

# **SALVATION--PRESENT, FUTURE AND ITS LINK TO CONVERSION, BAPTISM, AND PARTICIPATION IN THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Edinburgh Conference of 1910 was a landmark in Mission History, as it had opened up new possibilities in the understanding of mission and approaches to mission. At its centenary celebration it is proper that we focus on the theme of salvation as evangelization since salvation was a central concern of the Edinburgh conference. “The evangelization of the world in this generation” was both the theme and purpose of the Edinburgh Conference.”<sup>1</sup>

The title of this paper seems to suggest that the four words salvation, conversion, baptism and membership in a worshipping community are arranged in a descending order of importance. Hence, we shall also spend more time on the first and the others proportionately. In this paper, I propose to look at salvation in our present day world full of conflicts of one type or another. Many parts of the world are experiencing various forms of severe conflicts based on religion, culture, ethnicity, terrorism, and the like. Hundreds of people lose their life, many become refugees and people live in constant fear. My assumption is that for Jesus Salvation was not a Matter of ‘saving souls,’ as it came to be understood during later centuries, but something that happens on this earth, as is also suggested in the “Our Father: Your kingdom come, your will be done *on earth* as in heaven.”

The prevalent Fall-Redemption theology cannot contribute to our present theme, as that itself is based on a misinterpretation of the Christ event. After seeing why the murder of Jesus was misinterpreted we shall interpret it in the light of the picture of God that Jesus gave and his own life as the basis for our reflection on salvation for our times, especially in the context of nations and peoples in conflict.

The early followers of Jesus could not understand Jesus’ crucifixion, as it was inconceivable that God would curse such a godly man (see Deut. 21:23). Hence, they interpreted the murder of Jesus in salvific terms as a sacrifice. We must emphasize the fact that Jesus was murdered as the direct consequence of his life: his attitude to the law, his table fellowship, his preferences, priorities, and the image of God he presented – all these were a threat to the established religious systems. Like the Father, he opposed sin, injustice, everything that dehumanized humans in any form and supported life in every way. Jesus opposed the legalism, ritualism and heartlessness of the Pharisees and the rich. His cleansing of the temple and the prediction of its destruction also suggest a new way of relating to God, beyond the sacrificial system of the OT. If God loves and welcomes sinners unconditionally, if Jesus puts proper brotherly/sisterly relation above any religious act, if meeting the needs of the needy gains one salvation (Lk. 15:1-32; 10:25-37; 17:11-19; 19:1-10; Mat. 5:23; 25:31ff) then the exact observance of the law, the sacrificial system – all these lost their importance in God’s scheme of things. Hence, Jesus was a threat to those who lived by these. Besides, the last triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Lk. 19:35ff) proclaiming him the “King of the Jews’ alone would have been enough for the Romans to hang him – and that is exactly what they

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<sup>1</sup> Roger E. Hedlund and Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj (eds.) *Missiology for the 21st Century* (Delhi: ISPCK/MIIS, 2004), 129.

did.<sup>2</sup> As the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy, they could have stoned him on their own. They did not stone him, but let the Romans crucify him, which was for political rebels; the inscription on the cross proves this. The fact that Jesus was murdered is often overlooked because we are accustomed to “He died for our sins,” forgetting that his brutal murder was interpreted as atonement for our sins. Then with the Letter to the Hebrews, which interpreted the whole Christ event in OT terms, the sacrificial interpretation prevailed.

Hence, we have to affirm that the sacrificial interpretation of the death of Jesus, culminating in Anselm’s theory of vicarious satisfaction offered to an offended God, is an aberration from the truth of the NT and the God of Jesus Christ. In other words, we have to move away from a Fall-Redemption theology.

## **SALVATION PRESENT AND FUTURE**

### **A Re-Interpretation of the Christ Event**

Jesus in his inaugural mission manifesto did not say that he had come to die for the sins of people, or to make a sacrifice of himself to God. The image of God that Jesus gave (by his life and teachings) forces us to reinterpret the paschal mystery. Jesus gave the parables of the lost coin, lost sheep and lost son (Lk. 15) to defend himself against the Pharisees who attacked him for his “Table fellowship.” Besides these parables, there are many stories in the NT, which reveal the person of Jesus and thus the Father. For example, Jesus’ attitude to the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:1-11), the woman who washes his feet with her tears, the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the stories of Zacchaeus, the Good Samaritan and the Samaritan woman (Lk. 7:36-50, 18:9-14, 19:1-10, 10:25ff, Jn. 4:4-26) and many others. The following passages too show the same attitude of unconditional love: Mat. 20:1-16, 2 Tim. 2:13, Jn. 18:25ff and 21:15ff.<sup>3</sup> We must take seriously Jesus’ attitude to sinners and the marginalised in order to understand the reality of God as Jesus reveals the Father (Jn. 5:19; 8:29; 12:50; 14:9).

We must interpret the Paschal mystery in the light of the above picture of God. This affirms that God loves us and we are God’s friends not because Jesus dies for us, but it is because God loves us sinners that God sends God’s Son (Jn. 3:16) that he may show us the way back to the Father. Paul has clear statements about the Father as the source of salvation. “Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things...” (Col. 1:20; see 2 Cor. 5:18-19). “Adam Christology” is another interpretation of the Christ event; there Paul contrasts the two Adams: the one who disobeyed and brought in sin and death and the other

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<sup>2</sup> The New Testament seems to blame the Jews for the killing of Jesus. The passion accounts in the Gospels and the speeches of Peter and Paul in the Acts are meant to be a school of life for Christians, especially in times of persecution, and to invite the Jews to repentance – hence they spoke of their ancestors killing Jesus, though this has unfortunately led to the anti-Semitism that has been alive down through the centuries. These texts were not giving an accurate history of the murder of Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> We must add, though, that the idea of God’s justice is often misunderstood in opposition to God’s love; whereas God’s love is God’s justice, God’s justice is God’s love. God’s love/justice is meeting the needs of the needy: the sinner needs forgiveness and the chance to start afresh, the sick needs healing, the broken needs to be put together, the hopeless needs to be given hope, a chance to live for something greater. That is what Jesus does with the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the tax collector Matthew, the fishermen like Peter, Zealots like John, and the woman caught in adultery.

by his obedience brought an end to sin and brought life (cf. Rom. 5:12ff; see also: Rom. 8:3, Gal. 4:4, Phil 2:6-11, 2 Cor. 8:9).<sup>4</sup>

In Jesus, the meaning of salvation is realised. God's child lives the way God wanted from humankind from the very beginning: in loving obedience and thus comes to share the fullness of life with God. The Father's plan for humankind came to fulfillment and humanity reached its destiny in Jesus: loving obedience to God and loving relation to the whole of creation. Jesus is the reality of our salvation, God's saving plan enshrined in creation from its first moment has come to fulfillment and realization. Jesus never allowed sin to have power over him; even on the cross, he loved all, including his enemies. In that sense, he overcame sin. In him, humanity has realized its response-ability and has made the proper response to God's love, has "returned" to the Father. In him, God's love became truly operative. Jesus shows the way for every child of God to live: the way of obedient love and service of fellow humans; in the face of hatred, opposition, evil done to us, we love and we forgive, as the Father does with all God's children (Mat. 5:43ff), and we give life and bring wholeness. Hence, John's description of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life is very important. Jesus' life and death show that human self-fulfillment is not in dominating, in having power over others, in possessing wealth and high positions, but in self-gift, in being for others in service. In and through Jesus God reveals to us that "God is love" and that we are to "love as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12).

### **The Jewish Idea of Salvation**

The Jewish idea of salvation is very much linked to their socio-political-economic situation and based on Yahweh's promise of a land following with milk and honey, which eventually came to be called "shalom," meaning wholeness: harmony between people among themselves and people and nature, people and God and freedom from foreign rule. The reality was very different: wars, poverty, and conflicts. The promise of a Messiah who would lead them to the promised "shalom," national liberation and prosperity (Is. 11:1-10) arises from this tension between the promise and the reality. What Isaiah had foreseen, namely harmony between humans, animals and nature (Is. 11:1-10, 65:17ff) is an important insight valid even today, as it refers clearly to the dimension of ecological wholeness, elimination of inequality, corruption, socially harmful behaviour and justice among people. After the resurrection of Jesus, people saw him as the promised Messiah; but since he had not established the hoped for "Kingdom" - shalom, they spoke of his coming back soon to establish it. Since a national salvation did not take place at all, the idea of a spiritual salvation, of saving souls for an after life would eventually emerge and the Church's idea of salvation is this later development.

### **Jesus' Idea of Salvation**

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the Bible many insist that it was God's will that Jesus be crucified (Lk. 24:46). The Jews interpreted every event in history as willed by God, for nothing could happen apart from God's plan and will – be it the falling of the rains or the rising of the sun. What the Father directly wanted was the loving obedience of the Son. His murder was the consequence of this obedient life. If we insist that it was the Father's will that Jesus be crucified, then we are admitting that the *Father wanted a heinous crime to be committed*, and that he would be pleased with it – God's innocent Son being brutally murdered does not please the Father but the fact that in spite of suffering and death, he obeyed and loved to the end. "God did not will the unjust murder..." (Fallon, M. *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*) for God cannot will injustice. The murder of Jesus was clearly a crime.

Jesus' own idea of salvation enlightens our present theme. Jesus moved away from the OT understanding of salvation as a political, national liberation from foreign rulers; his emphasis was on proper relationship in society and concern for the needy. The story of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) shows that instead of living for himself and making wealth unjustly he opened his heart and purse to the needy, he decided to be just in his dealings with people - then Jesus said that he was saved. Similarly, Jesus said that when people cared for the hungry, homeless and lonely they were saved (Mat. 25:31ff). They had not performed any specifically religious acts. In both cases, nothing is said about forgiveness of sins, religious affiliation and belief in God. Jesus mentions no other condition.

For Jesus, salvation did not seem to be a matter of saving our souls for an afterlife<sup>5</sup> or something we "get" from God through religions and their practices, but a matter of proper relationships, and what we become through our loving, our caring for the needy brothers and sisters, in response to God's love in our hearts, and bearing fruit. Jesus did not call people primarily to a "religion" so much as to a new pattern of relationship in community and a new outlook on everything. Salvation was not a matter of any change brought about in God but a change in human relationship and our readiness to respond to the needs of the needy. Salvation is linked to humans in need and to the human community, to building up communities of love, justice and freedom, which Christians call the Kingdom of God. This implies that people actualize their love-ability in interpersonal relationship, in the formation of structures that help personal and communal conversion to freedom, love, justice, to a new social order where all can live dignified and worthy human lives in harmony with one another and where one respects human rights. Religions can help mediate such proper relationship, but in this aspect, no religion can claim to be the only one or even better than others. Unfortunately, of late people use religions to justify terrorism, fundamentalism, and inimical attitude towards others.

Jesus' own life shows the meaning of salvation. Thanks to the Father's love, he was a free, loving and caring person and was always for others. He was opposed to sin and whatever dehumanized people. John chapter fifteen also gives us a picture of salvation as Jesus envisaged it, namely, bearing fruit and being authentic. The root is the Father, the stem is the Son and the sap is the Spirit, and these are the intrinsic, innermost reality of ourselves who are capable of bearing fruit, of manifesting the type of tree whose branches we are: divine reality. When we do bear fruit, it is thanks to the type of tree we are, the type of life that flows within us; but since we are free (unlike a tree) if we do not bear fruit, it is because the world and its outlook condition us. This affirms clearly that salvation is a gift of God (Rom. 3:21ff; 11:5-6; Eph. 3:21ff): the actualisation of our power of love is dependent on God's continual self-gift to us and therefore is a gift, which is no less, our task. For, while the source continues to be God, and its actualisation is thanks to its own inner power, yet when I do/do not love, it is I who love or refuse to love. When we truly love<sup>6</sup> we are actualizing that God-given power, we are making it operative. We may say that it is in Jesus that we see this love-ability fully lived out. He loved all, even when he opposed their actions (Jn. 8:11, Lk. 7:35ff). His table-fellowship with the outcastes of society is the manifestation of the unlimited love-ability that we all possess, or rather, that we are. On the cross, Jesus revealed this love to the end.

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<sup>5</sup> Some times Jesus uses such expressions, as he is speaking to people brought up on the OT mentality.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Mattam, *The Religious Life within a Christian Vision of Reality* (Anand: GSP, 2007), 112-130.

## What Is Salvation Today in Our Present World of Conflict?

In situations of conflict, salvation is reconciliation between peoples.<sup>7</sup> First of all we must recognize the causes of the present, unjust human situation which is coming from the “outlook of the world” of equating a person with his/her group, possessions, positions, actions, appearances, etc, a system that leads to competition, ambition, greed, hatred, opposition and fear – eventually to conflicts and wars. Often conflicts arise due to greed and injustice, each side holding on to its own opinion as the only right one and the other as wrong. What is it that ultimately happens in reconciliation between two persons or two groups? The basic truth behind the process is that each understands the other from the other’s point of view. One needs to look at what the other is looking at, i.e., understand the other as s/he understands self when s/he does something. How does each one understand his/her behaviour? We know from our own experience that when we do something, we have a justifiable reason for doing it, and so, we see ourselves as blameless, even if the action is wrong. My contention is that we do not act primarily and intentionally against another just for the sake of being against the other or just for doing harm to the other. I do not say that for all actions one has an explicit justification. In merely thoughtless, instinctual and impulsive actions and mob behaviour, one does not have an explicit justification before acting. However if confronted one defends one’s action as justifiable, as was clear in the American attack on Iraq, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and the like (Actions of psychologically abnormal persons are a class by themselves).

Being unaware of the unconscious motives, we claim that what we do is right and we are not to be blamed. This happens not only in individual, interpersonal situations, but also in general. I do not say that because the doer has a justifiable reason, the action is right and good; the action can be quite wrong, as in the above examples. Here I am not talking about the morality of the action, but about our approach to bring about reconciliation between people, the way we need to look at one another if we want reconciliation. That means a person is not equated with what s/he does, as our normal interactions imply, but we see the person as good, even when his/her action is wrong and is opposed ( Cf. Jn. 8:11).

Such an attitude of understanding the other is what leads to true forgiveness without which there cannot be true reconciliation. Forgiveness is to understand the other as s/he understands self. To forgive is not to allow the action of the other to affect my relation to him/her and my attitude to the person remains unchanged, even when I oppose his/her action and demand reparation for the material harm done. When we have something to “forgive,” it is because we have misjudged the other. If there were no misjudgment, there would be nothing to forgive. Though what I have said above is applicable primarily to interpersonal relationships, the approach is valid also for groups. Hence, salvation for societies in conflict is reconciliation and forgiveness.

Following Jesus’ “wall-breaking” ministry, our task is to create communities of people who are committed to the cause of human well-being – their own and of others. This is not based on religions, but on human needs and the challenges that people face in their lives. There are various forms of divisions among people: cultural, religious, linguistic, regional and others. Our mission as agents of God’s work is to help break down all walls of

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<sup>7</sup> J. Mattam, “Reconciliation and Mission” in *Building Solidarity*, eds. J. Mattam, and J. Valiamangalam (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 48-62.

separation, selfishness, hatred, and unite people around human concerns, to empower them to better their living conditions, to be able to oppose exploitation, oppose forces that create disunity and discord among people, and eventually form communities of love, caring, sharing and justice. For Jesus people are primary in the plan of God, not religions, so it should be for us.

Jesus saw the coming of the Kingdom (salvation) in the overthrow of Satan. Today it will not be enough to go chasing imaginary Satan, as the Charismatic groups do, but we will have to see Satan as our greed, lust, hatred, fear of one another, poor self-image, religious fundamentalism, consumerism, communalism and the human-made socio-political, cultural and religious structures that impoverish, enslave and destroy people, and forces that divide and disunite. Hence, salvation today implies that we free ourselves from these and become loving persons engaged in building up communities of love. That means, in our present sinful world, opposing injustice, working for justice and the defense of human rights and harmony among people of various castes, genders, religions and cultures. Salvation is having the proper relationship to God as to our loving Father/Mother, to one another as brothers/sisters, and to the earth as not something to be hoarded or to be exploited for self but, with concern for its integrity, to be shared with all God's children. It is our task to identify the forces that work against unity, that cause division based on religion, culture and the like. These forces, subtle and often hidden, have to be exposed, opposed and overcome – only then are people able to form communities of love. For, as we saw above, Jesus proclaimed salvation in terms of a changed pattern of relationship and the Kingdom of God, which is freedom, love and justice. For this we work for unity among people, we empower them to free themselves from greed, hatred, fear, so that they become genuinely loving persons, concerned about one another and the whole – thus people who are just. This is not a task that can be finished in a day – it is a life long process of transformation of hearts and structures. This is also the meaning of repentance to which we have to invite people.

Another aspect of salvation in conflict-ridden societies is collaboration among all people who are committed to similar goals. In India, what we notice over the years is that in spite of the growing threat of religious fundamentalism and intolerance, there are secular minded people who are concerned about human well-being and are ready to work for human solidarity. Dialogue and collaboration with others take on an importance that perhaps in the past were not perceived as important. We have to recognize that we are not the only people who are concerned about human wholeness and human communities of love and sharing. Finding out such people and joining hands with them is an integral part of our mission today.

Jesus' concept of salvation was not about placating an angry God, or about religion or starting a club of the "saved," or saving our soul for an after life but about making people different, making them aware of being brothers and sisters, children of the One Father/Mother, living a new pattern of relationship on earth in freedom, love and justice. So today our commitment to salvation should continue to follow Jesus' pattern and make every effort to go beyond religious fundamentalism of any type, beyond any exclusive claims to salvation or to the knowledge of God who continues to be a mystery even for us Christians.

Therefore, salvation in today's conflict ridden world is to have the proper relationship, not based on greed and selfishness, on ethnic and regional affiliation, but on justice and genuine concern for one another. Our mission, in the service of salvation, is to enable people to come to proper relationship, is to work for reconciliation among people; to ensure that

Justice is done to the wronged party; each side is helped to understand the other side. The importance of reconciliation cannot be over emphasized. Salvation is breaking down all types of walls that separate and disunite: the rich-poor divide, the North-South divide, the Christian-non Christian divide, the insiders-outsiders divide and the like. Justice is one of the basic principles on which we found our work for and announce salvation.

Salvation, in countries like the caste-ridden India, tribalism-ruled Africa, is to help people to recognize the God given dignity they have as persons, so that they need not be enslaved by the worldly outlook of equating a person with what he/she has, does and the group one belongs to, a system which leads to competition, hatred and fear. The church itself needs to learn this new outlook. This recognition enables a person to truly love and live a graceful life. We have yet to return to the simplicity with which Jesus proclaimed and carried out his mission and invite, inspire and enable people to discover their own true worth as persons to actualize their God-given power of love and thus become graceful people, helping to build up societies of love, freedom and justice. The respect for human rights, the rights of the least in society, be they women, children, bonded labourers, refugees, etc. is an integral dimension of salvation in societies in conflict.

This can happen only when people discover their own identity. This is necessary especially in communities where people have been considered the so-called, “low caste,” “untouchable” and “impure.” Becoming a Christian does not automatically confer this awareness on people – this awareness has to be cultivated. The faith that Jesus spoke of, the faith that can move mountains, is precisely this new outlook on self, others and events. One who does not see oneself as dignified and precious will not see others in that way. Hence, one of the primary aspects of salvation is to awaken in people this sense of worth, so that they can live full human lives.

The fact that Jesus was murdered because of his commitment takes on a great importance in societies facing conflicts. The seed has to die in order to be a source of life, new life. In today’s Third World Countries, especially in societies facing conflicts, one has to expect opposition to our work. For just as Jesus’ work upset the powerful class, our work with the powerless in empowering them, and in opposing divisive forces, is going to be opposed by the mighty of our land. These days we are experiencing precisely this in the attacks on Christians in Orissa, Karnataka. Those who have benefited from education and other resources of the country will oppose any action leading to their losing their privileges. The murder of Jesus keeps reminding us that we may expect a similar fate, if we carry on his work for the victims of society.

This description of salvation goes beyond what Edinburgh or the Catholic Church at that time believed; now all have moved away from the conception of that time. The above is what should happen on earth; after our death what we become is in the hands of God, just as our beginnings are in God; all we can do, as Jesus suggests, is to care for the hungry and other needy people and build societies of love. I am not suggesting that what happens on earth is the final thing or there is nothing beyond it, but I do not know what it would be and so we leave it to God and be busy with what we can do here on earth. One may question if the above is the Catholic position. Catholics in general believe in “heaven” and “hell,” the eschatological; however, today more and more people lay emphasis on the present, this worldly elements, without explicitly denying the eschatological.

Now we shall focus on the other parts of the title: conversion, baptism and participation in the sacramental life of the church.

## **CONVERSION**

What this term seems to imply is whether such a work for salvation necessarily leads to conversion, baptism and joining a Church? We may look at these words and see that what these words imply is found in salvation, but perhaps not necessarily a sacramental participation.

Edinburgh had taken “conversion as a central theme”<sup>8</sup> It argued that “It is possible today as never before to have a campaign adequate to carry the Gospel to all the non-Christian world *so far as the Christian Church is concerned*”<sup>9</sup> Conversion is not primarily a matter of change of religions (Lk 24.47; Acts 2.38) or acceptance of a new religion. In the bible, conversion is more fundamental than change of religion. Repentance and belief in the good news are the same.<sup>10</sup> Belief in the good news, in the unconditional love of God is the root of the movement of freedom from self and bondage to fellowship, justice and love – the kingdom. The conversion is not a purely individual affair; it has to have its social effect. Conversion implies a move from agreeing to differentiating wealth and its systems; from individualism in religion and society to corporate existence; from spiritual and economic selfishness to the truth of the community and of the world which God loves; from rigid doctrines of private property and privatization of life to Trinitarian communion; from ritual preoccupation to pursuit of justice, from law to grace, from sacrifice to mercy. The Lima text talks of “new ethical orientations” and so points to the social dimension. “Turning from idols and from selfishness to the living God, to Jesus Christ and to his people must become embodied in the believing community and socially expressed in a new life style” (no. 15).

Conversion is the rejection of Satan: It means the rejection of greed, domination, lust for power, for pleasure, consumerism, racism, casteism, hatred, fear, poor self image, the values opposed to the Gospel of brotherhood and sharing, and rejection of the power structure that keeps millions enslaved and impoverished. This is very important today; the more we accept and enhance the value system of the world, the less we remain prophetic.

Such a conversion may lead to baptism and entrance into a Church. The meaning of conversion is linked to the meaning of baptism; hence, what follows will further enlighten us on the meaning of conversion as well.

## **SHARE IN THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

Does conversion necessarily lead to baptism and sharing in the sacramental life of the Church? Edinburgh had understood mission should result in “conversion to Christ and His Church”<sup>11</sup> But today is “conversion to Christ and His Church” so absolute? I would argue that it is not; however, we welcome anyone who wants to become part of the witnessing community to carry on the mission of Jesus. We notice that in the early church when people were baptised into the name of Jesus they did not change their religion; they

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<sup>8</sup> Sebastian Kim, in Hedlund, *Missiology for*, 547.

<sup>9</sup> *World Missionary Conference 1910*, 1,10 (emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> For the following sections, I depend on my forthcoming book on the Sacraments.

<sup>11</sup> Eliya Mohol, in Hedlund, *Missiology for*, 41.

continued in their former religion until the Jews expelled them from the Synagogues and the Temple. There are groups now in India who do not become Christians but live very “Christian” life.<sup>12</sup> The *Khrist Bhakta* groups are very alive and active; perhaps such movements could be encouraged more. Dr. Sakarias in a very detailed study suggests that “mature Catechumens” may live a normal sacramental life without water baptism.<sup>13</sup> What is important is not the water ritual, but the conversion of heart and mind, conversion as I described above, to a new form of other-oriented-life, which is ultimately the meaning of salvation. Hence, commitment to the cause of God’s rule, to bring about a society of freedom, love and justice has to be given primacy in our considerations, rather than the water ritual; and in that sense we move forward from Edinburgh. However, we shall look at the meaning of baptism, as it completes the reflections on conversion.

Edinburgh also believed that nations in the East are looking “for enlightenment and liberty. Christianity alone of all religions meets these in the highest degree.”<sup>14</sup> Is the “Fulfillment” theory acceptable today? We have to go beyond Edinburgh.

## BAPTISM

Baptism is entry into the Paschal mystery, into the life, death, resurrection of Jesus: (Rom. 6:3,8). Immersion into the life of the one, who in obedience to the Father, lived for the wholeness of people and was opposed to sin and all its effects in the world, and was killed; entrance into it is to follow his path, is to accept him as the way, the truth, and the life. This is a contract, then, to work for the liberation of humans, even unto death, dedication of life for freedom of all fettered. We saw above that it was such a life that led Jesus to his murder.

Baptism is Incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ. “In the one Spirit we were all baptized. Jews as well as Greek...” (1 Cor. 12:13; see Eph. 4:4ff). It is entry into a brotherhood, a communion, fellowship in the Spirit of Christ. Different authors interpret “Body of Christ” differently: the risen body of Christ, or communion with him. The “Body of Christ” may also mean that all those who are committed to the cause of the Kingdom (whatever name they may use) of freedom, love and justice are part of that Body. As children of God baptism makes us one family (Gal. 3:27ff) - no Greek, no Jew, no male, no female, no rich, no poor (Eph. 2:11ff). All these discriminatory classifications are overcome, all the “walls” are broken: you are all brothers/sisters. This is a challenge to casteism, racism and linguistic divisions and discriminations based on gender, caste, and race. The Church is a sign and symbol of the new family of God. The Baptised become Members of the one body; they share in Jesus’ prophetic mission, and in the royal and prophetic priesthood of Christ (1 Pet. 2:22ff). To understand this, we do not begin with the word “priesthood,” but we look at the person and mission of Jesus and see what it means to share in the priesthood of Jesus. He was an eminently free person, who loved all and who had made an option for the poor. This priesthood implies holiness of life, prophetic role, building up of the community and commitment to the Kingdom of God. It also means authority in the community for the realization of its goal – responsibility for the mission of the Church. This is not a temporary relation, but a lasting one. Theologians express it as a “character.”

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<sup>12</sup> Anand, “Khrist Bhakta Movement,” in *Emerging Indian Missiology*, eds. J. Mattam and J. Valiamangalam, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006) 181ff.

<sup>13</sup> C.f. Sakarias, *H. Swamy: Belonging to the Church without Baptism of Water?*(Delhi: ISPCK, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, in Hedlund, *Missiology for*, 117.

It is acceptance of the Lord and his ways; it is conforming to Christ, “putting on of Christ” (Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10, Gal. 3:27, Rom. 6.4). It is to accept his value system, his outlook, his “vision” of reality: of God, humans and the world. If baptism makes us conformed to Christ, if we have taken on his outlook, then we accept his mission; we join him in his work for the kingdom of freedom, fellowship, and love - justice. The new creation must have its social effect; the values of Jesus when accepted have to affect our earthly life, in which the values of the world have a hold. Acceptance of baptism leads to a conflict with the values of the world. Our baptism is the beginning of our mission in the church just as for Jesus his baptism was the beginning of his mission; Baptism is not about saving souls, but about joining Jesus in his mission – in this all members are equal.

We “become” children of God: All are sons/daughters of God by birth (Gen 1.26f, 5.3). However, baptism makes us like Jesus, the Son; it is being conformed to Christ. We are declared sons/daughters of God; it reveals the meaning of being a child of God; it is to be like Jesus. Being a son/daughter is a Matter of relationship - here there is a deeper awareness, a profession and hence a commitment to being a child of God. Son-ship, while it is a gift, is no less a task, a challenge to be like Jesus.

Baptism introduces us into the Trinitarian life of God: Personal relation to the Father, Son and Spirit. We become sons/daughters of the Father, brothers/sisters of Jesus Christ, and temples of the Spirit. God dwells in us: we let God reveal self in our lives of love. Each one ought to be able to say what Jesus said: “you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” This intimacy with the three divine persons is what the Trinitarian formula of baptism expresses. We accept the Trinitarian dimension of reality and life: the ultimate reality is shared existence, and it is a life for and with the other. Hence, we accept to be opposed to all privatization; we agree to community as basic and central. This affects all areas of life: prayer, mission, and the like. All this happens through the action of the Spirit whom God sends and gives through the raised Christ; the Spirit takes hold of us, inspires us, strengthens us, encourages us, sustains us, makes the newness of Christ work in us; transforms us into the likeness of Christ - that is the goal: to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. We need to be aware of “metaphors” and figures of speech: “the Spirit is poured into our hearts.” It means to let the Spirit of love guide us, self-giving love as was revealed in Jesus, and to be Spirit filled persons.

There is a beautiful story, which shows the meaning of the attitude “for the other,” the “spirit of cooperation,” and of working together:

There was a farmer who grew superior quality, award-winning corn in his farm. Each year, he entered his corn in the state fair where it won honors and prizes. One year a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew his corn. The reporter discovered that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbors. “How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbors when they are entering corn in competition with yours each year?” The reporter asked. “Why brother,” the farmer replied, “Didn’t you know? The wind picks up pollen grains from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbors grow inferior, sub-standard and poor quality corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I want to grow good corn, I must help my neighbors to grow good corn.”

The farmer gave a superb insight into the connectedness of life. His corn cannot improve unless his neighbors' corn also improves. So it is in the other dimensions and areas of life! Those who choose to be in harmony must help their neighbors and colleagues to be at peace. Those who choose to live well must help others live well. The value of a life is measured by the lives it touches...

Baptism awakens the theological virtues of faith-hope-love: the new outlook, the new mode of existence in this world of sin. Faith in the resurrection gives us hope in a world of sin. Faith is commitment to Christ and hence a new relationship to God, to self and to others. This is an expression of faith: (Mk 16:16). It is an action of the Church; proclaims and embodies her profession of faith and worship; the word announced resuscitates faith. Faith of the minister, of the community, of the recipient (if s/he is an adult) is a subjective participation in the faith of the Church; it is the first profession of faith by the baptized. I see faith as a share in the vision of Christ, sharing in his YES/NO: Yes to life, to self, to others, to God; No to sin, to injustice. Every love relation is a matter of faith: here it is faith in the self, in others, in the community, in God working in the community. This is a call to love as Jesus loves, and carry on working for the Kingdom in spite of the hopelessness that surrounds us. Love triumphs and this affects us deeply.

Remission of sins: Baptism as the sacrament of remission of sins is an old idea (Acts 2.30; 22.16). The NT spoke of actual sins and their remission. What does it mean that baptism remits sin? Is something removed, washed away? Bible does talk of God forgiving sins. It is said that sins are washed away. If we look at it in the context of God's unconditional love that Jesus reveals, we will need to explain it further. A sinner refuses to live by God's love, refuses to be in a relation of obedient love to God; he/she is alienated from God, from self and from others. Through the love and acceptance of the community, God takes the initiative in reaching out to the sinner. God welcomes the sinner. When the sinner allows self to be touched by that love, s/he turns to God and lets God's love become operative in self, s/he becomes a renewed being, experiences self as a forgiven being; now his/her orientation is to God, to obedient love, a relation of love to others. This repentance is thanks to the love of God - hence it is "grace," "gift." We can say s/he is forgiven, becomes a new creature (Eph. 4.24; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Original sin and baptism: The Bible speaks of actual sins being removed by baptism, but slowly it is stuck to original sin and its remission. This is questionable. Paul's reference to the holiness of children born in a mixed marriage (I Cor. 7:14) points to a general belief in the holiness of all children born of Christian parents. If one understands original sin as the alienating and corrupting influence of human environment, then baptism does not remove it, unless of course, in so far as the Christian churches form a new society based on the Gospel, and provide the child with a world of justice, fellowship, unity, sharing and caring. If this happens it can mean a withdrawal of the child from the atmosphere poisoned by the grown ups. The care, concern and acceptance that the child experiences from the parents and community can be for him/her a saving element in a world where s/he experiences from within and outside forces against its growth as a child of God. I would say that it is better to de-link baptism and original sin in the traditional sense of the doctrine.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus' concept of salvation was not about religion or about starting a club of the "saved," but about making people different, making them aware of being brothers/sisters, children of the One Father/Mother, living a new pattern of relationship in freedom, love and justice. So today our commitment to salvation should follow Jesus' pattern and make every effort to go beyond religious fundamentalism of any type, beyond any exclusive claims to salvation or to the knowledge of God who continues to be a mystery for all. Our work is to help build communities of love, breaking down all walls of separation, selfishness and hatred. For Jesus people are primary in the plan of God, not religions, so it should be for us. While we leave behind the "Fulfillment" theory, and the obsession to baptize as many as possible, an important contribution of Edinburgh, namely a move to ecumenism is of great value even today. "The Edinburgh Conference was of decisive importance in the coming into being of the modern ecumenical movement. Historians often speak of Edinburgh as the beginning of the ecumenical movement."<sup>15</sup> Latourette also considers this Conference as of great significance for the ecumenical movement.<sup>16</sup> Hence, this centenary celebration could give an impetus to the ecumenical movement, which perhaps has suffered a certain setback in the last few years.

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<sup>15</sup> T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Latourette, *A History of*, 1344, 1377.