Ritualistic rules were treated with much more importance than the ethical rules. Dogmas were blindly trusted instead of openly seeking solutions to the problems of humanity.

Death is natural to a civilization, and the humanity can continue to exist only if it gives birth to a new civilization as the older one dies. In Jesus' world, the old Israel had to give birth to a new Israel. Jesus called it the Kingdom of God, which needed a new birth. Jesus' mission made it possible for a healthy civilization to be born in the place of the dying civilization.

In the twentieth century world, there was a feeling that the then civilization would soon give place to a new civilization. The year 2000 was believed to be the end of an age. Mar Gregorios was never tired of affirming that the contemporary civilization was breathing its last, and a new civilization was on its way. He called it the New Humanity. He was very well aware of the possibility of the contemporary civilization to meet with a catastrophic end like a global warfare similar to what happened in Jesus' world— the destruction of the temple.

## **B. The View of Life of Jesus and of Mar Gregorios**

If Jesus had lived in the world of Mar Gregorios, (let us call it the modern world), he would immediately realize that our civilization is like a building on sand. It can easily be swept away by a hurricane such as a world-wide war that can erupt any moment or a deadly virus that can spread all around the globe in no time. He would also realize that we have two paths ahead of us: a wide highway of short-sightedness seeking comforts and wealth that ultimately leads to destruction, or a narrow path of far-sightedness and responsibility that leads to a healthy existence. He would encourage us to build a new civilization on a strong foundation—a new strong view of life instead of the present shaky one.

No religion or ideology in the modern world would escape the sharp criticism of Jesus. Instead of being good shepherds, they act as hired servants or even as wolves in shepherd's clothing. Most of the religions focus on the ritual rules. Jesus would ask them to move the focus to the ethical rules. He would assert that religion is for man; not man for religion. He would also criticize the religions and ideologies for being dogmatic. They blindly hold on to their beliefs instead of being open to the existential issues.

Paulos Mar Gregorios asserted repeatedly that ours is a dying civilization, and that a new civilization soon needs to replace this one. He also implied that mankind has the choice of the highway of irresponsibility or the narrow path of responsibility. No religion or ideology could escape the sharp criticism of Mar Gregorios.

Jesus would expose the dishonesty of those people who claim to be in custody of the truth. Jesus would argue that God alone knows the ultimate truth. He would make a firm stand against fundamentalism in all its forms. Jesus would agree that we receive knowledge through our senses and that we process information with our power of rationality. But without blindly trusting them, he would realize their limits. He would tell people that the world is much larger and greater than what we can perceive with our senses. He would also remind us that the world is far more than what we can conceptualize. He would advise people that without blindly trusting our senses and our

power of thinking, we need to open up our minds willing to receive knowledge wherever it comes from. We need to be open to the wealth of wisdom we have inherited from our ancestors. He would use metaphorical language and would gently correct the people who interpret his words as well as the scriptures literally just as he corrected his disciples when they took his words literally. He would encourage people to think rather than follow their customs and dogmas blindly. He would tell us how important it is to keep our mind clear and pure in order to use it effectively and appropriately.

Mar Gregorios engaged in a crusade against fundamentalism all his life. He couldn't put up with the claim of having the custody of truth.

Jesus, in his time, did not have to worry much about the this-worldly view, for not many people in his world held such a view. Otherworldliness existed though due to a literal understanding of myths and metaphors. Jesus patiently reminded his listeners to take metaphorical language metaphorically and not literally. Living today, Jesus would reject both other-worldliness and this-worldliness. Jesus would probably tell us that nothing remains invisible to God though a part of the world remains invisible to our senses. It means that there is only one world. We cannot care for the invisible part of the world while ignoring the visible part, for they both belong to the same world. Jesus would use a metaphorical view rather than a literal one.

Jesus would not deny science or its discoveries. But he wouldn't allow science to limit his world to what we can perceive with our senses. Jesus would admit that science can help us live our life more easily and comfortably, but it cannot tell us why we live. It can tell us only about the part of the world we perceive; nothing about the imperceptible part. A poetic worldview completes the scientific worldview telling us how the imperceptible part of the world looks like. A poetic worldview helps us answer the basic questions of existence such as why we live, who we are, and how we are related to one another and to everything else. Humanity has always functioned with a poetic worldview. In the past few centuries, we developed a scientific worldview, which we thought can replace the poetic

worldview. That was a mistake. We need both kind of worldviews, and they need to exist side by side complementing each other.

Living today, Jesus might create a new poetic worldview that complements the modern scientific worldview. Jesus may not teach us the same Lord's Prayer, but the prayer he teaches will be a prayer for the liberation of the humanity. Rising from the very depths of our hearts, it will be a prayer for the wellbeing of all the people on earth. Jesus may teach the same prayer asking us to understand it metaphorically. Thus instead of understanding heaven as a parallel world above the earth, we may see it as another dimension or as the invisible part of the world. We may also see it as an ideal world, as a scale to measure our world.

Mar Gregorios was against other-worldliness and this-worldliness. He believed in the oneness of all that exists. Here is a part of a prayer he taught:

We need wisdom to know how to order our lives as a world community. We need wisdom to know what are the values worth living for, so that we do not lose our souls in the mad pursuit of a foolish affluence. We need wisdom to know how to achieve the training of the masses of men and women for seeking their own liberation and for building the right kinds of societies.

— Grant us wisdom, Lord!

We need power, power to withstand the unjust oppressors, terrorists, power to resist the blandishments and seductions of power itself. We need power to imagine and to create. We need power to see visions and to pursue the truth. We need power to build a world of peace with justice. We need power to hope, to struggle and to strive. We need power to create what is good and joyous, peaceful and just.

— Grant us the right kind of power, Lord!

And most difficult of all, we need power to love! We need to know your love, so that in that love alone we seek our security. We need to know your love, in order that we may not be afraid to love. We need to love, for love is the sign of your



presence, and without love neither peace nor justice is worth very much.

— Teach us both to know your love, and to be unafraid to love, Lord! <sup>1</sup>

Most of those who have denied an invisible world have also denied God. Without a God above, man has assumed the place of God, which has led to an irresponsible management of the world, and we are suffering its consequences. Jesus would gently remind us that we cannot blindly trust our senses or our rational power to deny whatever exists beyond our senses and our rationality. He would also tell us that only someone with a pure heart can see God. God's existence was primary for Mar Gregorios. Although he cooperated with Marxists and Buddhists, his faith in God remained unchanged.

Jesus living in our time might still speak metaphorically of God as father to all people and as the king of the world. However, he wouldn't take it literally to mean that God is a part of the world as a king is a part of the kingdom. Jesus would rather say that the world exists within God. God is self-dependent, whereas, the world depends on God for its existence. The world has no existence apart from God.

Some people today believe that human nature is basically good, but some others believe that human nature is basically evil. Jesus would tell us that both of these beliefs are unrealistic. Man stands in between good and evil all the time with the freedom to choose either good or evil. Mar Gregorios could not join Augustine to affirm that man is basically evil, nor could he join Pelagius to affirm that man is basically good. He asserted that man stands in between good and evil with the freedom to choose either.

The issues in human existence in Jesus' world were regarding God-man relationship and man-man relationship. A defective understanding of God-man relationship that God loves and blesses only the good people led to a defective understanding of man-man relationship that the poor and the sick were inferior to the others. These issues continue to exist in our world today. If we classify people into good and bad, and if we believe that good people are blessed and bad people are cursed, we need to listen to what Jesus wants to tell

us today. Jesus would tell us that all people on the face of the earth belong to the same category. God alone is righteous, and all people are unrighteous. In spite of us being unrighteous, God loves all people alike unconditionally. Such a view will help us to see all people in the world alike without any discrimination. It will also help us to approach our existential problems such as poverty and ill-health realistically.

Mammon is the primary god of our world. People live for money, and money drives the world. People are primarily classified into classes based on the wealth they own. Jesus would advise us to dethrone mammon, and to stop classifying people based on the amount of money in their possession. Jesus would strive to bring the poor, the sick, and the disabled to the mainstream society. These relationships were of supreme concerns for Mar Gregorios. He devoted his life to mend these broken relationships.

### **C. The Activism of Jesus and of Mar Gregorios**

If Jesus lived among us today, he might compare our civilization to a building built on sand. He would point out why its foundation is as weak as sand. It does not have the strength to withstand a global catastrophe. Instead of warning against the views of scribes and Pharisees, he would warn against the views of secularists and fundamentalists. He would also point out how a new civilization can be built up with a strong foundation of rock. However, it is doubtful if he would call it the Kingdom of God, for kings and kingdoms have almost disappeared from our world. He might call it the world of God or the family of God or some other similar name which we can easily relate to.

If Jesus Proclaimed the Kingdom of God, Mar Gregorios proclaimed a new civilization well-grounded in God. Jesus claimed that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are born again; Mar Gregorios claimed that the new civilization belongs to the new humanity. Jesus explained clearly how the existing kingdom of Satan was standing on a foundation of sand; Mar Gregorios explained clearly the weakness of the foundation of the present western civilization. Jesus explained the characteristics of the foundation of rock on which the kingdom of God was built; Mar Gregorios explained the characteristics of the strong foundation of the new civilization.

We read in the gospels that Jesus spent forty days in the desert in solitude. Mar Gregorios always had a passion to be in a monastic setting, but he couldn't realize his dream as he hoped for. After coming back from Geneva, and after taking over the principalship of the Theological seminary in Kottayam, India, he wrote a letter to his friends in 1969, expressing his hope to live a monastic life of prayer, solitude and contemplation. He wrote:

I am not world-weary, but I do want to get away from it all. The world is complex but I think I can manage to live in it without being completely thrown over. But if I want to live in it with perspective I need to withdraw for a while to a disciplined community of solitude, reflection and prayer. I see quite clearly that overcoming self is the greatest victory a man can win. I also see that I myself am not making much progress there; neither do most of the people I see around me in the world. The toughness of a disciplined and strong human will is the ingredient without which there cannot be any real salvation for society or individual, and that will can be shaped best in a modern monastic community.<sup>2</sup>

Traveling around his world (Palestine), and teaching people about the Kingdom of God was the most important thing that Jesus did; traveling around his world (the globe) and teaching about the new civilization was the most important thing that Mar Gregorios did. In a letter he wrote in 1975 to his friends after he was consecrated as a bishop, he lists the places he was planning to go that year.<sup>3</sup>

February - Singapore,  
 March - Crete,  
 April - Geneva, Sofia & Budapest,  
 July - U.S.A. and Canada,  
 August - Mexico City,  
 September - Malaysia & Italy,  
 November - December - Kenya, Africa

In a letter to his friends written in 1979<sup>4</sup>, he wrote:

This year, i.e., in 1979, I made four visits to the U.S.A.— in January, March, July and October, three to the Caribbean

(Jamaica, Cuba), five or six visits to Europe: in February (Holland), March (Finland, USSR), April (UK, Germany), June (USSR), August (Germany, Austria), September (Rome, Geneva), October (Germany) one visit to Africa (May), another to Outer Mongolia (June). This means that during the first ten months of the year there was no month when I was not outside India for part of the time.

In a letter written in 1986<sup>5</sup>, he wrote,

This year I have been to China, the Philippines, the Soviet Union (twice), Poland, Ethiopia, Austria, Zaire, U.A.E, Hong Kong, Bulgaria etc. I still have three more trips abroad planned for this year and will, God willing, visit Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Iceland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Canada and U.S.A.

Just as Jesus was known as a friend of the sinners and tax-collectors, Mar Gregorios was known as a friend of the communists and other such Godless people. Jesus had to face trials and temptations from evil forces, and finally they managed to crucify him; Mar Gregorios, being a peace activist who always stood with the oppressed, risked martyrdom. His close friends lived in such fear. People often encouraged and even forced Jesus to become their king; Mar Gregorios was encouraged and even forced by Haile Selassie, the emperor of Ethiopia, to marry his niece, and become a member of his royal family.

Based on such close relationship between Jesus and Mar Gregorios, one may even be tempted to claim that if Jesus had lived in our world, he would have said and done almost the same kind of things Mar Gregorios said and did.

## **Conclusion**

The Christian church is supposed to be a visible representation of the invisible Christ. The church has to do in a certain context exactly what Christ would do in that context. Paulos Mar Gregorios knew this well enough, so that he could practice it in his own life. He spoke like Christ and lived like Christ in his context. The similarity even

tempts one to claim that Mar Gregorios was a second coming of Christ. Actually this claim should be made about every Christian, about every local church, and about the Christian church as whole.

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- 1 Work of Mar Gregorios\English Articles\Worship, Liturgy, Prayer\litanyforpeace.html
- 2 Letters/letter-69-friends.htm
- 3 Letters/letter-75-friends.htm
- 4 Letters/letter-79-friends.htm
- 5 Letters/letter-86-friends.htm

## 6

# Conclusion

Christianity seems to have at least one fourth of the world's population in its fold; however, it does not have a leadership role in the world any more. The other traditional religions like Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism don't have any leadership role either. The western liberalism, with its utilitarian and secular philosophical outlook and its market economy, is in the forefront. Liberalism evolved in revolt against the conservatism and the religious oppression of the traditional western Christianity, and it has done well in taking over the leadership role of the humanity from an oppressive religion. However, its roots are not deep enough to stand firm and hold the humanity against the various challenges it faces. The foundation it provides to humanity is not one of rock, but of sand. Perceptive minds realize that this situation is similar to that of the blind leading the blind.

The present dominant civilization, the western civilization, as Toynbee calls it, is in its deathbed, but a new civilization is not born yet. The traditional religions and western Liberalism are presenting themselves as the candidates for the new civilization. Each religion/ideology hopes to dominate and lead the humanity forward. However, they are often too reluctant to modify their poetic worldviews according to the changing scientific worldviews. As a result they cannot effectively communicate with the present generation. Their maintaining a tension between their poetic worldviews and the prevailing scientific worldviews pulls the humanity backward instead of leading them forward.

The need of the time is a new movement that transcends the barriers that divide people, unite them, and lead them forward. The movement initiated by Jesus Christ can be adopted as a model. Although the Christian movement originated as a reform movement within Judaism, it evolved as a great human cultural movement that transcends the barriers and differences of race, color, gender, class, and religion. Paul declared, "In Christ Jesus, there is no Jew and Gentile, no male and female, no master and slave".

We need a new political structure in which all people on the face of the earth live together in peace and harmony supporting one another. We need a new economic structure in which people will enjoy having everything in common. People will have freedom to hold their own poetic worldviews and religious practices as long as they do not hinder the common wellbeing.

Paulos Mar Gregorios had a very clear vision of such a new humanity building up a new civilization. He had Jesus Christ as his role model. Jesus initiated such a new humanity and a new civilization in his time. The vision and mission of Jesus Christ became clear to him through the fourth century Philosopher-saint, Gregory of Nyssa. Not only had Mar Gregorios this vision of a new humanity, he also applied it effectively in his world.

This study is a call to the Christian world to accept the vision and mission of Paulos Mar Gregorios as a challenge. The Christians, as individuals and as churches, need to become truly Christian rather than remain nominal Christians. They need to see how Mar Gregorios followed Jesus Christ in the modern times, so that they may follow his example.

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