THE CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN KERALA

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Dr. John Vazhakoottathil OCD

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DR. JOHN VAZHAKOOTTATHIL OCD

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DR. JOHN VAZHAKOOTTATHIL OCD

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PREFACE

My heart is full of gratitude to God as I complete my work of systematically documenting the teachings of the Church and the reflections of the theologians on popular devotions based on a study in the context of the Church in Kerala. The Almighty God gave me many a chances to preach retreats and homilies and administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the religious ambient of popular devotions and in the centers of charismatic movement. His providence allowed me to do my doctoral studies while working in the parishes in the dioceses of Rome and Terni-Narni-Amelia. All these pastoral experiences facilitated my research.

I gratefully acknowledge the scholarly assistance of my moderator, Professor Francis Anekwe Oborji and his gentle approach. The first and second correlators, Professors Alessandro Dell'Orto and Indunil Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage, helped me with their valuable suggestions and words of encouragements. I express my gratitude to Professor Benedict Kanakappally OCD, the Dean of the Faculty of Missiology, and all the other Professors whom I encountered at various Courses in the University who enriched me with their excellent classes.

I am very grateful to Rev. Dr. Datius Kanjiramukil OCD, my former Provincial who permitted me to do my doctoral studies in Rome and to Rev. Dr. Jacob Palliparambil OCD, my present Provincial, for his prayerful support and paternal care. I thank all the members of my Discalced Carmelite Religious Community of St. Valentine's Basilica at Terni, for their cooperation and brotherly love. I thank my beloved parents, relatives and well wishers who encouraged and prayed for me during the course of my studies.

Rome, February 2013. Vazhakoottathil Antony John

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Apostolicam Actuositatem
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AG	Ad Gentes Divinitus
CL	Christifideles Laici
CT	Catechesi Tradendae
EA	Ecclesia in Asia
K. C. B. C.	Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference
K. C. Y. M.	Kerala Catholic Youth Movement
LG	Lumen Gentium
MD	Mediator Dei
NA	Nostra Aetate
P. O. C.	Pastoral Orientation Centre
PDV	Pastores dabo vobis
PF	Porta Fidei
RM	Redemptoris Missio
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium
VC	Vita Consacrata
VD	Verbum Domini

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

One of my friends in Europe who went to spend his vacation with the tribal people in the dense forest in Africa narrated to me in wonder that he was taken up by the luminous eyes and the joyful smiles of the children, although they were living there in utter poverty. What is the inner force that pushes some people, especially the poor, to go ahead with lot of joy in their hearts and smile in their faces even in their struggles of daily life? The people, of the countries with ancient roots of religious traditions, with their simplicity of life and with their extraordinary capacity to survive in spite of their lower standard of living, challenge those who put their trust in money and power to secure a happy living on earth. Although the false dreams of secularism has crumbled down today, it has conditioned some people in such a way that they themselves are incapable to come out of it.

We observe some remains of these secularist attitudes also in the ambient of religiosity. When the religion is secularized the religious heads begin to express their temptation to take up the arms of money and power to dominate the believers and as a consequence the spirituality becomes oppressive, idolatrous and superstitious. A worship that is promoted with the tools of fear and compulsion is questioned by the findings of the positive sciences. A critical evaluation of the past and a true awareness of the present are very urgent for a significant presentation of the religious values to the humanity today.

THE IMPULSE FOR THE STUDY

It is a surprise for everyone, in India and abroad, that in Kerala, the followers of many religions, who consider their faith life very seriously, live together in harmony like brothers and sisters when in many other parts in India and abroad there were persecutions and bloodshed in the name of religion. It is a common sight in many places in Kerala that churches, temples and mosques exist in close vicinity and the devotees cooperate each other in their religious celebrations and other human endeavors. What is the

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underlying factor that unites people in spite of their ethnic and religious diversities? A study of the history of religions in Kerala reveals that the most important world religions - like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism which had their origin in the main land, India and, Judaism, Christianity and Islam which had their origin in the Middle East - were introduced to the people of Kerala from outside. What was the attitude that helped the people of Kerala to welcome these religions in a positive spirit?

A phenomenon that is observed in the religious ambient of Kerala is that devotees, irrespective of religions, gather in large number to the centers of popular devotions. These gatherings are characterized by an extraordinary dynamism and zeal which are most often absent in the religious ambient of official worship. The people who visit these centers communicate to everyone the stories of healings and material prosperity. What are the common religious sentiments that are expressed here that attract some people of Kerala to these centers even going beyond institutional religious barriers? What is that common religious sentiment that unite the people of Kerala in these centers even beyond caste and creed?

The Catholic Church in Kerala also witnesses the exodus of the devotees to the centers of Catholic popular devotions. The people, who are passive and silent during the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist or other Liturgical celebrations, shout out the songs and prayers of the popular devotions. The public reading of the reports, of the miraculous healing and material prosperity, give hope and enthusiasm in the people to visit these centers again. There is also a public reading of the requests, that the devotees make for the material wellbeing and prosperity, promising some vows to the saints they honor or to the centre of popular devotion that they frequent. The people who gather in large number in the centers of charismatic movement also express the same religious expectations that are observed in the people who gather around the centers of Catholic popular devotions. What should be the pastoral attitude of the Church to this religious ambient where people are overcome with their daily worries of life? It is a Catholic religious ambient which is also frequented by the brethren of other religions. How can the Church fulfill her missionary duty

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of proclaiming the mystery of Christ in its integrity, to communicate to them the originality of Catholic faith especially in a socio-political context where secularism and atheism gain lot of popularity?

SCOPE AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY

The dissertation is an attempt to investigate into the social, cultural, religious, political and pastoral context of the Catholic popular devotions in the Church in Kerala with a view to discover how Church can exercise her evangelizing mission in this context, how these devotions can be effectively used as instruments of catechesis and how the ambient of popular devotions can be converted into that of dialogue with people of other faiths. It is also a search to see how much the popular devotions can be a help to promote an attitude of contemplation which is already present in the other religious traditions in India.

The study is limited to the Catholic popular devotions in Kerala although a quick look is made into the general picture of the popular devotions especially that of popular Hinduism. Since its major concern is pastoral, the cultural, social and anthropological dimensions of the popular devotions are not studied in much detail. The study uses mainly the works of the Indian theologians for the development of the theme although some Church documents and other theologians in general are referred to.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology that is adopted in this work is social, historical and analytical. At first there is a philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of popular devotion. Then, there is an effort to make a historical and theological research into the Catholic popular devotions. It is followed by an attempt for a contextual analysis of Kerala in general and analysis of the popular religious ambient in particular. Later, the pastoral responses of the Church in Kerala to the context of Catholic popular devotions is studied. The work is concluded with some evaluations and some pastoral reflections.

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DIVISION OF THE WORK

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter studies the 'phenomenon of popular devotions'. It is a short study of the religions, religious experience and a detailed study on the religious attitudes that are seen in the centers of popular devotions, the various aspects that govern these religious attitudes and the reasons that attract devotees to these centers. The phenomenon of people getting into small groups began to be visible when the human communities became large and complex. Common values did not do justice to the entire human community in its integrity. Same thing was true with the official worship patterns. They always favored and satisfied the religious sentiments of a small group of people. There were also situations in the history that the religious sentiments and their worship patterns were introduced to a particular human context from the outside. All these contributed to the origin of popular devotions.

The second chapter is dedicated to the study of the 'Catholic popular devotions' in particular. The chapter begins with a study in search of the popular religious attitudes in the Bible. Although we do not find the popular devotions in the Bible as it is today, there are accounts of the popular religious practices in the Old Testament and New Testament biblical traditions. With the help of the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, a detailed study of popular devotions in the liturgical tradition of the Church is made to see how Liturgy and popular piety together helped the faithful in their way to Christian perfection and how later they got separated. The *Directory* reports how, in the difficult times of the Church, the popular piety served as the back born of the Christian faith. This chapter includes a study on the Church's instructions on the Catholic popular devotions which are evident through the recent teachings of the Church. The search for theological perspectives in general on Catholic popular devotions is limited to the study of two authors – Karl Rahner and Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

The title of the third chapter is: 'Kerala, a land of popular religiosity'. A contextual analysis of the social, political, religious and cultural dimensions

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of the people in Kerala is done in this chapter with the help of a short study of the history of Kerala. The people of Kerala welcomed all the world religions with all their diversities without losing an underlying unity which existed there before the arrival of the religions. The socio-political attitude that promoted equality and justice that existed in Kerala before the coming of Aryans survived there in a religious way in spite of the unjust social stratification of the Aryans. This humanistic religious attitude is visible in the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala. Since it is a common religious attitude of all the people in Kerala irrespective of religions, the centers of popular devotions are visited by the believers of all religions. This is also true in the centers of Catholic popular devotions and in the centers of charismatic movement which promote popular religious sentiments.

The forth chapter deals with 'the pastoral response of the Church in Kerala to the popular devotions'. It begins with a long introduction, which speak about the evolution of the concept of mission, with a purpose to highlight the missiological significance of the pastoral ministry. The pastoral letters of the Indian bishops are referred to in search of their pastoral response to the followers of popular devotions. Although they promote and encourage the popular devotions, yet they also caution the parish priests and the people in general against superstitions and exploitations. The perspectives of two Indian theologians – Michael Amaladoss and Felix Wilfred – are studied for a contextual theological reflection on the popular devotions in India. The promotion of popular devotions by the consecrated men and women and that of the laity and the consequent commitment to Christian service are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter five deals with the 'prospects and challenges of the popular devotions in Kerala'. It makes a study on how the popular devotions are the means for promoting catechetical formation, integrity of prayer and contemplation and inter-religious dialogue. This chapter highlights some of the important challenges of the popular devotions. It is observed that there is only a partial proclamation of the mystery of Christ in these centers. Either the people who gather in these centers are not fully prepared to contemplate the fullness of the mystery of Christ or the status quo is purposely

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maintained for some worldly motives. The general limitations of the popular religiosity are also visible in the centers of popular devotions in Kerala. The chapter is finished with some pastoral reflections looking ahead. The work ends with some general conclusions.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PHENOMENON OF POPULAR DEVOTIONS

1.0. INTRODUCTION

One of the significant phenomena we see today is that people get themselves away from the large social, religious or political groups into smaller local groups and these small local groups seem to be more dynamic and committed than the larger groups. Some of these groups, being away from the larger groups, disturb the social, religious or political order, may be with a vision of a new order, which will be in favor of them. Some other groups move side by side with the larger groups, and strengthen and increase the fervor of the local expressions of the larger groups. In some other situations, popular and dynamic movements of the members of the societies can be seen side by side with the institutionalized structure of the human societies which are governed by a few. What does force them to this adventurous dynamism is a question of heated discussion.

A radical and vibrant phenomenon that we witness in the ambient of worship in almost all the religions is 'popular devotions'. They are expressed in various ways and in general as veneration of 'saints' or good people who, they believe, can share the vibrations of their hearts fully. People also gather in large numbers to some places of pilgrimage to which they attribute some sacred powers. There are also popular use of 'sacred objects', taking of some vows and fulfilling it to please the deity whom they worship, and so on. The devotees who seem to be passive participants in the institutionalized worship systems, as if they are participating in them to please somebody out of compulsion, express their religious sentiments in a very dynamic way in the ambient of popular devotions. We are interested to know the reasons for the origin of these devotions and the reasons that provoke the devotees for this religious dynamism. According to some scholars, the emergence of the popular devotions can be traced in the dichotomy between the organized religious experience and the dynamic

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human experience[1] and in a living dialectic between the social situation of the common people and their religious forms of faith and institution.[2]

In this chapter, we try to study the phenomenon of popular devotions, looking into it from various angles, to see what are the reasons that influence the people to express their religious sentiments in the ways that we observe in the religious ambient of popular devotions. We begin with the basic questions about religion and religious experience and then proceed to a proper discussion on the phenomenon of popular devotions. As the term 'phenomenon' is a philosophical term, the discussion about the popular devotions in this chapter is philosophical in nature.

1.1. RELIGION AND POPULAR DEVOTIONS

We observe in almost all the religious traditions, the existence of the institutionalized worship patterns and popular worships. The institutionalized worship patterns are organized in such a way to safe guard the integrity of the concept of religion of a particular human community with some common values that judge each human expression of worship and religious experience. Rather, the popular forms of worship give importance to the particular human religious sentiments and their expressions. They give importance to and propagate the particular religious experience of an individual rather than a 'corporate religious experience'[3] which is held and propagated by the institutionalized religions. It is here that we confront the dichotomy between individual human experience and the collective or corporate human experience. When the individual human religious experience is bypassed, the religion becomes a dry ideology. Too much insistence on the subjective religious experience of the individual will cause the isolation of the individuals in the human communities. The terms

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[1] C. ILLICKAMURY, "Popular Devotions and Authentic Christianity", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 77.

[2] A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 69.

[3] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* vol. 12, 328.

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'religion' and 'popular devotions' represent the collective and individual expressions of the religious sentiments, respectively.

The religious sentiments of a human community of a space and time would be articulated and celebrated through some performances of rites and rituals, by which the members of the community gain an experience of peace, joy and a feeling of security. It is self evident that these rites and rituals need not be valid for all times because human life and experiences are dynamic and 'diverse'.[4] The religious sentiments which is celebrated through some rites need not always satisfy all the aspects (bodily, mental, spiritual, communitarian) of all people even in a given space and time. This dynamism and diversity seek expression and release and as a result a new way of manifesting the religious sentiment emerges.[5] Some of them becomes very popular when they give breath to the concerns of the people and in turn console them. Here we can see a reason for the emergence of the popular devotions which exist in almost all the religious traditions side by side with the institutionalized worship patterns.

1.1.1. What is Religion?

The questions and experiences that challenged man in his daily life initiated in him a journey within in search of some answers. Man looked with fear and wonder at the overwhelming cosmic experience of infinite powers beyond his reach and control. The more man extends knowledge and domination over the nature and cosmos around him, the more is its complexity. A journey into the self also reveals man that his life is not exhausted in daily activities and relations but leads to the threshold of the ultimate question, "What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we

---

4 It is self evident that since the historical and geographical ambient of people in the world are different and diverse and since they influence human life, the mode of their thinking, being and doing are different. The dynamism of human life and experience are caused by the enlargement of the human mind by the everyday interaction with the nature and society.

5 A. ATHAPPILLY, "Popular devotion of St. Sebastian", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 377.

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going?"[6] To some authors, this is the matrix from which religious life and its manifold expressions in history originate. Each of the world religions attempts on its part to reveal the transcendent dimension of human life and gives orientation to all its spheres.[7]

Any treat on 'what is religion?' will try to begin with a precise definition on what is the essence of religion. Various attempts have been made to find out an essential ingredient that is common in all religions that makes religion distinct from other human enterprises. But objections have been brought against such attempts because the rich varieties of religions will give some counter-examples for any speculated objective affirmations based on the analysis of a particular religious context. Sometimes, the elements which are sited as very essential for the reality of religion are very peripheral for some other religions. For example, gods play very subsidiary role in most phases of *Teravada* Buddhism.[8] William James, in his famous book, '*The Varieties of Religious Experience*', says:

> [...] the very fact that they are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word 'religion' cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name. [...] we may very likely find no one essence, but many characters which may alternately be equally important in religion.[9]

Therefore, a precise and comprehensive definition about religion is not possible.[10] The problem can be examined by considering religion from several different points of view or under several different aspects. It can be

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6 VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, 28 October 1965: *AAS* 58 (1966), n. 1. [Hereafter referred to as NA]

7 J. NEUNER, "Popular devotions: theological reflections", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 29.

8 I. T. RAMSEY, "Religion", *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 15, 592.

9 W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* (Centenary Edition) Routledge, New York 2002, 26.

10 N. SM, "Religion", *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 15, 613.

defined empirically, theologically and historically.[11] We can study the religion with a classical (conceptual) approach and an empirical approach. The conceptual approach comprises of studying the beliefs, myths, rites, and festivals in a historical perspective in the context of its Sacred Scriptures and traditions. Whereas, the empirical approach studies the religion in a context of the religious consciousness of the people.[12] William James looked into the religion from institutional and personal perspectives.

> Worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization, are the essentials of religion in the institutional branch. Were we to limit our view to it, we should have to define religion as an external art, the art of winning the favor of the gods. In the more personal branch of religion it is on the contrary the inner dispositions of man himself which form the centre of interest, his conscience, his deserts, his helplessness, his incompleteness.[13]

After analyzing the history of religions in the world, we can state that no culture whether it is primitive or backward, has been found that does not have ideas on divinity, spirits, human survival, and supernatural forces, along with corresponding rites.[14] Since the understanding of the concept of religion vary in various cultures, the definitions on religion also express their diversity. For example, the concept of religion, for the western thinkers, imply a separation between holy and unholy, sacred and profane. Thus every place of worship is a concrete physical embodiment of this religious attitude. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam follow this mode of religious understanding.[15]

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[11] J. GOETZ, "Religion" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, 240-241.

[12] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar,*Christian Literature Society, Madras 1983, 1.

[13] W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 2002, 28.

[14] J. GOETZ, "Religion", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, 246.

[15] W. L. KING, "Religion", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, 282.

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But for Hinduism, almost everything is given a religious significance. For them, the ultimate reality manifests itself in a multitude of ways. The real is apprehended, it is said, at many levels in accordance with the individual's capacity.[16] It is a characteristic of Asian religious traditions that they place their prime emphasis upon the inner states of realization rather than upon the merely instrumental rite and doctrine. In some radical expressions of Asian traditions, such as Zen Buddhism and Hindu *bhakti* (devotional faith), religious doctrines and traditions are merely secondary in their pursuit of religious experience.[17]

Traditionally, religion has been defined as beliefs in 'supernatural forces and beings' and the behavior and practices associated with them.[18] The human sciences, rather, explain religion in a 'scientific-humanistic' context. Sociologists and anthropologists are of the opinion that religion is not an abstract set of ideas, norms, or experiences developed outside the 'total cultural matrix' but, they say, that many religious beliefs, customs, and rituals can only be understood in reference to a cultural background. They explain how the society controls the individual in the name of god or gods which are only a personified society.[19]

William James defines the religion as "[...] *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*".[20] However, he accepts the limitation of his definition by telling about 'a chance of controversy' over the word 'divine' because, although the Buddhist system is atheistic in the strict sense yet we call Buddhism, a religion. Therefore he says that we must interpret the term 'divine' very

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16 W. L. KING, "Religion", 282.
17 W. L. KING, "Religion", 283.
18 P. G. HIEBERT – R. D. SHAW - T. TIENOU, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, Baker, Grand Rapids (Mich.) 1999, 35.
19 W. L. KING, "Religion", 284.
20 W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 2002, 29-30.

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broadly.[21] Paul G. Hiebert - R.D. Shaw – T. Tienou, in their book quotes the definition given by Clifford Geertz on religion. According to him,

> religion is 1) a system of symbols which acts to 2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating concepts of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factualness that 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[22]

It may be said that almost all the cultures express their religious sentiments as a system of beliefs and rites, as the depth dimension of their culture at all levels, and the expression of their deep desire to move forward to some sort of ultimacy and transcendence, are celebrated through some symbolic rites, that provide norms and power for the rest of life.[23]

In his article on "Religion", M. Dhavamony says: "In the medieval Christianity, religion in its supreme and greatest degree signified monastic life with the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Hence, the religious person par excellence is the monk or the nun, and the religious state was considered the state of perfection."[24] Later, in the history of the word 'religion' there is a transformation of its meaning in the western culture 'from a primary reference to the ritual practice of a specific cult or style of life to a basic system of beliefs and practices'.[25]

A short description about 'what is religion?' make us clear that the concept of 'religion' gains new horizons of meanings in the course of history. However, a basic altruistic significance, that is, a significance outside the individual, whether immediate or distant, can be seen as a unifying factor in all the attempts of defining religion.

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[21] W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 2002, 32.

[22] P. G. HIEBERT – R. D. SHAW - T. TIENOU , *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 1999, 35.

[23] W. L. KING, "Religion", 286.

[24] M. DHAVAMONY, "Religion", in R. LATOURELLE – R. FISICHELLA (Eds.) *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, The Crossroad Publishing company, New York 1994, 820.

[25] M. DHAVAMONY, "Religion", 820.

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1.1.2. What is Religious Experience?

According to W. J. Hill, "experience denotes the impression and imputation of a conscious rational subject resulting from actual contact with things, from living through an event or events".[26] Since the experience is not merely knowing about something, rather, a matter of being affected by something by the subject, it is largely subjective and valued subjectively. To W. J. Hill, religious experience is some sort of awareness of and response to the divine, largely achieved in terms of discerning the divine presence or one's total dependence upon divinity. This discernment, he says, may be immediate or mediated. Either this experience will be totally subjective or will have varying degrees of objective validity in external reality.[27]

In his article on 'religious experience', James Alfred Martin Jr. says that "the question whether there is any totally un-interpreted, or non-conceptualized, 'pure' or 'immediate' experience [...] that is presupposition-less, or 'given', is largely answered in the negative in current philosophical discussions".[28] He continues to say that since individual religious experience is very much conditioned by the 'corporate experiences',[29] it is appropriate to examine a "classic expression of a specific tradition, an expression that also exemplifies many elements highlighted by one or more influential theorists" to have an objective study of it.[30] The author presents *Bhagavadgita* as the classic expression of Hindu religious tradition. In *Bhagavadgita* we come across with three ways of attaining a religious fulfillment or experience. *Karma marga* explains religious experience as the realization of one's duty. The disinterested fulfillment of duty gives the individual a liberation from the *samsara chakra,* the cycle of birth and rebirth, and thus he will attain *moksha,* salvation. All those who follow *Jnana marga* enjoys a religious experience as a meditational insight. It is a unitive wisdom or insight achieved through study and meditation. In the ultimate experience of union,

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[26] W. J. HILL, "Experience, Religious", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, 751.
[27] W. J. HILL, "Experience, Religious", 752.
[28] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 325.
[29] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 328.
[30] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 325.

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the seeker will say '*Aham Brahmasmi*', that is, 'I am *Brahman.*[31] In *Bhakti marga,* religious experience is interpreted as the joy that comes from the personal devotion and worship to a personal god. The devotee experiences the presence of the divine within as grace, and enjoys an inner liberation and transformation.[32] While *Jnana marga* is followed by the elites, the popular expressions of Hinduism follow *Bhakti marga* and *Karma marga.*[33]

William James, the American philosopher and psychologist is more responsible than any other, for a general interest in the concept of religious experience as a key to the understanding of religion.[34] To him, the 'religious sentiment' cannot be explained with a single category of thought. He says:

> One man allies it to the feeling of dependence; one makes it a derivative form of fear; others connect it with the sexual life; others still identify it with the feeling of the infinite; and so on. Such different ways of conceiving it ought of themselves to arouse doubt as to whether it possibly can be one specific thing; and the moment we are willing to treat the term 'religious sentiment' as a collective name for the many sentiments which religious objects may arouse in alternation, we see that it probably contains nothing whatever of a psychologically specific nature.[35]

To escape from this ambiguity William James concentrated on personal religion rather than institutional one. But he said that we cannot be sure whether a religious experience is an abnormality or the growth and maturity of human mind. Therefore, in the end we will have to "come to our

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31 'I am *Brahman*' is one of the *mahavakyas* (great statements) occurring in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* of *Yajur Veda.* The statement 'I am *Brahman*' is both a postulation on the state of *Brahman* at an intellectual level and an expression of an enlightened yogi in a state of self realization. www.hinduwebsite.com/.../ *visited on 28-10-2011.*

32 J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 325-327.

33 C. FERNANDES, "Popular religiosity in World Religions", in *Word & Worship* 2 (2010), 72.

34 J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 324.

35 W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 2002, 27.

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empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots [...]".[36] Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of liberal Protestantism,[37] speaking about the religious faith and experience says that the heart of religious faith lies in the affections and in a distinctive religious feeling. He termed this religious feeling as the 'feeling of absolute dependence', the 'sense and taste of the infinite' and 'the feeling of the whole'. It is from this basic feeling that stems the life of religion in both its doctrinal and its cultic forms.[38]

Catholic theologians began to accept the language and notion of personal experience only recently. They avoided the talk on experience telling that it prone to encourage an emotional and irrational style of Christianity. However, later, the Catholic fundamental theology began to be affected by the positive views of experience. In his writings, John Henry Newman, makes constant appeals to experience, both collective and personal, and felt at home with his deeply cherished "dogmatic principle". Due to the contributions of great theologians like Yves Congar and Karl Rahner, the language of experience found its expression in the Second Vatican Council Documents although they use it sparingly.[39] M. Dhavamony says that any conception of religion that excludes the particular individual experience is defective because, "it is the individual's personal apprehension of the sacred or the divine that constitutes one of the most important features of religion".[40]

Christian faith has its fundamental basis in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus "was completely open to, and reflective of, that creating and redeeming

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[36] W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 2002, 21. (In philosophy, Immanuel Kant found the heart of religious experience in the life of 'practical reason' and the implicates of freedom established in the experience of moral law., in J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 328.)

[37] G. O'COLLINS, "Experience", in R. LATOURELLE – R. FISICHELLA (Eds.) *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, The Crossroad Publishing company, New York 1994, 306.

[38] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 329.

[39] G. O'COLLINS, "Experience", 306-307.

[40] M. DHAVAMONY, "Religion", 820.

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reality that is apprehended in perfect human God-consciousness".[41] Gerald O' Collins, in his article on "Experience" describes:

> The fundamental theology studies the fundamental revelation mediated through Jesus' own unique experience of God, the disciples' experience of Jesus and the experience of the apostolic Church as its mission developed in the power of the Holy Spirit. The post apostolic tradition can be seen as the collective memory of those privileged experiences which constituted the fundamental revelation that reached its definitive and unsurpassable climax with Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. In all its written and unwritten forms, tradition means handing on, from one generation to another, the Church's collective and specifically Christian experience of God in Jesus Christ.[42]

Here, the author speaks more of a collective Christian religious experience. In the life and thought of traditional Christianity, the religious experience was primarily associated with personal and corporate bringing up of the life of faith. A predefined system of life was introduced systematically to the followers with a guarantee of obtaining a religious experience. In this system there was "less occasion for self conscious reflection on those personal and corporate experiences that would later be singled out as religious experiences. To a large extent, this continues to be the case in Roman Catholic and Eastern Christian communities".[43] Devotional practices formed a context of religious experience but that context was firmly embedded in a structured ecclesiastical framework.[44]

Thus, according to W. J. Hill, it is only from the time of the protestant reformers that religious experience assumes a singular and predominant role

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[41] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 329.
[42] G. O'COLLINS, "Experience", 308.
[43] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 328.
[44] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 328.

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in religious life.[45] The concept of religious experience in Christian tradition which has been characterized by variously nuanced relations of feeling to thought and action has stemmed specifically from certain theological concerns of modern Christian thought, especially in its protestant forms.[46] We can see one common note in all of western Christianity aside from Catholicism, during the four centuries from Luther to William James, "that religious experience is the ultimate criterion and rule of faith."[47] However, Christian mysticism contributed much in the study of religious experience in Catholicism. Mysticism simply means the spirituality of the direct experience of God.[48]

Since the 'religious experience' has personal and collective dimensions, a honest subjective and objective evaluation is necessary to arrive at a proper explanation. Since the religious experience also involves some elements beyond an objective explanation, an attitude of openness in the study of religious experience will produce positive results.

1.1.3. Religion or Religions?

Diversity is a reality of the natural order in and around us. It is our daily experience that this diversity in us and around us is not a cause for rivalry or chaos but an organization that is mutually complementary. Although the elements of human nature are same in every human being,[49] the people of different continents are different in appearances, and the reason is said to be the differences of geographical environment. Human body adapted itself to the various geographical environments to which they reached in their exodus for survival. If this is the case with the human body, how much more will be the influence of the diverse environments on human mind! Here, we are at a point to understand the reason for the diversity of cultures and

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[45] W. J. HILL, "Experience, Religious", 752.

[46] J. A. MARTIN, Jr., "Religious Experience", 328.

[47] W. J. HILL, "Experience, Religious", 752.

[48] What is Christian mysticism? www.frimmin.com/faith/mysticismintro.php *a brief introduction.... visited on 28-10-2011.*

[49] L. S. CAHILL – H. HAKER (Eds.), "Human Nature and Natural Law: A Critical Discussion", in *Concilium* 3 (2010), 7.

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consequently of the religions. Phenomenologically, the term 'religious pluralism' refers to the fact that there are plurality of religious traditions and plurality of varieties within each religious tradition.[50]

Although we can speak of a common universal religious attitude, yet, since the people and their cultures differ, the external expressions of their religious attitude also differ. Not only that the ways and means of relating oneself to the deity differ but also the very conception of the deity may differ from people to people because of the differences in their quest caused by the differences of environments. The variety of the conceptions of the deity gave rise to plurality of deities and the variety of the external expressions of the religious sentiments caused the rise of many religions.[51] The religious sentiments of each culture are expressed differently and their diversity is comparable to the diversity of languages.[52]

The very name of the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council *Nostra Aetate* on 'The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions', reveals how Church Fathers were conscious about the reality of the existence of various religions in the world. The Declaration states that "men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition."[53] It also affirm that these search for answers have produced positive fruits:

> From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and

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[50] J. HICK, "Religious Pluralism", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* vol. 12, 331.

[51] C. ILLICKAMURY, "Popular Devotions and Authentic Christianity", 1986, 76.

[52] J. OUSEPARAMPIL, "Popular Devotions vis-a-vis Formal Liturgical Worship", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 453.

[53] NA 1.

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> recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.[54]

The Council specially hailed the religions 'that are bound up with an advanced culture' who have struggled to answer the questions of humanity 'by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language':

> Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.[55]

Finally the Council Fathers added that the Catholic Church accepts everything that is true and holy in these religions.[56]

The religious diversity began to be a cause of persecution and bloodshed when the exclusive religious claims of each religion confronted one another. The religious claims, which were considered absolute in an endogamous human community with a particular culture, began to be challenged by the absolute claims of another religious tradition. The Catholic Church, although once upon a time maintained an exclusivist attitude, now looks at other religions with an attitude of inclusivism. Maria Cristina Astorga in her

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[54] NA 2.
[55] NA 2.
[56] NA 2.

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article refers to Jacques Dupuis who speaks about the providential function of the diversity of religions and says that no single moral or spiritual system can contain the distinctive forms of human goodness which are expressed in various religions.[57] Pluralism, which speaks of the truthfulness and equality of all religions has not still achieved total acceptance.[58] However, today, all accept the presence of various religions in the world although there are various ways of explaining them in relation to the other religions.[59] K. P. Aleaz says that today the religions are not considered as isolated, self-contained entities rather, it is considered that different religions contribute to each other to arrive at an integral faith-experience for each religion. This relational convergence of religions, sometimes results in the emergence of a creatively new path in each of the earlier paths. The author calls this phenomenon as 'pluralistic inclusivism'.[60]

A general statement which resounds in the multi-religious context in India, is worth noting: 'the religions are, like rivers which flow unto the sea, the different paths to the same God.' To continue a healthy coexistence of human beings in spite of the religious diversity, we need to compose some common principles that include the religious quest of all religions.

1.2. WHAT IS POPULAR DEVOTION?

There is indeed a complex debate concerning the interpretation of popular religion. The difficulties in constructing an adequate interpretation begin already with the definition of 'people' and 'popular religion' or 'popular religiosity'. The fundamental question is: to what extent can particular forms of religion or religiosity be characterized as 'popular'?[61] Sometimes,

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[57] M. C. ASTORGA, "Human Rights from an Asian Perspective: The Challenge of Diversity and the Limits of universality", in *Concilium* 3 (2010), 92.

[58] J. HICK, "Religious Pluralism", 331.

[59] M. AMALADOSS, *Walking Together. The practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand (India) 1992, 169.

[60] A. KALARIKKAL P., "Theology of Religions and the Mission of the Church", in *The Asia Journal of Theology* 24, 2 (2010), 198.

[61] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Paul: Commissioned to teach 'all nations' the worship of the 'unknown God' through Jesus Christ", in *Jyotir Dhara* 10, 1&2 (2008), 53.

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'people' stands for the oppressed classes or the poorer strata of the population, as opposed to the groups possessing more knowledge and power.[62] At other times, 'people' is identified with 'nation', or a minority within a nation, thus considering popular religiosity as the religious culture of a collective subject with a proper historical experience and cultural tradition.[63] It characterizes peculiar experiences and practices within a given religion. Indeed, each religion has itself, alongside the official beliefs and practices protected by the religious authorities, a segment of beliefs and practices that can be called 'popular religiosity'.[64] It is a non-official or non-institutional religiosity of the ordinary people or common folk against the elitist religiosity.[65]

1.2.1. Religion of the Masses?

Popular devotions refer to all religious expressions which are natural to the masses[66] as opposed to those favored by minorities with a higher degree of culture and religious learning. By 'popular' it may be understood anything which springs from or survives in 'the people' and it is distinguished from that which is institutional and official. They are the religious expressions or mediations emerging in and from the people and handed down traditionally outside any official religious structure.[67] The natural religious sentiments in man is often in tension with the normative religious claims and laws

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[62] F. A. PASTOR, "Popular Religion", in R. LATOURELLE – R. FISICHELLA (Eds.) *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, The Crossroad Publishing company, New York 1994, 850.

[63] J. V. NIEUWENHOVE – B. K. GOLDEWIJK, (eds.), *Popular Religion, Liberation and Contextual Theology: Papers from a Congress (January 3-7, 1990, Nijmegen, the Nederlands) Dedicated to Arnulf Camps OFM*, Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kokkampen 1991, 5.

[64] H. SHIJDEWIND, "Popular Religion, Spirituality and Liberation", in J. V. NIEUWENHOVE – B. K. GOLDEWIJK (eds.), *Popular Religion, Liberation and Contextual Theology*, 1991, 196.

[65] L. FERNANDES, "Towards an Understanding of Popular Religiosity. From a Field Study in Karnataka", in *Word & Worship* 1 (2010), 38.

[66] S. ARULSAMY, "Popular Devotions: An Experience of the Divine", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 58.

[67] S. ARULSAMY, "Popular Devotions: An Experience of the Divine", 1986, 58-59.

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whenever the normative claims ignore the element of dynamism of the nature. Sometimes the universal norms are inapplicable to the diverse contexts of human communities. The phenomenon of popular devotions can be said to be an expression of dissatisfaction of the masses towards the normative claims which did not undergo constant contextualized interpretation.[68] Although there are some common natural laws for the human beings, each particular individual or a collective individual in a particular context is moved to the common good by the dynamism of its particular nature, conditioned by a time and space.[69]

The popular devotions are spontaneous and agreeable to the individual person's manner of thinking and feeling and they satisfy the inner inclinations of piety.[70] Here the devotees can move quite spontaneously and freely, follow their motivations and pursue their sacred world view.[71] Anand Amaladass, an Indian writer says:

> Popular devotion provides scope for freedom and autonomy in which simple people quite spontaneously move and follow their motivations as also their sacred world view, to be able to develop a type of language and relationship to places, objects and human beings. [...] these devotional practices provide autonomy and freedom to bring in fresh initiatives by the common people.[72]

Thus, these devotions represent a religion of the people[73] (masses) and they "tend to bypass the mediation of the priestly figure, which is felt to be absent or distant".[74] These devotions become the heritage of the people in a

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[68] L. S. CAHILL, "Human Nature and Natural Law: A Critical Discussion" (2010), 7.

[69] S. J. POPE, "Tradition and Innovation in Natural Law: A Thomistic Interpretation", in *Concilium* 3 (2010), 18.

[70] S. ARULSAMY, "Popular Devotions: An Experience of the Divine", 1986, 63.

[71] J. PONNIAH, "Popular Religious Practices as Occasions for Inter-Religious Dialogue", in *Word & Worship* 1 (2010), 48.

[72] A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", 1986, 67.

[73] PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, 8 December 1975: *AAS* 68 (1976), n. 48.

[74] F.A. PASTOR, "Popular Religion", 850.

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human context and a social unity is built up around these popular devotions. There is a fellow feeling among them to help one another, an underlying unity of purpose, bound together in faith.[75] In this ambient the common people discover a personal meaning for their life. They are able to articulate their religious sentiments in the language of their hearts. They feel at home in this religious ambient.[76]

Popular devotion is considered the 'religion of the masses' because the common people feel their religion sentiments expressed in the religious ambient of popular devotions. They rediscover their individual identity and gain self confidence in the celebration of these devotions.

1.2.2. A 'Pragmatic Religious Experience'

The nature that people see and experience in and around them appear to them as a challenge, whether positive or negative, and they realize that it requires lot of sacrifices and hard work to go ahead with life. The sufferings that comes on the way exhaust the people and they seek some assurance from some were to go ahead with a positive hope. There are some acute moments of life where they are absolutely helpless to proceed further and here meditations on eternal life in heaven do not help them. Their life is almost blocked and they need some solutions to their existential problems, here and now. On the level of popular devotions, the central concern is the well-being on earth.[77] They are expressing a religion of life rather than a religiously inspired ethic or rational faith. It is an expression of the people's quest for good human life on earth.[78] The form and manner of religious experience, presented in the religious ambient of popular piety are more direct and simple in character, "in a search for an enhanced functionality, and a modality more accessible to the concrete individual or group".[79]

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[75] A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", 1986, 68.
[76] A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", 1986, 71.
[77] P. G. HIEBERT – R. D. SHAW - T. TIENOU, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 1999, 133.
[78] J. PONNIAH, "Popular Religious Practices as Occasions for Inter-Religious Dialogue" (2010), 48.
[79] F.A. PASTOR, "Popular Religion", 850.

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S. Arulsamy, an Indian author, says that religious sentiments are not simply a quest for interior life. It is not purely a matter of reason. It is intrinsically bound up with all areas of human life. The popular devotions are not only the expression of the desire in man *for* experiencing the Divine, but they are also the expression of the experience *of* the Divine that they already had. In other words, they are the practical and external manifestation of the religious experience, it is a practical celebration of the religious experience. The religious ambient of the popular devotions is a religious experience and action of here and now.[80] As unitary rational creatures who are composed of soul and matter, humans are naturally inclined to seek the external goods such as wealth and good reputation; goods of the body such as health and physical beauty; and the goods of the soul such as virtue and knowledge.[81] In the religious ambient of popular devotions the main concern is this worldly dimension of the human beings although they are considered, sometimes, in an irresponsible and unreasonable way.

Anand Amaladass says that popular devotions concern always the individual as the starting point with his pressing needs of day to day life. The prayers that are uttered in the popular devotions air the daily worries of the individual and the celebration of their faith guarantees an immediate response.[82] The people who practice popular devotions are not generally interested in an academic understanding of God or other eternal questions of human mind rather, in procuring a good and meaningful life. They want to guard themselves against the evil which disturbs their life constantly. These devotions are not based on contemplation and rational speculation but on practical results.[83] Lawrence Fernandes says:

> Popular religiosity is that religiosity of the people that bring to religion their day-to-day concerns and express it through rites

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80 S. ARULSAMY, "Popular Devotions: An Experience of the Divine", 1986, 59-60.

81 S. J. POPE, "Tradition and Innovation in Natural Law: A Thomistic Interpretation" (2010), 18.

82 A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", 1986, 67.

83 P. G. HIEBERT – R. D. SHAW - T. TIENOU, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 1999, 84.

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> and rituals, which emerge from their culture and which have strong sensory, emotive and material aspect and values. This does not mean that people involved in popular religion are not concerned with the other world of life hereafter; it means only that their main preoccupation may at times be the concerns of this world, not denying their desire to have a good life, even life after death.[84]

Thus, it is clear from the above statements of the authors that the religious ambient of the popular devotions is charged with the day to day problems of the common people and is vibrant with the here and now accounts of religious experience.

1.2.3. Popular Devotions and Worship

The religious sentiments of awe, fear, dependence, remorse, etc., were expressed through some forms of oral utterances and actions, in all the cultures. These became the channels of communications to the hidden power that guide the courses of life. Thus the feeling of ambiguity and uncertainty that the people suffered in their life or the mystery dimension of their life they overcame by some counter mysterious acts. The popular devotions appear to be very attractive here because they respond to all the concrete problems of life through the performance of a cult.[85] If the popular religiosity is the first form of religion, then the popular devotions have been the first form of worship.[86] In this religious ambient, the religious expressions do not remain confined to some purely spiritual or otherworldly realm but can be seen in the concrete, physical realms. According to Lawrence Fernandes, the vibrancy of popular religiosity emerges precisely from the copious use of lights, sounds, colors, fragrances and legitimate use

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[84] L. FERNANDES, "Towards an Understanding of Popular Religiosity. From a Field Study in Karnataka" (2010), 38.

[85] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Paul: Commissioned to teach 'all nations' the worship of the 'unknown God' through Jesus Christ" (2008), 55.

[86] G. CHOONDAL, "Cathchesis Through Popular Devotion", in *Word & Worship* 2 (2010), 81.

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of bodily expressions in the act of worship. While the official religions or classical traditions treasure silence and treat the body with contempt, popular religiosity treats these human realities with reverence and provides a space for their adequate expression. The prayers and rituals of the people in popular religion are animated by many bodily gestures and expressions especially the rituals of penance and thanksgiving.[87]

Special efficacy is attributed to sacred formulae, *mantras* (magic words), and other religious rites. The people in general who go to the centers of popular devotions believe that they would receive their desired benefits beyond the involvement of their free will. To obtain the desired benefits they take some vows and perform it, recite some prayers without break for some days or some hours, visit the centers of devotions certain fixed number of days, light candles before the statues of the saints, deities, and so on.[88]

Speaking about the rituals Faber, in one of his articles takes note of various reactions from various authors:

> Three things strike me when examining the literature. In the first place: in the early psychoanalytic publications, especially those of Freud and Jung, ritual has a negative connotation. Freud [...] associated rituals with obsessions and Jung [...] saw them as defense mechanisms in threatening encounters with the numinous. Secondly, psychotherapy has, in recent decades, given more attention and approval to ritual. And thirdly Erikson in a well-known essay *Ontology of Ritualization in Man* [...], has developed the vision that ritual forms an essential element in a person's achievement of "basic trust", which he believes is essential to a person's sense of well-being.[89]

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87 L. FERNANDES, "Towards an Understanding of Popular Religiosity. From a Field Study in Karnataka", (2010), 40.

88 J. NEUNER, "Popular devotions: theological reflections", 1986, 36.

89 H. FABER, "The Meaning of Ritual in Liturgy", in H. G. HEIMBROCK & H. B. BOUDEWIJNSE (Eds.) *Current Studies on Rituals. Perspectives for the psychology of religion,* Editions Rodopi B. V., Amsterdam-Atlanta 1990, 43.

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After going through the affirmations of various authors, Faber states that rituals are necessary for the human beings to balance and console them in their feelings of insecurity and fear as they confront a complex world in them and outside them, beyond their control. The rituals provide the human beings a basic trust and security in all their ambiguities. Human mind always suffer the problem of inconsistency. The rituals either conditions the mind negatively by fear and compulsion or encourage the human mind promising the support of the hidden power in the ritual that is performed.[90] Like a child who does lot of performances to make sure the care and protection of the mother and please her, 'human ritualizing behavior' urges him to do various performances to please a 'worshiping community' or to assure its care and protection.[91]

The religious ambient of popular devotions provide the devotees an occasion to pour out all their religious sentiments of fear, helplessness, repentance, trust and surrender. The worship patterns of the popular devotions take care of the human needs in their integrity and therefore, the religious ambient of the popular devotions give an integral religious satisfaction to the devotees.

1.3. DIMENSIONS OF POPULAR DEVOTIONS

In the book, '*Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*', the authors say that the culture consists of an organization of life based on some belief systems which are made up of three interacting dimensions. They are cognitive, affective and transcendental dimensions. The religion, they say, as an essential part of culture reflects these dimensions. The cognitive dimension includes deep religious beliefs and knowledge shared by the members of a group. The affective dimension consists of the expressions of joy, sorrow, fear, awe, and so on. The affective dimension remain as a powerful protective wall for

[90] H. FABER, "The Meaning of Ritual in Liturgy", 1990, 45.
[91] H. FABER, "The Meaning of Ritual in Liturgy", 1990, 49.

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the belief systems by providing emotional support to their truthfulness. The transcendental dimension is the scope of a cultural or religious system which remain as a judge of the people in their being, doing and saying.[92] We verify here the dimensions of the popular devotions.

1.3.1. Socio-Cultural Dimensions

William James says that for an ordinary religious believer, "his religion has been made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fixed forms by imitation, and retained by habit".[93] This flow of religious tradition and culture to the new generation will go on smoothly when they are not challenged by a foreign one or until the religious tradition and culture are beneficial to all the members of a given society. The basic human nature respects a proper balance between the love of the self, family, and friends, and the love for the society promoting the common good of all especially that of its weakest members.[94] But, if their religious tradition and culture have failed to satisfy the various human needs of every member or if they encounter with another system of living and believing which seem to have a contextual appeal, then, there emerges a thesis anti-thesis encounter in search of a new mode of living and believing.

According to Anand Amaladass, popular devotions originate from a living dialectic between the social situation of the common people and their religious forms of faith and institutions which have a strong mutual influence.[95] The rise of *bhakti* movements in Indian religious tradition is a good example in this context. The aboriginal people of the Indus valley civilization who were called Dravidians were outside the socio-political and religious system of Vedic Religion. They were considered as 'untouchables' and 'outcasts' and lived doing the so called menial works in the society.[96] Later the Dravidians were concentrated in the south India and their

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92 P. G. HIEBERT – R. D. SHAW - T. TIENOU, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 1999, 36-37.

93 W. JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,2002, 11.

94 S. J. POPE, "Tradition and Innovation in Natural Law: A Thomistic Interpretation", 18.

95 A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", 1986, 69.

96 History of Hinduism, www.allaboutreligion.org/history-of... , visited on 05-05-2010.

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religiosity was 'popular' in character.[97] In the course of time, the religion of the Aryans blending with the cult of the pre-Aryan population spread all over India developed into what is known as Hinduism today.[98] It is from the non-Aryan people, particularly the Dravidians of South India, Hinduism received the concepts of incarnations and the personal God.[99] The doctrine of transmigration is thought to have been introduced by the inhabitants of Ganges valley.[100] Being influenced by the popular religiosity of the Dravidians, the Brahmins who settled in south India reinterpreted the Upanishads with anthropological concerns.[101]

Thus, we can observe that the social situation of the common people has given rise to a new religious language and new forms of the expressions of faith. These religious expressions, sometimes, were reactions to the abstract and elite type of religious language of the time and above all, against the attitude that prevailed in that milieu in the name of religion towards common people. The common people who gather in an ambient of popular devotions reflect their longing to participate, directly with a more spontaneous, more emotional or experimental way, in a form of religion, in order to cope with the depersonalization that they experience in a mechanized and unjustly stratified society.[102] The use of another language besides Sanskrit, for example, in the ambient of popular Hinduism, the inclusion of women saints and even non-Brahmins in the accepted list of saints are really pointers to particular social situation that reflects the then prevalent conflicts in society among different groups in India.[103] Even today, in many parts of the world, the people are fighting and dying to

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97 B. GRIFFITHS, "Hinduism", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, 1130.

98 B. GRIFFITHS, "Hinduism", 1123-1124.

99 B. GRIFFITHS, "Hinduism", 1130.

100 B. GRIFFITHS, "Hinduism", 1124.

101 Ramanuja, for example, a Tamil Brahmin of the 11th century A. D., contented that, the supreme Being, the Brahman, had essentially a personal character and a personal relationship to his worshipers. In opposition to Shankara he maintained that the way of knowledge (*Jnana marga*) was inferior to the way of devotion (*Bhakti marga*), in B. GRIFFITHS, "Hinduism", 1128.

102 L. FERNANDES, "Towards an Understanding of Popular Religiosity. From a Field Study in Karnataka" (2010), 38.

103 A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", 1986, 69.

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affirm and defend their religious identity as the deepest element of their personhood. Michael Amaladoss states that the religious ambient of the popular devotions reveals a new way of living and expressing the religious sentiments, being identified with more than one religious identities, with a spontaneous desire for a culture of peace and religious harmony.[104]

Authors have also observed that popular devotions are spontaneous religious expressions of a socio-cultural group distinct from a collective or individual prayer tradition.[105] They are in accordance with the social nature of man and they provide mutual encouragement and support in the living out of one's faith to which they give public testimony. The characteristic of popular devotions is that they give importance for emotions and sentiments.[106] As emotions add energy to the motivation of an individual, popular devotions give the group enthusiasm to meet the demands of religion. They reinforce the faith of the people in a particular culture.[107]

History of religions show that the social and cultural factors of human communities are a determining element in the formation of the religious sentiments of the people. Therefore a study on popular devotions of a particular human community need to consider the social and cultural factors of that community.

1.3.2. Political and Economic Dimensions

The origin of the religion can be traced in the context of oppression. Either religion is an effort to please the angry oppressor or it is a search for a more powerful force who can conquer their oppressor. This search for the supreme power, to liberate themselves from various kinds of oppressions, ended up in monotheism for some. However, the common man continues to suffer oppression and religion also sometimes takes up the role of an

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104 M. AMALADOSS, "Double Religious identities and Pilgrim Centres", in *Word & Worship* 1 (2010), 5.

105 A. PUTHUSSERIL, "Cultural Need for Popular Devotions", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 569.

106 J. SALDANHA, "Popular Religiosity and faith", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 45.

107 A. PUTHUSSERIL, "Cultural Need for Popular Devotions", 1986, 569.

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oppressor in some human communities. The oppressors dictate to them what they should believe and how they should express their faith. But faith is a spontaneous expression, like the flow of a river, which moves with the ever dynamic human life. If it is blocked with a structure, it will open a new path abandoning the established path. The established path is like the rocky old ways of a brook. But when a new path is open, it is like a land slide, there is an enormous movement of the masses with the flow. Here we can see the reason for the origin of popular devotions from its political and economic dimensions.[108]

Yvon Ambroise, in his article says:

> In the society there is the 'elite' group who are rich, educated and call themselves intellectuals and cultured. They also wield socio-economic, political and cultural power in the society. The religion they adopt and practice stands often in contrast to the religion of the poor, and the illiterate, the so-called uncultured and emotional masses following superstitious beliefs and practices.[109]

Michael R. Candelaria, in his book, after making a scientific analysis of the political and economic situation in all over Latin America says that, "oppression conditions the religious practices, the myths, and the symbolic belief systems of the poor. The popular sectors live out their religiosity within the oppressed and exploited situation of underdevelopment and poverty."[110] It is important to keep in mind that religions are always in a historical context. They are constantly changing according to the internal and external forces and theological pulls which are socially and politically patronized.[111] When the people, who are marginalized, confronted by their

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108 J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Paul: Commissioned to teach 'all nations' the worship of the 'unknown God' through Jesus Christ" (2008), 55.

109 Y. AMBROISE, "Cultural Need for Popular Devotions", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 572.

110 M. R. CANDELARIA, *Popular Religion and Liberation: The Dilemma of Liberation Theology*, State University of New York, Albany (NY) 1990, x.

111 P. G. HIEBERT – R. D. SHAW - T. TIENOU, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 1999, 36-37.

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subordinate social situation of misery, unemployment, hunger and social and psychological insecurity, they turn to the ambient of popular devotions in which they find hope to continue their living. Popular devotions sometimes become a symbol of protest against oppression and exploitation. They invoke the intercession of the deity against their adversaries and they go ahead with their life expecting with a positive hope that the adversaries will be punished.[112]

Religion does not exist for itself rather it serves a clearly and consciously defined purpose of making people human and the world a peaceful home. But the history of religion reveals how religion also degenerated into the means of oppression and exploitation. Popular religion here, can be characterized as a social practice of people's struggle to be free. They are looking forward to an open space free from oppression, control and bureaucratic institutions devoid of creativity.[113] It functions polemically in the religious ambient where the religion of the powerful and the rich claims hegemony.[114]

It is self evident that people in general, in a time of frustration, come down from the abstract formal operations to the concrete level. If the basic needs are met somewhat satisfactorily, one may be able to philosophize or theologize. But when one is constantly shocked by trials and adversities, the cognitive faculties regress to concrete categories because emotions turn us egocentric and restricted.[115] The cry and sigh for the concrete needs in the religious ambient of the popular devotions also express the present helpless situation of a group of people in the society for which the political and economic factors also play a considerable role. Popular devotion "is a cry of

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112 J. PONNIAH, "Popular Religious Practices as Occasions for Inter-Religious Dialogue", (2010), 49-50.

113 H. SHIJDEWIND, "Popular Religion, Spirituality and Liberation", in J. V. NIEUWENHOVE – B. K. GOLDEWIJK (eds.), *Popular Religion, Liberation and Contextual Theology,* 1991, 199.

114 J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Paul: Commissioned to teach 'all nations' the worship of the 'unknown God' through Jesus Christ" (2008), 54.

115 L. PINTO M., "The Psychology of Popular Devotions" in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 313.

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hope of the people who desire to live a life together in fraternity, justice and equality".[116]

A study on popular devotions will reveal that the people who find shelter in the religious ambient of popular devotions most often are economically poor and politically oppressed. The fraternal communion and equality they experience in the religious ambient of popular devotions give them the inner strength to go ahead with a positive hope.

1.3.3. Psychological Dimensions

M. Loretta, in her article, "The Psychology of Popular Devotions", states that a childlike, innocent and amiable face of religion stands out prominently in popular devotions. While the institutionalized structures of prayers and rites are just attended like ritual and routine, the devotional practices are celebrated with lot of feelings and fervor.[117] Though no much studies are available particularly on popular devotions, we have some valuable insights that explain the mental attitudes that are expressed in the ambient of popular devotions. Most psychologists speak about the significance of the early years of human life in the development of religious consciousness in the human individual.

William James excludes all cultural dimensions of religion – myths, rituals, institutions, etc., and he limits it to the feelings, acts and experiences of the individual.[118] Erik Erikson explains how an individual's religious experience is conditioned by his relationship with his parents and especially with his mother. As a result, he formulates a psychology of religion in which he states that the religious resources of the society helps the individual to overcome the crisis of the adult life and regain his lost ego strengths which, in his childhood, he had gained from his parents.[119] Faber relates all the popular expressions of piety to the primary feelings of a child

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116 S. ARULSAMY, "Popular Devotions: An Experience of the Divine", 1986, 60.

117 L. PINTO M., "The Psychology of Popular Devotions", 1986, 305.

118 J. Z. SMITH (ed.), "Psychology of religion", in *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion* 1996, 903.

119 J. Z. SMITH (ed.), "Psychology of religion", 904.

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towards its mother or perhaps to the father and says that "it undoubtedly deserves closer investigation".[120] The use of religious objects, which is an essential part of popular devotions, gives a feeling of safety and security to the devotees. The use of images and statues give the devotees the feeling that the persons, whom they represent are really present in their midst.[121]

Walter Houston Clark speaks about the characteristics of the religion of the childhood. He says that in this religious ambient, the ideas are accepted on authority. In this sense obedience is hailed as a great virtue. Since the ideas are accepted on authority, the devotees do not reflect about the things they do. They believe and accept the omniscience of their leaders or guides. In this religious atmosphere, the devotee is most often egocentric. Each one cries for one's own personal need than that of others. Anthropomorphism is another characteristic. The devotees superimpose on their deity the feelings either they expect from their elders or according to what they experienced from them. The religion of the childhood is verbalized and ritualistic. A great deal of what we see in this religious sphere is simply the repeating of the phrases by rote or the performance of religious rites. This religion is learned through imitation, suggestion, fear and compulsion. The author also speaks of the 'wonder', that the devotees express at the experience of the momentary delight, as the characteristic of the religion of the childhood.[122]

A closer investigation into the religious ambient of popular devotions will reveal that the characteristics of the religion of the childhood are celebrated there. The attitude of pleasing the elders and authorities, who seem to be very strict and conditional, to be accepted as a good girl or boy, conditions also the human relationship with God. The devotees, in their extreme distress, undertake many exaggerated rituals to please God.[123] When they are in utter helplessness to please the conditional God-consciousness, they search some intermediaries and the popular devotions provide some points of references to which or to whom the people can go without a feeling of

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120 H. FABER, *Psychology of Religion*, SCM Press Ltd., Great Britain 1976, 166.

121 H. FABER, *Psychology of Religion,*1976, 166.

122 W. H. CLARK, *The Psychology of Religion*, The MacMillan Company, New York 1958, 96 -107.

123 L. PINTO M., "The Psychology of Popular Devotions", 1986, 314.

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unworthiness. A trust in the intermediaries is systematically created or handed down by oral or written propaganda.[124]

A most important factor in the religious ambient of popular devotion is a feeling of security, trust and dependence in times of total helplessness. The devotees feel that they can go to this religious ambient without the fear of being rejected since these centers function beyond any structural stipulations.

1.4. CONCLUSION

Popular devotion is a phenomenon that is present in almost all the great religious traditions in the world. The very fact that a definition on 'religion' and 'religious experience' faces acute subjective objective dichotomy, reveals how important it is to consider the religious expressions in the popular religious ambient seriously, to bring into light the liberative value of religion and religious experience. The dynamism and religious fervor that we observe in the popular religious ambient calls for a serious study and evaluation on how the established systems of worship help the people to cherish their religious sentiments as a positive help in their daily life. The religious sentiments are necessarily conditioned by the space and time. Therefore, the particular religious expressions, which are celebrated in the religious ambient of popular devotions, carry the religious sentiments of a given people more effectively than corporate religious expressions. Human beings are living in this world as a community with a culture and with a socio-political organization. Since the religious sentiments are from and for the human beings in this world, all the dimensions of popular devotions are to be studied and evaluated to get an integral picture of the religious sentiments that are celebrated in the ambient of popular devotions. Economy, as an essential thing for the survival and a standard of life in this world, has a very strong influence in the human religious sentiments and their expressions.

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[124] Y. AMBROISE, "Cultural Need for Popular Devotions", 1986, 575.

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CHAPTER 2

CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS

2.0. INTRODUCTION

Catholic Church has witnessed the presence of various types of devotional prayers and practices, alongside with the official Liturgy, throughout its history. However, Catholic popular devotions, in its strict sense can be said to have an origin in the encounter of Christianity with the non-Christian religions and cultures[1], as a result of an effort to express the Christian faith using the religious symbols and rites of the particular religions and cultures or as a result of an effort to respond to their religious needs. Although God is the ultimate object of devotions, he alone is worthy of cult, yet "the boundless extent of the divine riches open innumerable avenues of approach to God and thus provide a basis for a great variety of devotions".[2]

In his article on "Devotion", David Kinsley gives us a description on what is devotion:

> In the religious sphere, devotion is ardent affection, zealous attachment, piety, dedication, reverence, faithfulness, respect, awe, attentiveness, loyalty, fidelity, or love for or to some object, person, spirit, or deity deemed sacred, holy, or venerable. Devotion may also be thought as action, such as worshiping, praying, and making religious vows.[3]

J. W. Curran gives us a theological reflection on 'devotion' with the help of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. He says:

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[1] S. GALILEA, " Popular Christian Religiosity", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 11, 441.

[2] M. PARITHIRICKAL, "Popular Devotions in the Middle Ages", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 413.

[3] D. KINSLEY, "Devotion", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 4, 321.

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> According to him [St. Thomas Aquinas], devotion is an act of the habit or virtue of religion, that virtue by which man is inclined to pay to God the worship to which He is entitled by right. [...] Devotion is the first act of the virtue of religion and is defined as: promptness or readiness of will in the service of God. Concretely, this means the perfect offering of the will itself to God, [...] offered to God in worship. Just as by adoration the body of man is offered to God, so by devotion the will of man is offered to God.[4]

"In the religious usage, the term 'devotion' has three different but interrelated senses", says P. F. Mulhern, in his article. He continues:

> In its most basic meaning it is the will to serve and worship God readily and zealously. [...] Then, in a derivative sense, the term came to be applied to the effect of devotion i.e., to the fervor of feeling, the affective "glow," that often accompanies or is the effect of religious activity proceeding from the devotion of the will. Finally, by a further derivation, the term came to designate an instrumental cause often operative in evoking or stimulating devotion in the other two senses, namely, a centering of attention and cultic activity on a special object [...].[5]

Catholic popular devotions could be defined as a collective name for the prayers and practices which originated from private initiatives and were not accepted as official liturgy of the Church although many of them are highly recommended and approved by the ecclesiastical authority.[6] They comprise the many forms of Christian worship through which vast sectors of Christians give expression to their religious life who, according to Segundo Galilea, 'have minimal formal religious education, who have achieved a deep symbiosis between their religious and cultural behaviors and who

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[4] J. W. CURRAN, "Devotion", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, 832.
[5] P. F. MULHERN, "Devotions, Religious", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, 833.
[6] B. RAAS, *Popular Devotions: Making Popular Religious Practices more Potent Vehicles of Spiritual Growth*, Divine Word Publications, Manila 1992, 14.

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emphasize the role of religion with regard to their temporal or material needs'.[7]

The devotional practices, that have the scope of contemplating the "essential mysteries of Christianity and the totality of the life of the Church"[8] are warmly commended by the Church and the Church encourages it with properly organized forms. They are called 'public devotions'. Devotion to Sacred Heart is an example for this. Rather, 'particular devotions' are limited to some centers, persons or objects which embrace only peripheral aspects of the mysteries of faith. The mode of the practice of these devotions change from place to place. "They may be termed as private devotions and are of greater or lesser value to individuals depending on personal needs and dispositions."[9]

Anand Amaladass says that it is self evident from the history of religions that the sophisticated theories of religious experience have their roots in the daily life of the individual in which he struggled to go ahead facing the limitations of his personal nature against the challenging nature and its positive and negative forces around him. Some religious sentiments encouraged him to go ahead. The encounter of individual religious sentiments complimented each other and a common religious attitude and a consequent religious experience became the heritage of a particular collective individual. Though we do not attempt to reduce theology into the reflection on popular devotions, yet we can say that the popular devotional practices could have a creative and even a normative influence on the official theology itself.[10]

After analyzing 'the phenomenon of popular devotions' in general from a philosophical perspective in the first chapter, we would like to make, in this chapter, a particular analysis on the Catholic popular devotions with the

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[7] S. GALILEA, "Popular Christian Religiosity", 440; J. NEUNER, "Popular devotions: theological reflections", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 32.

[8] P. F. MULHERN, "Devotions, Religious", 833.

[9] P. F. MULHERN, "Devotions, Religious", 833.

[10] A. AMALADASS, "Theology and Popular devotion", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 70.

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help of a research into the various expressions of popular devotions in the Bible and of Catholic popular devotions in the liturgical tradition of the Church. We also study the responses of the teaching authority of the Church on popular devotions and the responses of some theologians in general on popular devotions. We specifically consider the theological responses of Karl Rahner and Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

2.1. POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN THE BIBLE

Although we start here with a title 'popular devotions in the Bible', we do not intend to state that there existed the popular devotional practices, in the biblical tradition, as it is found today with all its particular characteristics. It will be surely an anachronism. We only want to state that if we examine the religious context that is pictured in the Bible, we can very well observe in it the religious attitudes that govern the religious ambient of popular devotions. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, for example, which later became a pillar of the worship tradition of Israel, carry all the religious sentiments of the pilgrimages of our times which come under the consideration of popular devotions.

The historical and geographical context in which the Israelites found themselves as nomads influenced their theological reflections. To overcome their feeling of insecurity and fear in a foreign land as a social minority, they made pilgrimages to the Temple of the Lord which was their point of reference and they felt at home in the temple as a communion of people who share the same religious sentiments. It would be the same historical and geographical context that inspired Israel to develop a religious consciousness that "she is 'a stranger', 'a guest' in this land, and that she depends totally on the Lord."[11] This total dependence on God strengthened them in their 'exodus' and 'exile'.[12]

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[11] R. RATCHAHARNATHAN J., "Pilgrimage – A Popular Devotion?", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 288.

[12] Exodus 15, 12; Deuteronomy 7, 7-8; Jeremiah 2, 2.

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At the same time, whenever this unconditional dependence on God became irresponsible and childish, the prophets denounced it vehemently. Isaiah and Jeremiah speak powerful words against a cultic and ego centric spirituality, without a consequent actualization of the symbolic expressions of the cults, in the daily life of the believers.[13] Amos also turned against the hypocrisy of worship and the false hope of the devotees.[14] The prophets wanted to protect the dignity of God and the dignity of the human person. They wanted to insist that only by protecting and respecting the human dignity Yahweh is glorified: "This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God!"[15]

2.1.1. Popular Devotions in the Old Testament

Due to the semi-nomadic culture of the Patriarchs of Israel, they confronted various human communities with diverse world views. Although, in the sphere of religion, they had a very strong monotheistic tradition, their religion assimilated many religious elements of the human communities they confronted especially, from the Canaanites. They include, "titles of God, temples and sanctuaries, pilgrimages, 'prophetical' manifestations, possibly a New Year liturgy, certainly its cycle of agricultural feasts, sacrificial forms, etc."[16]

It is self evident that since the Bible is not a book of history rather a book of the history of salvation, the biblical accounts always concentrate on the provident protection of the God of Israel against all other nations and their gods. As a result we are not able to get a detailed account of the popular religious practices of the people of Israel apart from the religious consciousness proposed by the elders and prophets. Throughout the Bible we can see a zeal for the glory of the God of Israel and there is no tolerance with foreign religious sentiments or gods. Since we do not have much books

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[13] Isaiah 1, 11-15; Jeremiah 7, 2-15.
[14] Amos 5, 21-24.
[15] Micah 6, 7-8.
[16] L. LEGRAND, "Jesus and the Popular religion of his Times", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 298.

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available to make a research on the presence of the popular religions in the Old Testament period, we depend on an article, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel"[17] written by Rui de Menezes, for the purpose of a short description on the popular devotions in the Old Testament.

Rui de Menezes begins the article by stating that "the Biblical authors and the redactors have at times excised or avoided the description of such matters lest they prove a pitfall to the readers". According to him, a careful reading of the narrative parts of the Pentateuch as well as the historical books will give us some information "here and there by the prophets who were censuring the people for their practice of superstition on the religious cults of the neighboring nations". The author divides the article into five parts in which he narrates various religious practices and attitudes that go in line with the popular religious expressions that we can find in various cultures.

The first part of his article speaks of the various foreign gods who entered into the religion of Israel at the popular level.[18] Among all the gods that threatened the Yahwism, the important one was Baal with his consort Asherah. The religion of Baal seemed to be more attractive and to answer better the daily needs of the Israelites who had adopted the agrarian way of life of the people in the land of Canaan. Baal was in fact the god of fertility. The prophets and sometimes the kings of Israel denounced the worship of other gods with powerful words and sword.[19]

In the second part the author speaks about the cult prostitution which, he says after an elaborate study of the Biblical history, was a "wide spread and important phenomenon in the popular religion of Israel that shook the very foundation of Yahwism".[20] The cult prostitution was considered a religious rite that formed a part of the fertility cult. In the Bible we notice that it was

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[17] R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 234-262.

[18] R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", 1986, 234-238.

[19] 1Kings, 18, 20-40; Hosea 4, 12-14; 10, 5; Amos 5, 4-6; 2Kings, 10, 18-27, etc.

[20] R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", 1986, 238-240.

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condemned by the prophet Hosea, Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy.[21]

The third part of the article studies the various types of occult arts that were quite popular in Israel, especially during the period of monarchy.[22] The most exhaustive list of the multiple forms of sorcery is found in the Book of Deuteronomy which legislate a complete prohibition of these practices.[23] The author gives a long list of terms for divination and the types of divination that are found in the Bible.[24] He concludes the part three of his article like this:

> One could say that even though the Deuteronomist legislator forbade all forms of divination and substituted prophecy for them [...] Deuteronomy is [first of all,] a late phenomenon in the history of Israel. Secondly, neither this legislation nor the Josianic reform was able to root out divination completely from Israel. Thirdly, the practice of Urim and Thummim or, which might be the same, the casting lots, to discern God's will outlived the Deuteronomic legislation down to the New Testament times.[25]

Rui de Menezes deals with the phenomenon of human sacrifice in the Bible in the fourth part of his article.[26] He has identified sixteen texts from the Old Testament which directly or indirectly has a reference to the human sacrifice.[27]

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21 Deuteronomy 23, 19; Hosea 4, 12b-14; Jeremiah 3, 6-11.

22 R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", 1986, 240-252.

23 Deuteronomy 18, 9-12.

24 For example, augury, astrology, hepatoscopy, Leconomancy, hydromancy, belomancy, casting lots, Ephod, Teraphim, Oneiromancy, Necromancy, sooth saying, sorcery, etc. Augury was a Greek and Roman practice of foretelling the future events by watching and interpreting the flight, chattering or singing of birds.

25 R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", 1986, 252.

26 R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", 1986, 253-254.

27 2 Kings, 3, 27; 17, 31; Deuteronomy 12, 31; Judges 11, 30-39; Leviticus 18, 21; 20, 2-6; Exodus 13, 12-15; Jeremiah 7, 31; 19, 5; Ezekiel 23, 37-39, etc.

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The fifth part of the article enumerates a few superstitious practices which the Bible forbids. In this part the author explains how, even the very small and ordinary life of the people are stipulated by the law. He also picks up from the Old Testament various passages to prove how even the official religious attitudes and customs are superstitious when we look at them from today's religious consciousness.[28]

The study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, make it clear that the phenomenon of popular religion, that we see in all the religious traditions, is also present with all its characteristics in the religious tradition of Israel. Whenever the religious tradition went up in the air with too much transcendence, the common people brought it home in their own way even following the other religious traditions which, they felt better to serve their purpose.

2.1.2. Popular Devotions in the New Testament

Some authors are of the opinion that the Gospels and the New Testament writings in general resound the religious attitudes that are predominant in the religious ambient of popular devotions.[29] This is clear from the insistence on the practical side of religion[30] even by denying the institutionalized expressions. We can read from the Gospels seven episodes which speak of Jesus who intervenes in the lives of the people to cure them

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[28] R. DE MENEZES, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel", 1986, 255-257.

[29] J. C. MANALEL, "Popular Devotions and Authentic Christianity", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 589.

[30] "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house." Luke 6, 46-49. A similar message we can read in Matthew 7, 21-23: "'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only 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.'"

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and liberate them even going beyond the literal prohibitions of the Sabbath.[31] He said categorically that the observation of Sabbath is made for man and the man shall not become a blind slave of the Sabbath forgetting the basic human principles.[32] "For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working'."[33] The very prayer Jesus taught contains all the characteristics of the religious attitudes of Jesus and his disciples which are much in line with the religious attitudes of the people who gather around the centers of popular devotions today. The representatives of the official religion were always challenged by Jesus and his disciples and the religious authorities were doubtful and even against the religious attitudes of Jesus and his disciples.[34]

L. Legrand in his article "Jesus and the Popular Religion of His Times" speaks about the religious atmosphere of Judaism which favored the needs of popular religiosity:

> It must [...] be borne in mind that Judaism, in the days of Jesus and still nowadays, did not present a clear cut orthodoxy. It was open to various forms which gave place to a wide range of religious sensibilities from the nationalistic fervor of the Zealots to the elitist desert spirituality of the Essenes, from the cultic concern and the conservatism of Sadducees to the progressivism of the Pharisees. Within that range there could be currents better attuned to the needs of popular religiosity.[35]

The author brings into light the existence of two religious sensibilities within the same spiritual tradition of Judaism. He says that although no clear cut orthodoxy was present in Judaism, the Sadducees, the priestly party,

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[31] Mark 1, 21-28; 29-31; 3, 1-6; John 5, 1-18; 9, 1-16; Luke 13, 10-17; 14, 1-6.
[32] Mark 2, 27.
[33] John 5, 16-17.
[34] J. C. MANALEL, "Popular Devotions and Authentic Christianity", 1986, 589.
[35] L. LEGRAND, "Jesus and the Popular Religion of his Times", 1986, 298.

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were the representatives of the official religion and the Pharisees represented the popular religious attitudes: "Whereas the Sadducees were aristocratic and clerical and the Essenes, elitists and aloof to the point of eremitism, the Pharisees issued from the laity, were close to the people and their aspirations. [... They] represent a 'liberal' current, characterized by vitality and flexibility."[36]

The religious sensibility of the Pharisees embraced the belief in the resurrection of the dead, angels as mediators, and signs and miracles.[37] Although Jesus makes strong remarks against Pharisees and Sadducees, yet, the author says that we can observe that when we consider the issues that divided Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus was sharing the religious sentiments of the Pharisees:

> He believes in the Resurrection and does not hesitate to engage in discussion about it with the Sadducees: Matt 23, 23-32 could be a good sample of Pharisee literature. He accepts also the existence of angels, of devils and exorcisms and he does not hesitate to give devils their popular names: not only the Evil One or the devil but also Satan, Beelzebub, Legion [...][38]

Jesus was always moving along with the people of simple faith and responding to their religious sentiments. Although the miracles were not much encouraged by the official religion, his pastoral life was accompanied by miracles of healing and exorcism. He was thus responding to the existential needs of the people. For the official Yahwism, "wonders worked by men came under the suspicion of magic and sorcery [Exod 22, 17; Deut 19, 9-10; Lev 20, 6-27]".[39] He made pilgrimages to Jerusalem not only for the three pilgrimages prescribed by the Law[40] but also for the other feasts.

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[36] L. LEGRAND, "Jesus and the Popular Religion of his Times", 1986, 298.
[37] Acts of the Apostles 23, 8.
[38] L. LEGRAND, "Jesus and the Popular Religion of his Times", 1986, 299.
[39] L. LEGRAND, "Jesus and the Popular Religion of his Times", 1986, 300.
[40] Deuteronomy 16, 16.

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At the same time, we see that Jesus does not keep the common people in the joy of the momentary satisfaction of here and now.[41] In him we see a healthy equilibrium between the 'already' and the 'not yet' dimensions of the religious experience. The miracles he performed and the parables that he uttered were constantly challenging the listeners to this equilibrium that he personally experienced within himself.[42]

In the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* we read:

> [...] the signs of personal piety are already to be found among the first generation of Christians. Inspired by the Jewish tradition, they recommended following the example of incessant prayer of Jesus and St. Paul (cf. *Luke* 18, 1; *Rom* 12, 12; *1Thes* 5, 17.), and of beginning and ending all things with an act of thanksgiving (cf. *1Cor* 10, 31; *1Thes* 2, 13; *Col* 3, 17). The pious Israelite began the day praising and giving thanks to God. In the same spirit, he gave thanks for all his actions during the day. Hence, every joyful or sorrowful occasion gave rise to an expression of praise, entreaty, or repentance. The Gospels and the writings of the New Testament contain invocations of Jesus, signs of Christological devotion, which were repeated spontaneously by the faithful outside the context of Liturgy.[43]

A partial analysis of the religious context in the New Testament period with the help of some articles make us clear that side by side with the institutionalized religious worship, there existed some popular religious practices and the attitudes of Jesus and his disciples were very positive to

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[41] For example, we read in the Gospel of John 6, 26-66, how Jesus encountered the people who were taken up by and searching the things of the world. He was so plain and clear that some people left him and never went about him.

[42] L. LEGRAND, "Jesus and the Popular Religion of his Times", 1986, 302.

[43] CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRAMENTS, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, L R C Publications, Kochi 2002, 18-19. [Hereafter referred to as *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*]

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these popular beliefs[44] and some of these popular beliefs which were considered superstitious by some, later became the pillars of faith. For example, the Sadducees had always sarcastic remarks on the faith in the resurrection of the dead. But for Christians it is the fundamental religious truth. Although we cannot point out some popular devotions in the New Testament period in its strict sense of the term that we use today[45] we are convinced of the presence of the popular religious attitudes and consequent religious expressions.

2.2. POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN THE TRADITION OF THE CHURCH

In the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* we read: "Until the second century, expressions of popular piety, whether deriving from Jewish, Greco-Roman or other cultures, spontaneously came together in the Liturgy."[46] The *Directory* gives us a detailed report about how at various epochs of the ancient Church, the popular piety played an important role to sustain the faith life of the people in general. "Liturgy and popular piety, either conceptually or pastorally, did not oppose each other. Both concurred harmoniously in celebrating the one mystery of Christ, considered as a whole, and in sustaining the supernatural and moral life of the disciples of the Lord."[47]

"In the fourth and fifth centuries", the *Directory* continues,

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[44] It is noteworthy that Jesus was so open and positive to the other men who were religiously influencing the people in their own way, even though they did not share his direct companionship. Luke 9, 6-7 is an example for this : "John answered, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.' But Jesus said to him, 'Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.'"

[45] To our surprise St. Paul, who was very critical about all the external rituals without proper practical significance (He even spoke against the circumcision during the Jerusalem Council), was very strict to practice his devotion. For example in Acts of the Apostles 18, 18 we read of a devotional practice of St. Paul which is very similar to the devotional practices of the present day: "Paul, having stayed after this many more days, took his leave of the brothers, and sailed from there for Syria, together with Priscilla and Aquila. He shaved his head in Cenchreae, for he had a vow."

[46] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 19.

[47] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 19.

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> [...] a greater sense of the sacredness of times and places begins to emerge. Many of the local Churches, in addition to their recollection of the New Testament data concerning the *dies Domini*, the Easter festival and fasting (cf. *Mark* 2, 18-22), began to reserve particular days for the celebration of Christ's salvific mysteries (Epiphany, Christmas and Ascension), or to honour the memory of the martyrs on their *dies natalis* or to commemorate the passing of their Pastors on the anniversary of their *dies depositionis*, or to celebrate the sacraments, or to make a solemn undertaking in life.[48]

The *Directory* ends the historical analysis of the popular devotions from the first century of the Christian era to the sixth century remembering the remarkable contributions of Pope St. Gregory VII to the Liturgical renewal of the Church:

> Mention must be made for the pontificate of the great pastor and liturgist Pope St. Gregory VII (590-604), since it is regarded as an exemplary reference point for any fruitful relationship between the Liturgy and popular piety. Through the organization of processions, stations and rogations, Gregory the Great undertook a major Liturgical reform which sought to offer [...] structures which resonated with popular sensibilities while, at the same time, remaining securely based on the celebration of the divine mysteries.[49]

A quick look at the history of the popular piety in the beginning of the Church make us clear that during this period there was a fundamental relationship between Liturgy and popular piety. History shows that popular devotions were the effective means for the Church to let the people celebrate the pastoral mysteries of Christ. The faithful could make the celebrations of Christian faith their own in and through the practices of piety. The great

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[48] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 19.
[49] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 19-20.

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fathers of the Church like Jerome and Gregory of Nyssa were also convinced that devotions, devoid of ritualism and sentimentalism, dispose the devotees for a good Christian life.[50]

2.2.1. Popular Christianity of the Middle Ages

In his article on "Middle Ages" Karl Schnith says:

> In the widest sense the term denote the central section of the historical process taking place in three or more stages, whether this process is regarded as a progress, a decline or a cycle. The concept of a 'middle' epoch was implicitly known to Christian historical tradition, since the triple division of the Apostle Paul [...] which influenced later attempts to divide sacred history into periods. [...] The following are included among the characteristics of medieval culture: unitary world-view, transition from primitive tribal organization to political society, emergence of social classes, foundation of cities.[51]

The author also speaks about the reasons for the emergence of various changes in the human society in Europe during the 'middle ages' and how the convictions of the middle ages were overcome by an antithetic consciousness of the reality:

> The Middle Ages emerged in fact as a result of the historical symbiosis, in the period from about the 4th to the 8th century, of three cultural forces – Antiquity, Christianity, and Germanism. [...] the Middle Ages came to an end when men became conscious of the fragmentation of Western unity and harmony.[52]

The expansion of the Church, which occurred along with the expansion of the Roman empire, as a state religion, was not accepted by the new ethnic

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[50] R. RATCHAHARNATHAN J., "Pilgrimage – A Popular Devotion?", 1986, 291.
[51] K. SCHNITH, "Middle Ages", in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 4, 29.
[52] K. SCHNITH, "Middle Ages", in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 4, 29.

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groups in a positive spirit. Neither the Church could address them, especially the Germans, in an effective way. "The long struggle of the Church with the Germanic empire transformed the Church's external character. Its ancient image as 'the mother of all the living' gradually yielded to the medieval image that represented her as dominatrix, regina, and imperatrix."[53]

In the article, "Popular Devotions in the Middle Ages", the author speaks of the ordinary life of the ethnic groups in Germany in that time:

> Ordinary life of the Germanic people went on within the tribal confines without much concern for gods. But their extraordinary sense of fate kept them under pressure to have recourse to them. The gods were considered as partners in the fight against the personified fate. But if a god failed to be a 'friend in need' the client was ready to change his allegiance.[54]

In its struggle to address the religious need of the German ethnic groups, "the early medieval Church accented the divinity of Christ so strongly that a certain imbalance entered into its way of considering the Incarnate Logos".[55]

The religious attitude of the Germans favored very much the ancient Christian cult of saints but, with a shift of emphasis: "Whereas the early Church venerated the saints as fellow wayfarers who have succeeded in reaching their goal of heavenly glory, the Germanic peoples took them for superior miracle workers."[56]

However, towards the end of the middle ages, there emerged lot of religious Orders and they struggled to recapture the simplicity and humanness of Christianity. "Historians of spirituality tell us that sensible devotion to the humanity of Christ, and especially to the mysteries of his earthly life [...]

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[53] M. C. NALLY, "Middle Ages", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. 9, 815.
[54] M. PARITHIRICKAL, "Popular Devotions in the Middle Ages", 1986, 418.
[55] M. C. NALLY, "Middle Ages", 818.
[56] M. PARITHIRICKAL, "Popular Devotions in the Middle Ages", 1986, 418.

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was in a sense a discovery of the 12th and 13th centuries, above all by St. Bernard and St. Francis of Assisi."[57] Their life and activities had considerable impact on the Christian worship. They adopted simpler liturgical forms which were often close to the people and to their religious sentiments and expectations. From them, there arose various schools of spirituality and they inspired the day to day Christian life of the people.

The changes in the society at various levels during the middle ages, and the struggle of confronting the people with different world views, had their consequences in the Christian worship. The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* gives us valuable information about the changes in the attitudes and modes of Christian worship.

> Between the seventh and the fifteenth century, a decisive differentiation between Liturgy and popular piety began to emerge which gradually became more pronounced, ending eventually in a dualism of celebration. Parallel with the Liturgy, celebrated in Latin, a communitarian popular piety celebrated in the vernacular emerged.[58]

The following are some of the reasons which the document describes for the separation of the popular devotions from the Liturgy: 1) the idea that the laity were only the passive participants at the Liturgy which is celebrated by the clergy; 2) the marked distinction of the roles and the life styles in the Christian society between clergy, religious and the laity was reflected also in their life of prayer; 3) because of the lack of sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures from the part of the clergy, the structure and the symbolic language of the Liturgy was not properly understood and explained; 4) the diffusion of the apocryphal literature which contained 'many stories of miracles and episodic anecdotes' attracted the imagination of the common people; 5) because of the lack of proper catechetical formation and effective pastoral care, the faithful could not actively participate in the Liturgy and consequently, they turned to alternative cults and prayers; 6) an excessive

[57] M. PARITHIRICKAL, "Popular Devotions in the Middle Ages", 1986, 426.
[58] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 22.

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use of allegory on the meaning of the liturgical texts and rites often deviated the faithful from the understanding of the true nature of the Liturgy.[59]

The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* gives us an account of the many forms of popular piety that gradually emerged or developed during the middle ages:

> the organization of sacred performances depicting the mysteries celebrated during the liturgical year, especially those surrounding the salvific events of Christ's birth, his passion, death and resurrection;
>
> the participation of the faithful was encouraged by the emergence of poetry in the vernacular which was widely used in the popular piety;
>
> as a parallel, or even as alternative to many liturgical expressions, several devotional forms appeared; for example, various forms of Eucharistic adoration served to compensate for the rarity with which Holy communion was received; in the late middle ages, the rosary tended to substitute for the psalter; among the faithful, the pious exercises of Good Friday became a substitute for the Liturgy proper to that day;
>
> the growth in popular forms of devotion to Our Lady and the Saints: pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and to the tombs of the Apostles and martyrs, veneration of relics, litanies, and suffrage for the dead;
>
> the considerable development of the rites of blessing which, together with Christian elements, also reflected a certain response to a naturalistic sensibility as well to popular pre-Christian beliefs and practices;
>
> nucleuses of 'sacred times' based on popular practices were constituted. These were often marginal to the rhythm of the

[59] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 22.

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liturgical year: sacred or profane fair days, tridua, octaves, novenas, months devoted to particular popular devotions.[60]

As we go through the history of popular devotions during the middle ages, we can realize how those devotions served to alleviate the complexities and vacuums that affected the religious sentiments and religious needs of the people due to the encounter of different cultural groups especially in an air of domination. It becomes clear that each encounter of the human communities necessarily demands a discontinuity in order to facilitate an integrated continuity. However, the history also reveals that in this process of integration of human communities there is a danger of losing the integrity of the basic values that govern the smooth ongoing integral human progress. The same thing is true when we speak of an integral Christian spirituality.

2.2.2. Catholic Popular Devotions in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of Sacraments, in its document on popular devotions speaks of the liturgical renewal and the significant growth of the popular devotions in the nineteenth century, after the French revolution.[61] It also mentions about what was the objective of French revolution, that is, to eradicate the Christian faith, and about its unconcealed hostility to Christian worship. Although there were various reasons for the outbreak of French revolution, the Church was compelled to think about the reason for this much severe antipathy against Christian faith and worship and started a restructuring of emphasis in the concept of the Church and its worship. This was the reason why the liturgical revival "was preceded by the development of a vigorous ecclesiology which saw the Church not only in terms of a hierarchical society but also as the people of God and as a worshipping community."[62]

Side by side with the updating process of the Liturgy, the Church also encouraged the local and popular expressions of Christian faith. The Church

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60 *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 23-24.
61 *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 30.
62 *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 30.

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was convinced that the Liturgy must be intelligible to all the faithful and therefore, provided 'the use of liturgical aids like bilingual missals, and various devotional booklets'. The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* gives us a very significant information about a unique phenomenon that we see in the nineteenth century in the religious ambient of popular devotions:

> The nineteenth century experienced a phenomenon of crucial significance: expressions of local cult arising from popular initiatives and often associated with prodigious events such as miracles and apparitions. Gradually these received official approval as well as the favor and protection of the ecclesial authorities, and were eventually assumed into the Liturgy. Several Marian sanctuaries and centers of pilgrimages, and of Eucharistic and penitential Liturgies as well as Marian centers associated with popular piety are all emblematic of this phenomenon.[63]

The document reports that an ever increasing expansion of the popular piety affected negatively the objectives of the liturgical actions. Against this background, Pope St. Pius X (1903-1914) brought the Liturgy closer to the people by popularizing it. The liturgical reforms that he enacted in the Church helped the common people participate in the liturgical celebrations more actively and the people assimilated the Christian spirit for their daily life from the daily celebration of the Liturgy. Thus, Pope Pius X addressed the religious sentiments of the common people bringing the Liturgy into their level.[64]

> Thus was born the liturgical movement which was destined to exercise a prominent influence on the Church of the twentieth century, by virtue of the contribution of many eminent men, noted for their learning, piety and commitment, and in which the

[63] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 30.
[64] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 31.

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> Supreme Pontiffs recognized the promptings of the Spirit. The ultimate aim of the liturgical movement was pastoral in nature, namely, to encourage in the faithful a knowledge of, and love for, the divine mysteries and to restore to them the idea that these same mysteries belong to a priestly people (cf. *1 Pt* 2, 5).[65]

The document also makes it clear that the twentieth century Liturgists had a diffident attitude to popular piety because of the many abuses they faced which was derived from the superimposition of the pious exercises on the Liturgy. There were instances where the Liturgy was displaced by acts of popular worship. They intended a revival of Liturgy based on the Liturgy of the early centuries and they rejected the popular religious tendencies of the middle ages.[66]

> This rejection, however, failed to take sufficient account of the fact that these forms of popular piety, which were often approved and recommended by the Church, had sustained the spiritual life of the faithful and produced unequal spiritual fruits. It also failed to acknowledge that popular piety had made a significant contribution to safeguarding and preserving the faith, and to the diffusion of the Christian message. Thus, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Mediator Dei* of 21 November 1947, with which he assumed leadership of the liturgical movement, issued a defense of pious exercises which, to a certain extent, had become synonymous with Catholic piety in the recent centuries.[67]

When we go through the history of Christian worship especially of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we notice that whenever the worship forms failed to carry the heart vibrations of the people, there arose some unrest in the society as a whole and there came up some new way of expressing their religious sentiments. The history of Christian worship of

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[65] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 31.
[66] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 31.
[67] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 32.

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these two centuries compels us to take into consideration the idea that since the worship is done by the human beings and for the human beings, the forms of worship can never be a static entity. They must assimilate the signs of the times and must represent the collective vibrations of the human hearts which are very much conditioned by the locality. However, the subjective objective dichotomy, that is, the dichotomy between the official Liturgy and the local religious expressions which are revealed through popular devotions, must have a healthy synthesis so that the worship forms may escape idealistic and superstitious extremes.

Since it is very natural that the levels of human understanding vary, it must be equally natural that we must be open and generous to the diversity in the integrity of worship forms. As the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* mentions, the so called non integral expressions of Christian worship had been the back born of the Christian spirituality in certain periods of crisis in the Church history. The popular devotions have produced unequal spiritual fruits in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and they have also become a cause for the liturgical renewal during this period.

2.2.3. Recent Teachings of the Church on the Popular Devotions

Although it is self evident, from the analysis of the history of worship in the Bible and in the tradition of the Church, that there existed some devotions outside the official Liturgy, the term 'devotion' entered in the Church documents only recently.[68] Throughout the Church history we can observe that there were questions regarding the relationship between popular devotions and Liturgy and they were always referred to the Church authority. Most often the official Church was skeptical about the use of devotions and was cautious to approve their practice because of the

[68] "The term pious exercises or popular devotions was officially used by the Church for the first time only in 1958, in the instruction [of] the Sacred Congregation for Rites on sacred music and sacred liturgy.", in A. KODAPLACKAL, "Popular Devotions in the light of Vatican II", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 466.

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aberrations that occurred during the middle ages.[69] But later, the Church began to appreciate their positive significance and recommended them. Pius XII, in his Encyclical letter *Mediator Dei* taught the legitimacy and the necessity of popular devotions:

> If the private and interior devotion of individuals were to neglect the august sacrifice of the altar and the sacraments, and to withdraw them from the stream of vital energy that flows from Head to members, it would indeed be sterile, and deserve to be condemned. But when devotional exercises, and pious practices in general, not strictly connected with the sacred liturgy, confine themselves to merely human acts, with the express purpose of directing these latter to the Father in heaven, of rousing people to repentance and holy fear of God, of weaning them from the seductions of the world and its vice, and leading them back to the difficult path of perfection, then certainly such practices are not only highly praiseworthy but absolutely indispensable, because they expose the dangers threatening the spiritual life; because they promote the acquisition of virtue; and because they increase the fervor and generosity with which we are bound to dedicate all that we are and all that we have to the service of Jesus Christ.[70]

Mediator Dei further taught that though the Liturgy and the popular devotions are not opposed to one another, they are distinct and separate:

> Unquestionably, liturgical prayer, being the public supplication of the illustrious Spouse of Jesus Christ, is superior in excellence to private prayers. But this superior worth does not at all imply contrast or incompatibility between these two kinds of prayer. For both merge harmoniously in the single spirit which

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[69] "[...] the Council of Trent [...] warned against the use of devotions that does not have the approval of the Church.", in P. F. MULHERN, "Devotions, Religious", 834.

[70] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, Encyclical Letter, 20 November 1947: *AAS* 39 (1947), n. 32. [Hereafter referred to as MD]

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animates them, 'Christ is all and in all'.[71] Both tend to the same objective: until Christ be formed in us.[72]

Manuel A. Vasquez, in his book, *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity* says that with Second Vatican Council the Church ceased to express its defensive and opposing attitudes against modernity which caused rapid social and cultural changes. The author says, "At Vatican II, rather than presenting itself as the way, the church defines itself as a 'pilgrim' in the world, open to what secular ideologies and institutions might have to say about the modern predicament."[73] This openness is also reflected in her attitude to diverse religious experiences around her in the world and the diverse expressions of Christian faith within the Church.

The Second Vatican Council by telling that the "Sacred Liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church"[74] acknowledges the presence and the vitality of popular devotions and hails their significance in the divine worship. The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy continues to say that:

> The spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father, in secret; yet more, according to the teaching of the Apostle, he should pray without ceasing. We learn from the same Apostle that we must always bear about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame. This is why we ask the Lord in the sacrifice of the Mass that, 'receiving the offering of the spiritual victim,' he may fashion us for himself 'as an eternal gift'.[75]

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[71] Colossians 3, 11.

[72] MD 37.

[73] M. A. VASQUEZ, *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom 1998, 21.

[74] VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on Liturgy, 4 December 1963: *AAA* 56 (1964), n. 9. [Hereafter referred to as SC]

[75] SC 12.

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The Council, thus encourages the spiritual exercises outside the liturgical celebrations and it also exhorts the need of liturgical formation of the clerics which include not only the personalized celebration of the sacred mysteries but also the "popular devotions which are imbued with the spirit of the liturgy".[76]

Article 13 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is the main point of reference whenever the Church spoke officially on popular devotions.[77] It says:

> Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See.
>
> Devotions proper to individual Churches also have a special dignity if they are undertaken by mandate of the bishops according to customs or books lawfully approved.
>
> But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them.

Lumen Gentium chapter VII has an indirect reference to the subject of popular devotion where it speaks of the Marian devotion:

> The various forms of piety toward the Mother of God, which the Church within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine, according to the conditions of time and place, and the nature and ingenuity of the faithful has approved, bring it about that while the Mother is honored, the Son, through whom all things have their being and in whom it has pleased the Father that all

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[76] SC 17.

[77] G. VAN LEEUWEN, "Popular Devotions in the Teaching of the church during and after Vatican II", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC Bangalore 1986, 487.

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fullness should dwell, is rightly known, loved and glorified and that all His commands are observed.[78]

The Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam Totius* also recommends devotional practices during the formation of the students for priesthood but with a notion of caution:

> Those practices of piety that are commended by the long usage of the Church should be zealously cultivated; but care should be taken lest the spiritual formation consist in them alone or lest it develop only a religious affectation. The students should learn to live according to the Gospel ideal, to be strengthened in faith, hope and charity, so that, in the exercise of these practices, they may acquire the spirit of prayer, learn to defend and strengthen their vocation, obtain an increase of other virtues and grow in the zeal to gain all men for Christ.[79]

However, article 67 of *Lumen Gentium* pleads for a healthy balance in the devotion to Mary and the saints avoiding exaggerations.[80] It says:

> Following the study of Sacred Scripture, the Holy Fathers, the doctors and liturgy of the Church, and under the guidance of the Church's magisterium, let [... the sons of the Church] rightly illustrate the duties and privileges of the Blessed Virgin which always look to Christ, the source of all truth, sanctity and piety. Let them assiduously keep away from whatever, either by word or deed, could lead separated brethren or any other into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church. Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but

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[78] VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium*, Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964: *AAS* 57 (1965), n. 66. [Hereafter referred to as LG]

[79] VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Optatam Totius,* Decree on Priestly Training, 28 October 1965: *AAS* 58 (1966), n. 8.

[80] G. VAN LEEUWEN, "Popular Devotions in the Teaching of the church during and after Vatican II", 1986, 485.

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> proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues.[81]

The Council Fathers always highlighted the importance of liturgical celebrations and state that they are 'sacred actions surpassing all others'[82] and that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed"[83] although it "does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church".[84] They recommended the popular devotions with some liturgical and theological conditions.[85] They said that the popular devotions should harmonize themselves with the liturgical seasons and that the devotions should be derived from the sacred mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy. They should dispose people to the faithful celebration of the liturgy.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI describes the popular religiosity as the "particular expressions of the search for God and for faith". He says that although in a time these religious expressions were not taken seriously, now the teaching authority of the Church is aware of "their significance with remarkable pastoral realism and zeal". The Pope is also aware of their limits: "It is often subject to penetration by many distortions of religion and even superstitions. It frequently remains at the level of forms of worship not involving a true acceptance by faith. It can even lead to the creation of sects and endanger the true ecclesial community." However, the Pope expresses his conviction that:

> [...] if it is well oriented, above all by a pedagogy of evangelization, it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute

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81 LG 67.
82 SC 17.
83 SC 10.
84 SC 9.
85 G. VAN LEEUWEN, "Popular Devotions in the Teaching of the church during and after Vatican II", 1986, 483.

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> awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence. It engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the sense of the cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion. By reason of these aspects, we readily call it 'popular piety,' that is, religion of the people, rather than religiosity. [86]

The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments gives us 'an organized synthesis' 'to facilitate a common doctrinal orientation' for the pastoral assistance of popular devotions. The second chapter of the first part of the document with the title "Liturgy and Popular Piety in the Church's Magisterium", elaborately discusses various aspects of popular devotions according to the Magisterium of the Church. It begins by saying that:

> Popular piety, according to the Magisterium, is a living reality in and of the Church. Its source is the constant presence of the Spirit of God in the ecclesial community; the mystery of Christ our Saviour is its reference point, the glory of God and the salvation its object, its historical moment 'the joyous encounter of the work of evangelization and culture'. [87]

Magisterium considers popular devotions as the 'true treasure of the people of God'. They help the faithful to grow in the internal dispositions of Jesus Christ. They facilitate a harmonious fusion of the Gospel message with a particular culture. Popular devotions are 'important and indispensable starting point' for any Christian in their growth into Christian maturity.[88]

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[86] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, 8 December 1975: *AAS* 68 (1976), n. 48.

[87] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 38.

[88] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 38-40.

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The chapter three of the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* discusses 'the theological principles for an evaluation and renewal of popular piety'. It declares that "the person and works of Christ are the essential reference point for the faith and prayer life of the people of God".[89] The faithful must receive "instruction on the character of Christian prayer, which is directed to the Father, through the mediation of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit".[90] The popular piety must be oriented to the Gospel of joy, which is resulted from the contemplation of the Resurrection of Christ, and to an adult Christian life, worshipping God in spirit and in truth by making "one's life 'a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God' (*Rm* 12, 1; *Heb* 12, 28)".[91]

As we go through the teachings of the Church on popular devotions we can always observe that the Church has a positive concern for these expressions of Christian worship. At the same time, the Church gently cautions the faithful against the attitudes that do not help a growth into Christian maturity.

2.3. THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON POPULAR DEVOTIONS

The question, whether thought, as a collective interpretation of experience, precedes concrete individual experience or vice versa, is a topic of heated discussion. If some say that the experience is the basis of thought, then some others will ask what is the basis of this experience. Although mathematical experience has a uniformity, conceptual experience vary from person to person. Here experience is had based on an interpretation of an object on the basis of some preconceived notions of the subject. These preconceived notions can be either innate or acquired and the sources of both are very complex, sometimes, something more than experience. It is this ambiguity which make us always humble in our search for meaning even of the visible realities and how much more we must be humble and open in our journey of

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[89] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines,* 44.
[90] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines,* 47.
[91] *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines,* 49.

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transcendence. However, we cannot be reduced into infinite regress. Therefore, we always search for some collective interpretation of experience, at the same time, respecting the individual experience so that we may arrive at some guidelines for the present life.

In the ambient of Christian worship we have Liturgy as the official form of worship on the one hand and the popular devotions on the other. We observe in the history of Christian worship that some pious exercises and devotions become very popular among the people than the Liturgy. Here we study the theological perspectives of some eminent authors on popular devotions with an intention of arriving at a missiological response to this particular Christian religious context.

2.3.1. Theologians, in General, on Popular Devotions

Although Catholic popular devotions have their origin in the ancient Church of the West, the rapid industrial development and the growth of science and technology changed considerably the human spheres of hope in Europe. In this historical situation, Michael Schmaus says that "there could be a temptation to dismiss worship as outmoded, because unproductive."[92] The author reports the perspectives of some thinkers on 'worship' during the period of 'enlightenment':

> Kant held that worship was a form of fanaticism and superstition. L. Feuerbach and K. Marx then made a still more radical attack on worship. According to Feuerbach, 'God' is a personification of human wishes and satisfaction in a non-human form which has been erected into an absolute. If man is not to dissipate his energies and lose himself, he must devote himself to his fellow-men and not to his figure of fantasy. [...] Feuerbach's idea was not to eliminate worship but to give it a 'horizontal' direction. [According to Marx, the human ...] society is to be paid the reverence which the masses once paid to

[92] M. SCHMAUS, "Worship", in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 6, 390.

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> God in the days when they created religion as a euphoric opium for their distress.[93]

The exaggerated emphasis of the material dimensions of man, in this period, can be said to be a reaction to the other extreme of the spiritual traditions. In the realm of Christian worship, popular devotion can be said to be the horizontal dimension of the religious expression of the common people against a vertical dimension of worship that ignored the existential conditions of the common people. For our convenience and also due to the lack of the availability of the theological responses of many authors on popular devotions we limit our study with the theological perspectives of Karl Rahner and Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

Karl Rahner

From his article on "The Relation between Theology and Popular Religion"[94] we can deduce some valuable theological perspectives of Karl Rahner on popular devotions. He begins by stating the primary theological concern of his article: "[...] if scientific theology is to be true to its own nature, it will have to reflect on the religion of the people much more than it usually does."[95] Here, by speaking of a 'theology true to its nature' he indicates a theology that has a fundamental relation to the faith of the Church.[96] For Rahner,

> Church, despite its institutional character and hierarchical organization, is the Church of the 'People of God', a pilgrim Church, in which everyone not only receives but also gives and serves, [... In this sense he says that the faith expression of the entire people of God] is the point of reference for theology and the real object of its reflection.[97]

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93 M. SCHMAUS, "Worship", 390.
94 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 140-147.
95 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 140.
96 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 141.
97 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 142.

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When Rahner says that popular religion is the 'religion of the people' he uses the term 'people' as a sociological one which signifies the lowest strata of the society in all levels.

> [...] there is such a 'people' also in the Church [...]. It is, for instance, evident that in the Church too there are differences in the cultural levels and that these differences influence people's religious life. It is [...] clear from the history that differences in secular power held by individuals affect their position in the Church, although the gospels and the Letter of James warn against it.[98]

Considering this diversity in the Church which is caused by social, political, economic, historical and even geographical dimensions of human existence, Rahner says that although God reveals himself equally to all, the human response to God becomes diverse. In the course of history some responses were systematized and others, because of various reasons, remained more simple. Here, Karl Rahner calls popular religion superior to theology because of "the fact that popular religion is continually being unconsciously inspired and carried by original revelation, and it has not passed through the screen of systematic, hence narrowing, theology".[99]

In order to assert the creative and normative significance of popular religion in the Church, Rahner explains how God's divine self-communication is perceived and accepted by the people in the Church. He says:

> [The revelation of God] is perceived and accepted, not as theory, but more profoundly in the very living of human life, to which also belong – but not only – the spoken word and a beginning of reflection and theory. That is why revelation, when it has been heard and explained in theology, is a revelation that has already been mediated by the concrete life of its hears.

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[98] K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 143.
[99] K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 144-145.

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> This mediation also happens in the Church through the concrete life of the people in the Church. That is why, in a theology of popular faith, we would have to inquire how God's original revelation is also mediated by the religious life of the people in the Church and thus becomes a revelation that is heard and believed.[100]

Based on the arguments of Karl Rahner we can say that the Catholic popular devotions are the popular application of the teachings of the Church 'in the very living of human life' of the 'people' and they are also in turn the source and inspiration for theological reflection.

Karl Rahner comments positively on the veneration of saints which is a part of the popular devotions. He says that 'the veneration of the saints necessarily belongs' to the life of the Church and she does it 'in praise of grace'. "It is her duty, because she must profess God's grace. [...] She must praise the grace which has had powerful effects, which has conquered, which has become real and manifest to us [through the saints]".[101] The saints represent in a historically tangible manner the victory of God's grace revealed through Jesus Christ. They represent the holiness of the Church and ratifies her role as an institutional establishment of salvation. They created new Christian modes of life in the course of the history of the Church.[102] The question, of why there are many mediators when we have one and only mediator in Jesus Christ, is answered by Karl Rahner by saying that all these happen because of man's "intercommunicative existence".[103] He explains by this "everyone's concern in everyone else's possibility of salvation".[104]

Karl Rahner has also some words of correction to the general conduct of Christian worship and the religious attitudes behind it. In the area of Christian devotions he notes that there is an over emphasis of the objective

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100 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, 147.
101 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, 93-94.
102 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, 97-98.
103 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, 176-177.
104 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, 177.

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power of the rites and the subjective participation of the devotee is completely kept to the minimum.[105] He has a word of caution against sheer ritualism with regard to the celebration of the sacraments:

> A Sacrament, even when received worthily, does not simply increase grace with absolute certainty and necessity in arithmetical proportion to the number of times it is received. Even though such a conception is the tacit basis of a fairly widespread popular opinion about the sacraments and their efficacy, this view falls down in face of the clear doctrine that the sacraments increase in efficacy [...] in proportion to the disposition of the recipient.[106]

Here the author insists on a personalized celebration of the sacred rites and a consequent sacramental action. He indeed calls every believer to 'a mature Christian relationship to God'.[107] In his theological contemplation Rahner envisions how a baptized Christian, how Church as a community of believers can be truly transformed into Christ and experience and witness to the salvific Christian life.[108]

Karl Rahner also insists on the need of an ongoing liturgical renewal. He says:

> No one with a knowledge of the laws of the psychology of devotion, and of religious history, will deny that, however much we treasure the Roman Liturgy, there is a certain aridity about it, a juridical austerity and a tendency to legalistic brevity, setting

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105 K. RAHNER, - C. HASTINGS (tr.), *The Christian Commitment. Essays in Pastoral Theology*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1963, 172.

106 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2, 110.

107 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, 42-43.

108 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2, 127-128.

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limits and barriers, psychologically and in terms of time, to its full subjective realization.[109]

He hails the Liturgy of the Eastern Church for its characteristics of being "more lyrical and meditative, giving a person far more opportunity for absorption, for the free play of feeling and emotion. [...] It means the full, personal participation of a spiritual, responsible person, with his free faith, hope and love [...]."[110]

In his book, *The Christian of the Future*, Karl Rahner reminds us the historical nature of the Church and therefore it is subject to change. He says, "The Church is not a finished, solidly built and furnished house, in which all that changes is the successive generations who live in it. The Church is a living reality which has had a history of its own as still has one".[111] The Church needs to change itself considering the signs of the times and should express itself in a new way, intelligible to the present generation. It does not mean that it should change its identity but 'into a new presence of its old reality'.[112] In his article "Demythologization and the Sermon", Rahner speaks of the 'need for a constantly new explanation' for the church's message 'to be intelligible and credible'.[113]

As we make a quick look into the writings of Karl Rahner it is self evident that he is very positive to the religious significance of the popular devotions. He categorically asserts how popular devotion is a source and object of serious theological reflection. He speaks of the social, political, economic and psychological dimensions of the popular devotion. He proposes an ongoing renewal of the liturgy according to time and place.

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109 K. RAHNER, - C. HASTINGS (tr.), *The Christian Commitment. Essays in Pastoral Theology*, 1963, 173.

110 K. RAHNER, - C. HASTINGS (tr.), *The Christian Commitment. Essays in Pastoral Theology*, 1963, 173.

111 K. RAHNER, - W. J. O'HABA (tr.), *The Christian of the Future*, Burns & Oates Limited, London 1967, 35.

112 K. RAHNER, - W. J. O'HABA (tr.), *The Christian of the Future*, 1967, 36.

113 K. RAHNER , "Demythologization and the Sermon", in *Concilium* 33 (1968), 20-21.

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Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI)

As far as I know, Pope Benedict XVI has not pronounced a direct teaching on popular devotions. However, as a philosopher and a theologian his perspectives on Christian faith and worship give us some guidelines on an effective pastoral approach to the popular devotions. Firstly, we observe in the writings of Pope Benedict XVI his absolute Christ centrism. In his book *The Fathers,* where he speaks of St. Gregory of Nyssa, he says:

> In this journey of spiritual *ascesis* Christ is the Model and Teacher, he shows us the beautiful image of God. Each of us, looking at him, finds ourselves 'the painter of our own life,' who has the will to compose the work and the virtues as he colors. [...] A Christian is someone who bears Christ's Name, who must therefore also liken his life to Christ. We Christians assume a great responsibility with baptism.[114]

Jesus is the way of human life designed by God[115], and the Pope would like to remind that the fullness of life, revealed by Jesus, is not completely made known without the proclamation of our resurrection in Jesus Christ. Tracey Rowland in his book *Ratzinger's Faith* says:

> For Ratzinger, the starting point of anthropology has to be the notion of Christ as the new Adam: a merely theistically coloured account of the human person is both an inadequate anthropology and an inadequate theology of creation. A full theology of creation is only intelligible in eschatology. As he puts it: 'the Alpha is only truly to be understood in the light of the Omega.'[116]

The pastoral project that he cherishes in his mind he reveals while speaking on the contribution of St. John Chrysostom, to develop a pastoral project in

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114 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Fathers*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., USA 2008, 97-98.

115 BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Encyclical Letter, 30 November 2007: *AAS* 99 (2007), n. 6.

116 T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008, 33-34.

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the Church, in the same book, *The Fathers*: "His [John Chrysostom] pastoral project was incorporated into the Church's life, in which the lay faithful assume the priestly, royal and prophetic office with baptism. To the lay faithful he said: 'Baptism will also make you king, priest, and prophet."[117] When our body is transformed into that of Christ, when it becomes an expression of faith, it becomes a "visualized hope and a confident statement of what can come to be, projected into the present".[118] The Pope thus intends a worship of God through life, as it is revealed in and through Jesus Christ, through the flesh and blood.[119]

Secondly, as we search for some guidelines in the writings of Pope Benedict XVI to address the popular devotions, we observe that the Pope believes in the integrity of human response in Christian worship. In his book, *The Fathers* where he treats on St. Augustine we read:

> [...] Augustine's entire intellectual and spiritual development is [...] a valid model today in the relationship between faith and reason, a subject not only for believers but for every person who seeks the truth, a central theme for the balance and destiny of every human being. These two dimensions, faith and reason, should not be separated or placed in opposition; rather, they must always go hand in hand.[120]

The Pope remembers, "On the threshold of the modern age, the *Imitation of Christ* voices a dramatic protest against the disintegration of faith into a

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117 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Fathers*, 2008, 105.

118 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. M. MATESICH, *A New Song for the Lord: faith in Christ and Liturgy today*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1996, 88.

119 "Christian worship – a participation in the 'Pasch' of Christ from divine to human, from death to life, to the unity of God with man – is the practical application and fulfillment of the words of Jesus: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" in A. J. GRIBBIN, *Pope Benedict XVI and the Liturgy. Understanding recent liturgical developments*, Gracewing, Herefordshire 2011, 7.

120 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Fathers*, 2008, 186-187.

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theology that had become empty learning and the determined option for a Christianity of the unlearned".[121] When he treats on St. Irenaeus he says:

> The true teaching, therefore, is not that invented by intellectuals, which goes beyond the Church's simple faith. [The Apostles] taught nothing except this simple faith, which is also the true depth of God's revelation. [...] Irenaeus tells us, there is no secret doctrine concealed in the Church's common Creed. There is no superior Christianity for intellectuals.[122]

Pope recalls that St Augustine felt the need 'to communicate faith in a manner that all could understand' and he was convinced of his responsibility for the 'popularization of Christian message'.[123] In his book, *The Feast of Faith*, the Pope instructs how it is necessary to express Christian worship in a symbiosis of body and mind. He says,

> The theology of creation and the theology of the Resurrection [...] demand that prayer should be expressed in a bodily form, involving all the dimensions of bodily expression. The spiritualization of the body calls for the embodiment of the spirit, and vice versa. Only in this way can man and the world be 'humanized', which means that matter is brought to its spiritual capacity and that the Spirit is expressed in the wealth of creation.[124]

At the same time Pope instructs:

> It belongs to the religio-historical nature of Christian belief to put man in the way of truth, to give his stability, not in customs, but in truth and thus lay claim to the truth. It would be untrue to

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121 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. F. MCCARTHY (tr.), *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1987, 335.

122 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Fathers,* 2008, 26.

123 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Fathers*, 2008, 195.

124 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - G. HARRISON, *The Feast of Faith. Approaches to a theology of the Liturgy*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1986, 71.

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itself if it hid itself from reason. The struggle against ignorance, the banishment of sham piety, is its proper task.[125]

A third point we take from the writings of Pope Benedict XVI for the purpose of our study on popular devotion is that he is open to the diversity of Christian worship. To a question, "How many ways are there to God?", Pope replied, "As many as there are people." He continues,

> For even within the same faith each man's way is an entirely personal one. We have Christ's word: I am the way. In that respect, there is ultimately one way, and everyone who is on the way to God is therefore in some sense also on the way of Jesus Christ. But this does not mean that all ways are identical in terms of consciousness and will, but, on the contrary, the one way is so big that it becomes a personal way for each man.[126]

The words of Pope are very much self explanatory for the reality of the diversity in Christian worship. In another occasion Ratzinger asserted that, "every human reason is conditioned by a historical standpoint so that reason pure and simple does not exist".[127] It is with this conviction that Pope admires the new movements in the Church:

> I then came into contact also with the reality of the Charismatic Renewal. [...] I had the joy and grace [...] of seeing young Christians touched by the power of the Holy Spirit, [...] the Holy Spirit was creating a new spring time and that the joy of being Christian was being reawakened in young people, [...].[128]

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125 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. F. MCCARTHY (tr.), *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology,* 1987, 340.

126 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - A. WALKER (tr.), *Salt of the Earth. Christianity and the Catholic Church at the end of the Millennium*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997, 32.

127 Confer T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 2008, 34.

128 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2007, 68.

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Pope acknowledges that when the theology was 'an oppression of faith by a truncated reason' and when the Church suffered the danger of 'bureaucratization, which no longer served to open doors to the faith, but became self-enclosed', the new spiritual renewal movements like Charismatic Renewal was a gesture of God's benevolence.[129]

To a question to Pope Benedict XVI regarding what should be done against the 'erosion of the Christian foundations of our society', the Pope recalls "the great Catholic writers and philosophers who were an expression of a lively Catholic culture in the years between two world wars".[130] At the same time the Pope emphasizes that " we should think also of the simpler popular culture expressed in devotions (Stations of the Cross, Rosary, processions) and also in a certain kind of devotional literature."[131] With regard to the "faith of the simple people and its greatness"[132] the Pope says, "we are in full agreement".[133] He continues:

> [Although] we certainly need a thoughtful faith, an enlightened faith, [yet] we must be happy to have a faith that is not always setting conditions but joyfully places itself in the Lord's hands. The words of Jesus, who praises God for having given to little ones the gift of seeing (see Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21), always remain true, and we must always be a Church of little ones; we ourselves must never lose true simplicity of heart.[134]

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129 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* 2007, 69; 90-91.

130 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* 2007, 86.

131 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* 2007, 86-87.

132 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* 2007, 86.

133 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* 2007, 91.

134 J. RATZINGER (Pope Benedict XVI), - M. J. MILLER, H. TAYLOR (trs.), *New Outpourings of the Spirit. Movements in the Church,* 2007, 91-92.

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However, without mentioning any spiritual movements in particular, "Ratzinger has stated that they have had their share of childhood diseases".[135] Tracey Rowland in his book, *Ratzinger's Faith*, reports that Ratzinger expresses his sadness at the fact that many priests, with material motive, manipulate the sacred rites and thus reduces them to the realm of magic.[136]

2.4. CONCLUSION

A historical analysis of the Catholic popular devotions makes it clear that the popular expressions of Catholic faith was very much present side by side with the official Liturgy of the Church from the beginning of the Church. But they became more visible and clear when the Church began to encounter diverse human communities with diverse cultures. It is resulted by the Church's effort to present Christian faith in a way appealing to the religious sentiments of the newly encountered human communities, to satisfy their religious needs. The Church acknowledges that in times of crisis popular devotions helped the people to maintain their faith even in a heroic way. The theologians in general and especially Karl Rahner and Josef Ratzinger are certain about the positive elements of the popular devotions although both of them are conscious of their problems of growth.

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135 T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 2008, 91; J. MURPHY, *Christ our Joy. The Theological Vision of Pope Benedict XVI*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2008, 36.

136 T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 2008, 126; J. RATZINGER, - G. HARRISON, *The Feast of Faith. Approaches to a theology of the Liturgy*, 1986, 62-63.

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CHAPTER 3

KERALA: A LAND OF POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

3.0. INTRODUCTION

Kerala is a state which is situated at the south – western India with a population of 33.3 million, 2.76% of India's total population, with a density of population, three times higher than that of the main land. Kerala ranks highest in India with respect to social development indices such as elimination of poverty, elementary education and healthcare. Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India of 91% (2001) and life expectancy is also the highest in India.[1] Kerala is a land of many religions and the people belong to each religion hail from various ethnic groups. Kerala is a land that welcomed almost all the important religions of the world in the initial periods of their origin. They accepted with equal importance the three great religions which came from the main land India – Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism – and the three great religions which came from outside India – Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[2]

A study of the history of religions in Kerala will make it clear that Kerala was a land of popular religiosity. The religious practices in the ancient Kerala were popular in nature. They did not adhere to a system of thought or any institutionalized system of worship. In his book *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, A. Sreedhara Menon states:

> Their way of life was a strange mixture of primitive rites and practices. They had a variety of local deities to whom they made offerings of food. Tree worship and ancestor worship were common among them. There were no narrow caste or communal barriers. In fact, the early Dravidian society was an open society

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1 Demographics of Kerala, www. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of....., visited on 11-08-2012.*

2 V. PANIKKASSERY, *Kerala Charithra Padanangal* (Malayalam), Current Books, Kerala 1998, 117-118.

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based on the principles of social freedom and equality and the recognition of the dignity of labor.[3]

Although in the course of history there entered Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism from the North India on the one hand, and Judaism, Christianity and Islam from the outside on the other, the popular religious character survived throughout the religious history of Kerala.[4] Even today we can see that side by side with all the institutional religious practices, there are popular religious expressions in all the religions in Kerala. We receive a beautiful word picture of the religious ambient of Kerala from Dempsey Corinne, in his book *Kerala Christian Sainthood*:

> Kerala's religious pluralism [is] marked by the variety of Churches, temples, and mosques nestled throughout its tropical landscape. Moreover, beyond the many impressive Christian and Muslim edifices standing alongside those of the Hindu majority, we can see other reflections of their plurality. These take shape in the ecumenical – although mainly Christian and Hindu – heavenly characters who populate Kerala's terrain. [...] Saints and deities, colorfully painted on trucks and auto-rickshaws, regularly vie for space on busy streets; others encased in roadside shrines, receive visits from devotees who light candles or lamps, offer flowers, or slip coins into metal offering boxes.[5]

Now, in this chapter, we are aiming at a secular and religious analysis of the people of Kerala. We would like to know what were the basic religious attitudes that helped the Keralites to give a positive welcome to the various religions of the world. We are curious to know how the followers of various religions in Kerala, who consider religion very seriously, live in harmony as brothers and sisters in spite of their diverse world views. We are in search of

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[3] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, D. C. Books, Kerala 2008, 20.

[4] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 21.

[5] D. CORINNE G. *Kerala Christian Sainthood: collisions of culture and world view in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001, 3. [Hereafter D. CORINNE G. *Kerala Christian Sainthood*]

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the common religious sentiments that help the people live together in spite of religious diversity. We also study in this chapter how the religious ambient of the popular devotions, in the Hindu religion in general and the Catholic popular devotions in particular, express the common religious sentiments of Keralites.

3.1. A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF KERALA

Kerala is a land of a composite culture and there are various factors that helped in shaping its nature. Although originally the people of the land followed the Dravidian way of life, they were fundamentally influenced by the religious and the philosophical systems from the North India. The rise and fall of Jainism and Buddhism in Kerala, like in the main land, show the cultural and religious unrest resulted from the confrontation of Aryan and Dravidian cultures. As a result of the commercial contacts with the foreign countries, world religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam made their way to Kerala. They contributed much in the formation of the present culture in Kerala.[6] The men of culture and even the socio-political leaders often acknowledge the heroic contributions of the Christian missionaries in the cultural development of Kerala which makes Kerala different from the other states in India.

3.1.1. A Land of Many Religions

As it was stated above, from ancient time onwards, Kerala was a meeting ground of all the Indian religions and their philosophical systems and that of the most important world religions. A. Sreedhara Menon says:

> Kerala served through the centuries as the forum for the fusion of Arian and Dravidian cultures and this fusion led to the integration of the basic elements from both the cultures within the framework of the Hindu religion. Hinduism, as it has evolved itself in Kerala, has been profoundly influenced by

[6] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 20.

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Dravidian rituals and practices. Dravidian deities came to be incorporated within Hinduism as practiced in Kerala.[7]

Velayudhan Panikkassery says that during the time when the principles of Jainism and Buddhism flourished in Kerala, it was a spring time for human life which attracted many to this part of India. According to him, it is believed that Jainism and Buddhism were introduced in Kerala towards the 3rd century before the Christian Era.[8] By the time of 10th century A. D. Buddhism and Jainism began to fade in Kerala due to the Hinduaization of the principles of Buddhism and Jainism. People also found easy to follow the ritualism of Hinduism than the taxing self-discipline introduced by Buddhism. A shrewd political movement from the part of the institutionalized Hinduism also played a role in the eradication of Buddhism from Kerala.[9] It is by the end of 8th century A. D. that the Arians established their hold on the society in Kerala and imposed caste system.[10]

Kerala is said to be the cradle of Christianity in India. Tradition attributes the origin of Christianity in Kerala to the apostolic times. Our sources of knowledge about the first two centuries of the history of Christianity in Kerala are exceedingly scanty and differ widely in their historical value.[11] The difficulty of studying the early history of Christianity in Kerala is increased by the fact that such sources for the history of Christianity in the region as did come down to modern times were either destroyed or disappeared during the Portuguese hegemony in Kerala. Therefore, the Church in Kerala has been left without any authoritative documentation of the history of its ancient past. Our information concerning the early history of this Church is derived from Syriac and Greek sources.[12] There are two

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7 S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 287.

8 V. PANIKKASSERY , *Kerala Charithra Padanangal*, 1998, 117-118.

9 V. PANIKKASSERY , *Kerala Charithra Padanangal*, 1998, 125.

10 S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 229.

11 B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians. A Historical Critique,* Media House, Delhi 1995,1-2. [Hereafter referred to as B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians*]

12 J. KOYIKKARA J., *The Road to Diamper. An Exhaustive Study of the Synod of Diamper and the Emergence of Roman Catholics in Kerala,* Kerala Latin Catholic History Association, Cochin 1999, 1. [Hereafter referred to as J. KOYIKKARA J., *The Road to*

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traditions, which speak about the origin of Christianity in Kerala – the St. Thomas tradition and a tradition concerning the migration of Persian Christians to Kerala in the 4th century.

Although there is no sufficient evidence to the apostolic origin of the Church in Kerala[13], there is a strong local tradition, found mention in historical parlance since the visit of Marcopolo towards the close of the 13th century that in the year 52 A.D., St. Thomas landed in Maliankara near Cranganore, preached to the natives and baptised many believers. He erected seven Churches along the Kerala coast and he is supposed to have gone across to the Coromandel Coast, where he attained martyrdom by being stoned by a crowd and pierced with a lance at the hands of a Brahmin.[14]

According to the Persian tradition, some time before 345 A.D. a Persian merchant named Thomas of Cana visited Kerala and was disturbed by the deplorable condition of the Christians of this land. He returned to his own country and described the state of these Christians to the Patriarch of Seleucia. He was then commissioned to lead a colony of four hundred Persian Christians from Jerusalem, Baghdad and Nineveh, together with Mar Joseph, Bishop of Urha and other priests, to strengthen their Christian colony in Kerala. They arrived in Cranganore in 345 A.D.[15]

Diamper]; F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis. The First Archbishop of Malabar, A Historico-critical Study of his Life and Activities and of the Establishment of Latin Hierarchy in Malabar (1868-1897),* Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1998, 11-13. [Hereafter referred to as F. PEREPAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis, The First Archbishop of Malabar*]

[13] B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians* 1995, 123.

[14] B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians* 1995, 135-136; J. KOYIKKARA. J., *The Road to Diamper* 1999, 8.

[15] S. VISVANATHAN, *The Christians of Kerala,* Oxford University Press, Madras 1993, 1; B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians* 1995, 192-193; T. P., *Churches in India,* Govt. of India Press, Delhi 1964, 11; A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India. Vol. I, From the Beginning up to the Middle of the 16th Century (up to 1542),* Theological Publications in India, Bangalore 1984, 89-91. [Here after referred to as A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India. Vol. I*]; J. KOYIKKARA J., *The Road to Diamper* 1999,13-14.

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We are not sure whether the term 'St. Thomas Christians' is derived from the Apostle Thomas or Thomas of Cana who brought the Church in India into close contact with the East Syrian Church. The fairly convincing testimony of Cosmas would indicate that by the 6th century Christian traders from Persia came to live in the port-towns of Kerala in significant numbers and had brought their Church with them.[16] From that time they were periodically reinforced by fresh migrations from Syria and Persia. The fact that their Church has clung so consistently to the Syriac language, the ecclesiastical language of the Nestorians, without translating the scripture or their liturgy into the vernacular of Kerala adds support to this view regarding the origins of the Christian Church in Kerala.[17] A reasonable explanation for the tradition that St. Thomas came to Kerala is that "this is a wandering tradition carried over from Edessa with the Nestorian missionaries of Persian Church, traders or immigrants from Persia who established the Church in Kerala and Coromandal coast."[18]

The Jewish connection to the South Indian coast goes back to the time of King Solomon when the traders carried out regular voyages bartering for ivory, apes and silver. It is claimed that during the invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B. C., some Jewish exiles came to India. But it was after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 A. D., that the Jews came to Cranganore, an ancient port near Cochin, in large number. The 2001 Indian census recorded only 51 Jews in Kerala. The synagogue at Cochin (now, Kochi) is the oldest in the Commonwealth of Nations.[19]

There had been trade relations between Arabia and Kerala even before the time of Prophet Mohammad. Islam might have been introduced to Kerala by the Arab traders in the 7th or 8th century A. D. Like Jews and Christians,

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16 J. KOYIKKARA J., *The Road to Diamper* 1999, 21.

17 J. KOYIKKARA J., *The Road to Diamper* 1999, 22.

18 J. KOYIKKARA J., *The Road to Diamper* 1999, 12; B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians* 1995, 199-201; A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India. Vol. I* 1984, 29.

19 Demographics of Kerala, www. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of....., visited on 11-08-2012.*

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they also settled down in Cranganore as a community.[20] However, Islam became a socio-political force only when it came to North India in 12th century.[21] The spread of Islam in Kerala is marked by forced conversion and bloodshed.

At present the Hindus constitute 56.2 percent of the total population in Kerala who hail from more than 11 ethnic groups. Muslims of Kerala constitute 24.7 percent and based on origin and belief systems, they belong to 11 different communities. Christians constitute 19 percent of the total population and they are also in various communities according to the mode of worship and leadership. There is also a small population of others, 0 .02 percent, who follow Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, and so on.[22]

The unity of the people in Kerala in spite of a diversity of religious beliefs calls for an explanation and we are compelled to assess that the religious sentiments that existed in the people of Kerala even before the arrival of the world religions, continue to be a connecting link of all religions although the followers of various religions express it in different forms. These basic religious sentiments, although were enriched and expressed in various ways, they continue to vibrate in every Keralite in a common way. This may also explain the reason why the followers of all religions frequent the centers of popular devotions going beyond their particular belief systems.

3.1.2. Socio-Political Organization

Aju K. N., in his doctoral dissertation, entitled, *Buddhist Traditions of Kerala as found in Folk Tales. A study with special reference to folk knowledge of Alleppy district,* asserts that Buddhism, which was the principal religion of Kerala from about 3rd century B. C. to 2nd century A. D., has influenced all the spheres of the lives of the people of Kerala. There is a famous folk song which deals with the golden age of a just king of

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[20] Muslims of Kerala, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslims of....., visited on 13-08-2012.

[21] Indian Muslims, www. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian Muslims...., Visited on 13-08-2012.

[22] Demographics of Kerala, www.*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of*....., visited on 11-08-2012.

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Kerala, Pallivanaperumal, who is believed to be a follower of Buddha. It was a period of justice, peace, truth and freedom.[23] But the arrival of the Aryans from the North India, with a new religion and a socio-political system, changed the nature of the society in Kerala. A. Sreedhara Menon states:

> During the period before the Christian Era and in the Sangan age (i. e., the early centuries of the Christian Era) the sharp division of the society into castes and sub castes was conspicuous by its absence in Kerala. [...] By the 8th century A. D., the Aryan missionaries had established their hold on society and this led to the imposition of the caste system [...].[24]

The annual state festival of Kerala which is called 'Onam' is a celebration of the nostalgic memory of that age when all men were equal and where there was no fraud and cheating, when all lived in joy and nobody was afraid of any danger.[25] It became a nostalgic memory later because of the unjust stratification of the human society in Kerala under the hegemony of Hinduism. Even today, the socio-political organization of Kerala is characterized by a tension between the socio-political order of Aryans and that of the Dravidians. There are, thus, some ethnic groups of Kerala with an orthodox bend of mind who cherish a hierarchical human society based on birth on the one hand, and the progressive thinkers with all the people of the

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[23] A. KODUMTHATTU N., *Buddhist Traditions of Kerala as found in Folk Tales. A study with special reference to folk knowledge of Alleppy district*, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady 2001, 36-37. [Here after referred to as A. KODUMTHATTU N., *Buddhist Traditions of Kerala as found in Folk Tales*]

[24] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 229.

[25] A. KODUMTHATTU N., *Buddhist Traditions of Kerala as found in Folk Tales* 2001, 37. (The author assesses that Onam is a contribution of Buddhism. The word like 'Onam and 'Thiruonam' are the parallel words of 'Sravanam' which comes from Buddhist tradition. The yellow vestment [*Onakkodi*] which is offered by the head of the family to all the members and the array of flowers on the court yard in front of the house [*Onappukkalam*] which are all the parts of the Onam celebration, are connected with a traditional rite of Buddha by which he accepted his disciples to a specific level of mental growth.)

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lowest strata of the society who cherish a socio-political order which respect the human dignity beyond all unjust social stratifications, on the other.

Although the Indian Constitution assures social justice and equality for all her citizens, "castes and communities play an important role in all fields of social life including politics, not only in Kerala but everywhere in the country".[26] During the time of election in Kerala, to constitute a democratic government, the candidates for the various constituencies are selected by all the political parties satisfying the caste majority of the respective places and their interests.

However, we cannot ignore a powerful secular social and political movement in Kerala. One of the most 'popular' socio-political movement in Kerala is the Communist Party. The Youth League which was founded in 1931, which was propagating the Communist ideology, was attracted by large number of young men and women. The Communist ideology became very popular among the lowest strata of the society and there occurred a number of violent agitations against the unjust socio-political and economic systems. The more the ruling power tried to suppress it, the more it gained strength and popularity.[27] According to A. Sreedhara Menon, "Kerala has perhaps the singular distinction of being the first state in India and in the world to vote the Communists to power through the ballot-box in free election and give them a chance to implant their policies".[28] The first elected democratic government of Kerala after the independence of India was thus, a communist one.

As a result of the presence of the religious and traditional socio-political systems and the secular and progressive socio-political ideologies, and their mutual criticism in the process of the implementation of various developmental programs, Kerala stands out from the rest of India in the field of education, health care, land reforms, the struggles against social and religious injustice, movement for food security and a socio-political unity

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[26] S. N. ELANKULAM MANAKKAL, *History, Society and Land Relations. Selected Essays*, Left Word Books, New Delhi 2010, 78.

[27] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Political History of Modern Kerala* , D. C. Books, Kerala, 2008, 39-40.

[28] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 301.

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beyond caste barriers.[29] The political parties with their enlightened leaders made revolutionary social and political changes in Kerala. The slogan 'land to the tiller' was taken up by the democratic governments and they made legislation with a view of establishing social justice. In the present social context everyone, irrespective of caste or creed, has the right and opportunity to grow and flourish according to one's personal taste.[30] According to A. Sreedhare Menon,

> The social awakening among all classes of people in Kerala in recent times, the spread of democratic and egalitarian ideas, the increasing pace of industrialization, the influx of people from villages to towns and the improvement in the level of literacy and educational standards are all factors which hastened the pace of social change in modern Kerala.[31]

A particular characteristic of Keralites that is taken note of by many sociologists is that an "average Keralite is highly individualistic in his approach to problems".[32] They say that this individualistic mentality might be contributed by the isolated and safe position of this land as it is protected by the natural barriers of the mountains on the one side and the sea on the other.[33] As a result, the political parties are divided into regional parties and even among the regional parties there are groups headed by some individuals. This individualism, which is found both in the traditional and progressive socio-political organizations, slow down the collective efforts for the common welfare of the Kerala state.

The political parties, in the process of maintaining their institutional frame work and asserting their identity and interests to the public, exploit and oppress their poor members. The workers are compelled, with the threat of severe punishment, to participate in the party demonstrations and they have

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29 S. N. ELANKULAM MANAKKAL, *History, Society and Land Relations*, 2010, 128.
30 S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 295.
31 S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 293.
32 S. M. ALAPPAT , *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 301.
33 J. PULIURUMBIL, *The Early Christian Settlements of Kerala*, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, India 2008, 15.

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to pay from their little income for the subscriptions of the parties. The local leaders of the political parties have an unholy relationship with the land and enterprise owners that they cooperate with their massive programs of exploitation.[34]

The large number of emigrants from North India, especially from Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, who come to Kerala in search of some livelihood, make Kerala a land of strangers. There are about one million emigrants in Kerala.[35] As a process of development, the entrepreneurs all over India invest lot of money in Kerala and as a result the villages become the extensions of cities. All these manure individualism and materialism which harm human social accountability.

The people of Kerala, who have witnessed the ups and downs of various religions in the course of history and their diverse worldviews, are now emerging fast into a secular society where religion is considerably marginalized. The institutionalized religious expressions and their leaderships are limping behind the advanced secular thought and studies.

3.1.3. A Culture of Humanism

The ancient religious culture of Kerala was ignorant about the compartmentalized and institutionalized religion. Religious devotions did not mean to them an exclusivism. Although they worshipped God calling in different names, yet they had respect for each other and helped each other in human needs. But later the introduction of Vedic Hinduism with a new socio-political order patronized by their belief systems gravely hurt the religious life of the people in Kerala. Though the Hindu religion integrated some ethnic groups of Kerala into their caste hierarchy yet, the majority were rejected and they were called 'out castes' and they were

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[34] A. PATTAPARAMBIL G., "A Skeleton of the Actuality of the Marginalized Tea Workers of Munnar, Kerala", in K. K. Varghese (Ed.), *Marginalization and Liberation. Theoretical and contextual studies*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2008, 242.

[35] Demographics of Kerala, www. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of....., visited on 11-08-2012.*

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'untouchables'. Thus the religion became a measure of socio-political status. There occurred also a crisis among the Christians with the arrival of missionaries because of their effort to establish uniformity in the mode of worship.[36] All these religious unrest provoked the emergence of humanism in Kerala.[37]

The last decades of the 19th century witnessed the rise of powerful reform movements in the social and religious spheres of human life in Kerala. One of the famous person to be noted here is Sree Narayana Guru (1854-1928). He became very popular throughout Kerala as he was propagating a humanism beyond the religious barriers. He said that there is 'one caste, one religion, one God for man' and he added that 'whatever be one's religion, it

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[36] The official attitude of the Portuguese towards the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala was one of sympathy and understanding; but they always had a sense of superiority. The foreign missionaries believed that their form of Christianity was the true form and that all the Christians should conform to it in order to be perfect Christians. It created lot of confusion and resentment among the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala. The final outbreak of the resentment and dissatisfaction was occasioned by the arrival of an Eastern bishop, Ahatallah. The St. Thomas Christians had always remained very much attached to the bishops of the East Syrian rite and merely tolerated the governance of the Latin bishops. This is clear from the many petitions that they wrote to various ecclesiastical higher authorities in which they pleaded for Syrian bishops. Finally, the Archdeacon of the St. Thomas Christians, Thomas Parambil, wrote secret letters to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and to the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon in which he gave exaggerated reports of the state of frustration that the St. Thomas Christians experienced, and pleaded for their help. It was based on this request that Ahatallah arrived in India in 1652. He declared himself to be the head of the Church in India and China.

On 3rd January 1653, the agitated majority of the St. Thomas Christians, under the leadership of Archdeacon Thomas Parambil, made an oath in front of the cross at Mattancherry, a suburb of Cochin, never to obey the Roman ecclesiastical authorities. Another tradition says that a rope was tied to the Cross and people made the oath catching hold of the rope so much so, that the Cross was bent; hence, the Coonan (bended) Cross oath. As a result of the division caused by this event, one group promised their allegiance to Rome definitively, and the other group eventually affiliated themselves to the Antiochene Jacobite Church., in B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of India's St. Thomas Christians* 1995, 84-85; A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India. Vol. I* 1984, 352; F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis. The First Archbishop of Malabar* 1998, 11.

[37] K. CHAITHANYA, - P. PILLAI (tr.), *Keralam* (Malayalam), National Book Trust, New Delhi 1996, 72-73.

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is enough that individual becomes good'.[38] Speaking about Sree Narayana Guru in his book, *Charithrathe Agadhamakkiya Guru*, K. P. Appan says that although Guru was in an intellectual height of religious experience, he was not in a hurry to implement it in the society. He wished to raise the religious attitude of the people slowly from various status to the concept of one God and from the concept of passive adoration of God in the temples to the active participation of the people in a true human life in the society. Guru was God-centered but he did not have a conceptual rigidity. He considered human values as the measure of God experience.[39]

In a religious ambient where the institutional religions insisted that only a certain people with a high social status can worship some so called major gods like Siva, Vishnu, and so on, when it is insisted that only the priests can consecrate the temples, Narayana Guru, being a member of low caste (Ezhava), consecrated a temple to the Lord Siva. When there was organized protest from the part of the institutionalized Hinduism under the leadership of the Brahmins, Narayana Guru calmly clarified that it was their low caste god, 'Ezhava Siva' whom he has consecrated in the temple![40]

The great poets and writers in the modern period raised their powerful voice against the social discrimination in the state which is based on caste system. A poet, for example, Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), who belonged to one of the lowest strata of the society propagated the Buddhist principles of human dignity beyond Hindu caste discrimination and called for a social transformation. In all his poems he hailed human values, especially merciful love, over and above the institutionalized Hindu religious values based on the hierarchy of human origin.[41]

There are also powerful secular critics of religion in Kerala who always raise voice against the superstitions and exploitations in the name of God. For example, Rajan Gurukkal, the previous Vice Chancellor of the Mahatma

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[38] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 255.

[39] P. A. KARTHIKAYIL, *Charithrathe Agadhamakkiya Guru* (Malayalam), D. C. Books, Kerala 2005, 9.

[40] P. A. KARTHIKAYIL, *Charithrathe Agadhamakkiya Guru*, 2005, 10.

[41] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 200-201.

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Gandhi University, Kerala, in his book, *Myth Charithram Samooham*,[42] criticizes the exaggerated presentation of human realities by the religious leaders and the superstitious and unreasonable responses they give to the human realities with a motive of exploitation.[43] He remembers, how Mahavira and Buddha were against the ritualistic religion. He cites in his book many number of other great social and religious leaders of India who spoke against pure ritualism without a practical orientation.[44]

One of the salient features of the Kerala culture is that although there are diverse religions and ethnic groups, there exists a unity based on some basic human values.[45]

> A survey of the centers of worship of the different religious communities in Kerala will illustrate the high degree of religious amity and communal harmony that has prevailed here through the ages. One of the most exhilarating spectacles that one witnesses in Kerala is that of the location of the centers of worship of different religious communities in close proximity to one another in the same area.[46]

When in various other parts of India, people suffered violent religious conflicts among the followers of Hinduism on the basis of ritualistic differences and even bloodshed because of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, the people of Kerala expressed concern for each other because of the powerful humanistic movement.

> That Kerala was the first region in modern India to throw open its temples to Harijans [the name given by Mahatma Gandhi to the people of the lowest strata. The word means 'people of God'] and other *Avarnas* [out castes] and thus strike a decisive

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[42] The meanings of these Malayalam words are: Myth, History, Society.

[43] R. GURUKKAL, *Myth Charithram Samooham* (Malayalam), Prasakthi Book House, Kerala 2009, 67.

[44] R. GURUKKAL, *Myth Charithram Samooham,* 2009, 74-75.

[45] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 13.

[46] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 13.

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> blow at untouchability is a tribute at once to the perseverance of its people as to the humanism and enlightenment of its administrators who had the practical wisdom to read the writing on the wall and take timely action in this direction.[47]

The above considerations make it clear that the institutionalized religious tradition that was established in Kerala with a socio-political order did not satisfy the basic needs of all people. They neither safeguarded the basic human values nor they addressed the religious sentiments of all people. There was a lack of a balanced consideration of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of religious behavior. This caused the rise of secular socio-political movements in Kerala to safeguard the basic human values.

3.2. POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN KERALA

The people of Kerala share some common elements of religiosity although they belong to various religions. This common religious attitude, which may be a reason for the religious harmony in Kerala, is found its expression in the ambient of popular devotions. The fact, that a large number of people gather around the centers of popular devotions irrespective of caste and creed, reveals that the institutionalized forms of worship do not address fully this common element of religiosity in Kerala. There are some common elements of religiosity in the people of Kerala and they are evident particularly in the vows that the devotees make to their saints and deities. To say an example, there is a practice of offering '*alrupangal*', which means, models of bodily parts or of total body made of small pieces of Silver, Gold or Steal or with edible flours. These objects are offered to the saints or deities as a gesture of gratitude for the bodily cure they received or as the fulfillment of a vow to obtain a bodily cure. This practice can be seen in the Hindu and Christian centers of popular devotions. In his book, *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, the author affirms this and gives a list of other devotional practices.

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[47] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 299.

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> In Christian and Hindu places of worship in Kerala, devotees from both traditions offer vows in a similar fashion and in a variety of forms. Bodily vows commonly include any of a variety of 'acts of humiliation' [...], in which a devotee performs such feats as crawling to the shrine with a cured baby on his or her back, rolling on the grounds surrounding the shrine or temple, or shaving his or her head. Material vows can include the offering of the 'first fruits' of agriculture or industry, ornate umbrellas for annual festivals, or money for Church or temple funds.[48]

At present with the following titles we study mainly on the popular Hinduism and their devotions as we have a study on Catholic popular devotions later.

3.2.1. Hinduism: a Collective Name for Numerous Worldviews

The demographics of India open to us an ethnological museum! India is the second largest populated country in the world with over 1.18 billion people (estimate for April, 2010) and consists of more than one-sixth (17.31%) of the world's population. The people of India belong to more than two thousand ethnic groups.[49] Of the total population 80.5% of the Indians are Hindus. Among the rest of the population 13.4% are Muslims, 2.3% are Christians, 1.9% are Sikhs, 0.8% are Buddhists, 0.4% are Jains, 0.6% are of other religious groups and persuasions and 0.1% without a stated religion.[50] 43% of the Hindus speak Hindi while the rest speak Bangala, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Assamese and other languages. Almost 45% of the Muslims speak Urdu while the rest speak Bangala, Hindi, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, Gujarati, Assamese

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[48] D. CORINNE G. *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 102.

[49] Demographics of India, www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/ Demography..., visited on 13-05-2010.

[50] Demographics of India, www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/ Demography..., visited on 13-05-2010.

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and other languages. About one-third of the Christians speak Malayalam, one-sixth speak Tamil while the rest speak a variety of languages. In total, there are 1,652 languages and dialects spoken in India.[51]

The Hindu religious tradition is the oldest and immensely complex of all religious systems. Since it has no specific founder or theology, it is difficult to provide an adequate history of Hinduism. The invasion of the northern parts of India by the Aryan Indo-European tribes around 1500 B. C. influenced much in the development of Hinduism. The word Hinduism comes from the name of an Indian river Indus, on the banks of which the ancient Indian civilization developed. The Aryans worshipped multiple gods whereas the people of Indus valley, who were later called Dravidians believed in the sanctity of fertility.[52]

Hinduism comprises numerous sects or denominations. The denominations are roughly comparable to different religions. The presence of different denominations and schools within Hinduism should not be viewed as a schism, as there was no original unity. On the contrary, there is at present no great animosity between the different 'religions' which constitute Hinduism, and among Hindu followers as a whole, there is a strong belief that there are many paths leading to the one God or the source, whatever one chooses to call that ultimate Truth.[53] In his book *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, Abraham Ayrookuzhiel states:

> [...] whatever be the objective truth of religious concepts and rituals, a people's conception of the truth of those concepts and rituals in relation to 'themselves', 'nature' and 'society' is also historically and culturally conditioned. Briefly, this means that while the religious beliefs and rituals of a people play a key-role in shaping the self-understanding and the world-view of a

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51 Demographics of India, www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/ Demography..., visited on 13-05-2010.

52 History of Hinduism, www.allaboutreligion.org/history-of ...., visited on 05-05-2010.

53 Hindu Denominations, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_denominations...., visited on 11-06-2012.

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> people, the religious beliefs and rituals themselves are conditioned by the society in which [...] people find themselves.[54]

It is this natural diversity which is overcome by the religious consciousness in India by saying that 'there are many paths, but lead to the same goal' and in this way Hinduism establishes a unity in diversity. Each human community continues to be an individual human community only because it has an identity with a specific world view. Although Hindu religion supplies to its adherents with a set of religious symbols like *Isvaran*, *Sakti*, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Suddhi*, *Papam*, *Punyam*, *Moksham*, etc.,[55] yet these symbols were interpreted in the world view of each ethnic group and Hinduism accommodated itself to the identity of the individual communities. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel says, "The Hindu religious spirit is also such that it has absorbed concepts and ways of thinking from [even] other religious traditions [...] through movements of religious reform within its own tradition."[56]

When we analyze the spread and development of Hindu religion in Kerala we can notice the same process that has happened in the history of Hinduism in the main land, India. A. Sreedhare Menon states:

> The Hindu religion as it developed in Kerala in the course of centuries was moulded by a synthesis of Aryan ideas from the North and the Dravidian ideas from the South. Hindu religious practices in Kerala were the result of a gradual process of assimilation of these two ideas. The early Aryan immigrants

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[54] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar*, Christian Literature Society, Madras 1983, 2. [Hereafter referred to as A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*]

[55] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 2.

[56] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 3.

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> assimilated the practices of the native people and borrowed their gods whom they accommodated within their own religion.[57]

The elasticity that we observe in the world of concepts and ideas of Hinduism are also visible in the forms and objects of worship. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel reports:

> [...] the living everyday religion of Hindus is made up of the worship of not only their innumerable gods but also their objects like the cow and the serpent, trees and plants, rivers and planets, and tools and grains. Belief in evil spirits, practices of purity and pollution, observance of auspicious and inauspicious times are all part of their active religious consciousness.[58]

It is also important to take note of another religious movement in the Hindu religion. The intellectual profundity of the Vedic Hinduism was so high and transcendental that the 'common masses' had no access to reach it. The rigorous self discipline demanded by the Buddhism was so heavy for the weak people. Therefore there originated the school of Bhakti – an intense emotional surrender to God. A. Sreedhara Menon says, "the Bhakti cult generated a new wave of religious enthusiasm among the masses which paved the way for the rapid progress of [popular] Hinduism and the decline of Jainism and Buddhism".[59]

As we analyze the history of Hinduism, we are impressed by its unity in diversity. The religion is rich with the diverse individual religious expressions of the various ethnic groups and with some underlying factors of unity. The Hindu religion is like a big garden of varieties of flowers. Each individual religious sentiment finds a place to grow and flourish in this great religious tradition. There is respect for individual identity and its expression and at the same time there is effort for constant inculturation. As a result the

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[57] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 25.
[58] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 2.
[59] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 25.

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people of various religions can live together as good neighbors and as good citizens of a great nation.

3.2.2. A General Picture of the Hindu Devotions in Kerala

Although the evolution of the religious consciousness of the main land, India, had very much influenced the religiosity of the people of Kerala from ancient times onwards, Kerala was sharing the general religious attitudes of the people in South India.[60] The religious atmosphere was filled with many gods and goddesses and curiously there arose new gods and goddesses in the course of time with new forms of rituals and consequently the old gods with the old rituals disappeared or became unpopular.[61]

The absence of a religious institutional structure which regulate and safeguard the Hindu ritual traditions, like in Christianity, makes it difficult to give a general picture of Hindu devotions. As 'Hinduism' is a collective name for numerous world views, it becomes all the more difficult to assert some general statements about the Hindu devotional expressions even of a state in India, Kerala. Therefore we rely on a study of this kind by Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, who, in his book, *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism* makes an empirical study of the religious culture in Chirakkal, a village in North Kerala, to get a general picture of the Hindu devotions in Kerala. He states:

> The places of Hindu worship in Chirakkal are broadly of two types. The first type are those of the brahminical tradition [...]. The chief presiding deities in these temples are Sri Krishna, Siva, Somesvari amma (Lakshmi), Putiya bhagavathi (Bhadra Kali), Dhanvantiri (Vishnu), Sasta, Subramanian and Ganapati.
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> The other type of sacred places in Chirakkal [...] follow the tradition of *Teyyam* worship. *Teyyam* is said to be a corrupt form of the word *Daivam*, meaning God. The characteristic feature of

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60 A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 3.

61 Kerala – Gateway to Paradise, www.kerala.cc/index32htm Kerala History, Kerala Society ...., visited on 11-05-2010.

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Teyyam worship is that *Teyyangal* [plural for *Teyyam*] appear through the dancers who put on the different forms of gods – whether human or animal. This form of worship is spoken of by *Teyyam* dancers as *svarupa dhyanam*, namely the worship of gods in their own forms as opposed to *arupa dhyanam*, i. e., worship of gods in the spirit as practiced in the brahminical tradition.

There are about a half a dozen *Teyyam* shrines of importance in Chirakkal apart from numerous similar ones, some of which are family shrines.[62]

The temples of brahminical tradition have Brahmins as their temple priests and they have a worship of gods in the spirit. The statues of gods that they use are the symbols of the concepts of gods they received from their tradition. The statues are the mediums through which they encounter their conceptual gods. Whereas the tradition of *Teyyam* worship, which is often followed by the so called low class people, is very much sentimental and real.

During the temple feasts or the days of importance the *Teyyam* worshippers gather around their sacred places in which some persons are believed to be possessed by the gods whom they adore. Most often, the phenomenon of being possessed by gods occur to the same persons during the days of feasts. These persons are called '*piniyalukal*' which means, the instruments of gods. They prepare themselves with some days of prayer and fasting for the service of being the instruments of gods during the days of importance when all the devotees gather around the place of worship. The devotees go directly to these divinely possessed persons to narrate their difficulties of life so that they may receive some remedies.

The remedies that the god possessed persons utter will be most often in tone of retributive justice. For example, to the persons who suffer poverty, sickness, unemployment, family crisis, and the like, the god possessed person may say that such and such gods are angry with those persons either

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[62] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 13-14.

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because they ignored those gods in their lives or they did not perform the rites in honor of them for which they have taken a vow. Therefore they pronounce some rites to be performed by the devotees to get rid of the present problems of life. They assure the devotees fortunes and a good life in the future.

Some god possessed persons appear to be more powerful and the consecration in the temple become famous because the devotees experience that as soon as these possessed persons see a particular devotee, they pronounce the family situation before the devotee tell about it. These extraordinary stories are also propagated among the people. This help the devotees to trust more in the god possessed persons and they promptly follow their directions. The devotees feel that they really encountered their God. They feel that gods see their difficulties of life and believe that they will receive the protection and care of gods in their life.

Thus, the people in the ambient of popular devotions encounter their gods more really and sensibly than in the conceptual worship of the high class Hindus. If we examine closely we can see that the gods they worship are the same gods of the Brahmins. But the difference is that while the high caste Hindus worship the essence of a god, the low castes worship the attributes of the same god. They give some names for each attribute of god that they want to apply to god according to their religious needs or according to what response they expect from god in concrete to their life situations. Thus:

> The *Teyyam*-s associated with Siva in Chirakkal are Muttappan, Kantakarnan, Vayanatankulavan, Kutti chattan, Bhairavan, Gulikan, Pottan, Karu-Kuntappan, Vettaykorumakan, Puliyur Kannan, etc. [...] There are also a few Vaishnava *Teyyangal* for instance Vishnu Murti, Daivattar, Urpazhasi, Karim kutti sastappan, etc.[63]

An important thing to be noted here is that the two Hindu religious traditions, official and popular, are accepted by all people 'in varying

[63] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 14.

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degrees' and they feel at home with both traditions. Although each ethnic group in the same village will have a temple of their own, common people will pay visits to all the temples to satisfy their religious needs.[64] There is also a habit of devotees going to a particular temple to receive a particular blessing in their life.

The devotions are propagated by the sacred stories of gods' wrath and punishment. Some of these stories have their origin in the Hindu Purana and Epics and others are local in character whose origin cannot be traced in a literary source.[65] The stories become a medium of propaganda to attract more devotees to the temples.

We can observe that the people who frequent the temples of popular devotions are assailed by the concrete problems of life and they are in search of an immediate remedy. The remedies are pronounced either by the ritual tradition of the particular temple which the people visit or by the 'god men' they encounter in the temple. Thus we can observe in Kerala a contrast between the 'great tradition' of the 'reflective few', who worship God in concepts and a 'little tradition' of a large number of people who search God to resolve their problems in their concrete life.

3.2.3. Sabarimala: A Pilgrim Centre of Hindu Popular Devotions in Kerala

Sabarimala is the largest Hindu pilgrim centre in the world into which gather 45 to 50 million devotees from various parts of Kerala and from all over South India in every year.[66] The deity worshipped here is called in various names like, Sastha, Ayyappan, Hariharaputra or with the adjective Swamin which means lord or master. Although there are other temples dedicated to Sastha in various parts of Kerala, Sabarimala is the most famous among all of them. The pilgrims who visit Sabarimala have a long religious preparation by observing strict vows of non-violence,

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[64] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 20.
[65] A. AYROOKUZHIEL M., *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, 1983, 75.
[66] Sabarimala, *www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/Sabarimala.....* visited on 08-06-2012.

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vegetarianism and abstinence from all the luxuries of life.[67] They put on black, saffron or blue clothes and a Rudrakshamala (chain) around their neck. These symbols remind them and the public that they have decided to go to Sabarimala and that they have to keep the vows of abstinence during the days of preparation. The pilgrims of preparation will be called 'Ayyappas' or 'Swamins', the very name of the deity they are going to visit.[68]

The devotees start their pilgrimage with 'Irumudikkettu' – which means a cloth bag with two portions – on their head. One portion of this bag contains their offering to their deity and the other portion is filled with rise for their sustenance on the way. On their way they recite the ejaculations to the deity which speak of their hope and submission. During the days of preparation and the days of pilgrimage there is a change of outlook among them that they are all considered equals beyond all the socio-economic stratifications. All of them cry with one voice: "Svamiye Saranamayyappa" – 'Oh! Lord, Ayyappa, you are our refuge'.[69]

We are now interested to study the unique characteristics of this popular devotion that could embrace the religious expressions of millions of devotees of Kerala in particular and those of South India in general even beyond caste and creed. A religious contextual analysis of Kerala make us clear that it has a basis in the Dravidian popular religious attitude which, in the course of time, was very strongly influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism. While Buddhism speaks about the rigorous discipline of the self based on Dharma which is eternal justice, Hinduism speaks of the transcendental dimension of human life and that of the rites which function as a medium to this transcendental aim. In the Sastha worship we can notice that all these elements are beautifully combined.

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[67] S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 35.

[68] A. NAMBIAPARAMBIL, "From the 'Saranam' of Sabarimala Pilgrimage to the 'Saranam' of the Dialogue – Pilgrimage", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 227.

[69] A. NAMBIAPARAMBIL, "From the 'Saranam' of Sabarimala Pilgrimage to the 'Saranam' of the Dialogue – Pilgrimage", 1986, 228. (The transliteration is of the language Malayalam, the language of Kerala.)

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It is noteworthy that Sastha or Ayyappan is a minor deity in the hierarchy of importance in the Hindu worship that is, Sastha is a deity of the popular religiosity and not a deity of the institutionalized Brahmanical Hinduism. Some scholars "identify Sastha with Ayyanar, a Dravidian or non-Aryan deity, widely worshipped on the east coast and consider Sastha worship as the Dravidian element which was incorporated into the Aryan religion in the wake of the Aryanisation of Kerala."[70] Quite a few arguments are proposed in favor of a theory which states that Sastha or Ayyappan is the Hindu version of the Buddha. They point out some Buddhist characteristics and principles that are found in connection with the preparation for pilgrimage and with the location of Sabarimala temple. Another story tells that Sastha is the son of *Hari* and *Hara* (*Vishnu* and *Siva*) and thus he is called Hariharaputra – "an attempt to synthesize the Vaishnavaite and Saivaite ideologies in the Sastha cult".[71] The Sabarimala Sastha worship is also connected with Christianity and Islam with some popular stories.[72]

After an analysis of the religious context of Kerala and the particular characteristics of the popular devotion to Ayyappan at Sabarimala, we can discover the reasons that attract lot of people in Kerala and of South India to this centre. The Sastha cult has been formulated in such a way that all the possible religious sentiments that are seen in the religious history of Kerala are found their expression. The social, political, economic and psychological dimensions of the religious sentiments are taken care of in the religious ambient of Sastha cult and in front of which all devotees are equal. The religious, linguistic and cultural diversities are overcome in this religious ambient.

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70 S. M. ALAPPAT, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 26.

71 S. M. ALAPPAT , *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, 2008, 35.

72 The devotees who visit the temple at *Sabarimala* also stop at a mosque and the Hindu pilgrims make offerings in the Muslim mosque! The story that connects the two centres of worship is this: "a muslim chieftain 'Vavar' picked up quarrel with Ayyappa, the manifestation of the supreme, and later on became the ardent devotee of Lord Ayyappa"., in A. NAMBIAPARAMBIL, "From the 'Saranam' of Sabarimala Pilgrimage to the 'Saranam' of the Dialogue – Pilgrimage", 1986, 229. A Christian connection is made with a story which tells that *Sabarimala Ayyappan* is the brother of St. Sebastian of the Church at Arthunkal at Allapuzha in Kerala. They call St. Sebastian *Veluthachan* while *Ayyappan* is *Karuthachan*. Some devotees in their return from Sabarimala also visit this Catholic Church at Arthunkal.

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3.3. CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN KERALA

It was the missionaries who came to Kerala from the close of 13th century[73] who propagated the Catholic Popular Devotions in Kerala.[74] It was also a pastoral necessity to respond to the needs of the popular religious culture into which the Christians in Kerala were born and living. Like the worship of gods and goddesses in popular Hinduism, veneration of some Saints and Blessed Mother became popular among the common people in Kerala. The popular Hindu tradition of the recital of the *Rama nama japa* (repeated utterance of the name Rama) at home, in the evening was addressed with the introduction of the Christian tradition of the recital of Rosary in the Christian families.[75]

In his article, "An Attitudinal Study of Popular Devotions", Paul Karachira makes a Scientific study interviewing the representatives of 20 parishes in Kerala and enumerates 36 items of popular devotions.[76] Among them some are more popular than the other Catholic popular devotions in Kerala. They are: family Rosary, participation in pious associations oriented to social service, fasting, visiting Cemetery and paying homage to the dead, novena to Saints and Mary, pilgrimages, first Friday devotion, Scapular devotion, solemn celebration of feasts of the patron Saints, devotion to Rosary as a pious article and devotion to the passion of the Lord especially during the Lent.[77]

In our study, we are interested to consider the popular devotions of mass movements like devotion to the humanity of Jesus in various ways, devotion to Saints and Mary. It is a movement of the people who suffer poverty,

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[73] From the close of the 13th century, Dominican and Franciscan, and later Jesuit missionaries began to arrive in South India, in A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India. Vol. 1, From the Beginning up to the Middle of the 16th Century (up to 1542),* Theological Publications in India, Bangalore 1984, 120-121.

[74] W. FERNANDES, "The Missionary Background of Popular Devotions", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC Bangalore 1986, 123.

[75] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Catholic Popular Devotions in Kerala. A pastoral Challenge", in *Mission Today* 13 (2011), 273-274.

[76] P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 319.

[77] P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", 1986, 322-323.

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unemployment, family crisis, sicknesses, remorse of their past sins and so on. They expect an immediate supernatural intervention in their existential problems. The stories that are narrated in the centers about the divine intervention of Jesus in the lives of the devotees of the past through the intercession of the Saints and Mary, encourage them to visit these centers with the hope that the same stories will be repeated in their lives also. We consider also the charismatic movement in Kerala as an organized movement of popular devotions considering the 'masses' who participate in it with their 'popular attitudes' although it has its own identity outside the category of popular devotions.

3.3.1. Charismatic Movement in Kerala: an Organized Movement of Popular Devotions

The charismatic movement is a response to the trends of the time where people look for experience, acceptance and authenticity. It is a movement from the grass roots of the Church, and even the bishops and priests are attracted to it. It has given hope and fidelity to millions, but has also caused considerable confusion in many.[78] The main characteristic of the charismatics is that they believe that the Spirit, already present in the believers, can become present to the same person in a decisively new way, as a matter of experience, here and now.[79] The charismatic renewal has given birth to thousands of committed young men and women, and boys and girls, who love and serve the Church wholeheartedly.[80]

In India charismatic movement had its beginning at Mumbai in 1972 and became popular in Kerala in 1976.[81] At present there are about 87

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[78] E. EDEZHATH, "Catholic Charismatic Renewal: a Personal Witness", in *Jeevadhara* 25, 148 (1995), 286.

[79] P. PUTHANANGADY, "The Spread of Charismatic Movement today and the Revival of Fundamentalism", in *Jeevadhara* 22, 130 (1992) 1, 278.

[80] A. CHALUMKAL. C., "Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement as a response to Neo-Pentecostalism: a Personal Witness", in *Jeevadhara* 25, 148 (1995), 285.

[81] J. PALATTY, *Charismatic Naveekaranam Alakum Pidiyum* (Malayalam), Emmaus Publications, Kalamassery, Kerala 1991, 39.

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charismatic retreat centers all over Kerala.[82] Since this movement gives importance to the personal experience rather than theological or catechetical formation[83] any common man has the possibility to come to an ecstatic expression and experience of his religiosity. In this religious ambient the Saints as divine intercessors are substituted by the leaders and some men of prayer in the retreat centers. Common people go to them to ask their intercession for the divine intervention in their struggles of daily life.[84]

The charismatic movement in the Catholic Church may be considered one of the expressions of the outpouring of the Spirit in the post-Vatican period. However, since it is also a human endeavor, this movement can be fraught with dangers of human manipulation and distortion. In fact, in many instances, this has happened.[85] We consider some of the strengths and weaknesses of this movement in Kerala.[86]

Strengths:- The centrality of God in life as an idea relevant and practical for today's world is presented to each individual in a very powerful way through the charismatic renewal. The charismatic movement has helped the people to better their prayer life, and encouraged the communitarian aspect of prayer. There is an active participation in the liturgical celebrations, and people are more frequent for the sacraments of confession and the Holy Eucharist. There is an increasing interest in the spiritual life. The charismatic movement provides a common ground for the people of all faiths to meet and pray together, and a lot of dialogue and sharing take place

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82 K. C. B. C. Episcopal Advisor, *Catholic Charismatic Naveekaranam Marganirdeshangal* (Malayalam), Kerala Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, Kerala 2004, 9-10.

83 J. PALATTY, *Charismatic Naveekaranam Alakum Pidiyum*, 1991, 19.

84 J. PALATTY, *Charismatic Naveekaranam Alakum Pidiyum*, 1991, 25.

85 P. PUTHANANGADY, "The spread of Charismatic Movement today and the revival of Fundamentalism", (1992), 277.

86 These observations are based on the interviews I conducted with 3 prelates, 6 parish priests and 5 other eminent priests, 16 nuns of various religious congregations and 13 lay people, in J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, (M Th. Dissertation, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong 2003) Unpublished manuscript, 44- 54; Also confer D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Christian Sects and Groups", in *Eranakulam Mission* 79, 4 (2009), 133-139; T. CHACKYATH, "Letter to sisters", in *Eranakulam Mission* 75, 1 (2005), 7-9.

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even in an inter-religious way. Thus, a communion of believers is established beyond religious structures. Striving for holiness in this modern age, especially for the ordinary people, has become something practical.

The Bible has become popular among the people irrespective of caste and creed. Many are initiated to Bible studies due to this movement. The word of God is strongly discovered, and is shared in small friendship communities.

There is a spirit of evangelization in the faithful at various levels. New pastoral initiatives have come up and the Jesus Youth Movement witnesses the heroic commitment of young people who are Christ possessed. People share their goods with the poor, and we see a lot of other charitable works and movements. This movement attracts all people to the Christian faith. We observe a renewal of life in all walks of life and religions.

A lot of reconciliation is taking place in families and among individuals. Conversion of hardhearted people and drug addicts prove the effectiveness of the charismatic movement. Focus on the person and on one's physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs has exerted a liberative influence on millions of individuals. The charismatic movement has paved the way for the discovery of the power of lay initiatives in the Church.

Weaknesses:- There is a fear in some people that this movement may become a parallel Church. People go away from the hierarchical Church. Some feel that they are more than the Church and possess a superior spirituality. Many have lost their commitment to and communion with their parishes. Some ask, "Should we obey the Church authority or the spirit?" The unqualified preachers misguide people with a partial communication of the Christian faith. There is an exaggeration of the concept of sin.

There is the spread of a lot of superstitious beliefs, and undue importance is given to healing, signs and miracles than to a change of heart. Some are considered to be and some pretend to be 'god men'. There is an irrational approach to the faith. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are widely misused. Some of the gifts become exhibitionistic and magical.

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Since the Bible is not properly introduced to people, there is a widespread misinterpretation of the Bible. The charismatic groups quite often take the Bible as the Word of God almost in an exclusive sense, without realizing that God's Word cannot be imprisoned in a book, however holy it is. The Word of God is wider than the Bible itself. There is a strong hostility to modern theology and to the methods, results and implications of the modern critical study of the Bible.

There is a wide spread fatalistic interpretation of eschatology. Some charismatics at times would like to describe heaven as something that emerges from an apocalyptic cataclysm. What the believer has to do is to remain in prayer and wait for the event to take place. The collaboration of the human will is undermined.

The ministry of preaching is commercialized. Huge amounts of money are collected from the people by threatening them with curses and woes. There is a fight for power, position and cheep popularity among the leaders. Some people escape from their family responsibilities and involve themselves inordinately in this movement.

The counseling in the retreat centers conducted by unqualified persons misleads and confuses many people. Sometimes it even replaces confession, and leads to public sharing of the personal sins of the counselees. Some people, especially women, are abused spiritually and psychologically.

Other religions are considered as totally wrong and outside the action of the Holy Spirit. They ignore the positive affirmations of the teachings of the Church in this regard. It even provokes religious fundamentalism. Some become extremists and embrace other Churches.

The noisy prayer methods often do not help the people to improve their inner calmness, and many lose their mental balance.

Charismatic Movement as an organized movement of popular devotions have oriented lot of people to a life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The popularity and success of this movement lies in the fact that it tried to address the religious sentiments of the 'masses' in Kerala. Like in any other

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popular religious context, people have a chance to meet some God men and women who respond to their day to day problems of life with concern and care. These god men and women assure an imminent coming of prosperity and good fortunes to the people who are assailed by poverty, sickness, family crisis, unemployment, and so on. They strengthen the people to face the challenges of life generating in them a hope in a better future here and now.

3.3.2. Devotion to Infant Jesus, Sacred Heart and the Sufferings of Christ

Michael Thomas, in his book, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis*, narrates in detail about the origin and development of the devotion to Infant Jesus in various parts of the world and especially in India. The author mentions about some of the centers of popular devotions dedicated to Infant Jesus in Kerala.[87] In these centers the official Church takes special care to give due importance to the liturgical celebrations. At the same time, according to the aspirations of the devotees special prayer services and benedictions are conducted with great care and devotion. There are narrations of the stories of favors received and the public reading of the supplications of the devotees. Intercessory prayers are conducted for the sick and for the other material needs of the devotees.[88] Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of reconciliation are those liturgical functions that receive much importance in these centers of popular devotions in general.[89] The singing of devotional songs in a solemn way is an important element in these centers of popular devotions in Kerala.[90]

There are some Churches and Shrines in Kerala where people gather in large number to adore and pay their devotion to the Sacred Heart. The general ritual tradition of these centers and Churches are same as the other centers

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87 M. THOMAS, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis. A study based on the devotion to Infant Jesus*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2000, 74. [Hereafter M. THOMAS, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis*]

88 M. THOMAS, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis*, 2000, 83.

89 M. THOMAS, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis*, 2000, 84.

90 M. THOMAS, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis*, 2000, 90.

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of popular devotions. There is weekly novena recital and it is done most often on the Friday, remembering the death of Jesus Christ on a Friday. High solemn Mass is celebrated with solemn singing of songs which would be followed generally by the novena to the Sacred Heart. The narrations, of the favors received by frequenting the novena center without fail for nine consecutive days and the supplications for the favors accompanied by the declaration of the vows that they will perform if they receive the favors requested, take an important part in the sacramental service of novena. This follows the recital of the formula of novena which is the most important part in the service. In most of the centers people are given food (Often during the Lunch time) after the prayer sessions. One of the most famous pilgrim center at central Kerala, where devotion to Sacred Heart of Jesus attracts thousands of people is Sacred Heart Church at Manattuparambu, Kochi.[91]

Act of consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus during the first Fridays of the months is a common devotion in almost all the Catholic Churches in Kerala. It is done often along with one hour adoration to the Blessed sacrament. There is also the consecration of the Christian families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which is often done when a new house is blessed or sometimes during the annual house blessing.

Devotion to the Passion of Christ is in its peak during the Lent and the Holy Week although there are some Churches and shrines where there are monthly or weekly devotion to the sufferings of Christ. Way of the Cross is the most popular devotion that is done in a solemn way during the Lent especially during the Holy Week. It is recited either in the Church making a short procession to the stations of the Cross or a long procession is conducted that leads to the territories of the villages during the important days of repentance. During the Good Friday, the neighboring parishes may join together to conduct a Way of the Cross in a most solemn way. There are some Churches and hill tops which become pilgrim centers during the time of Lent and Holy Week.

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[91] Sacred Heart Church Manattuparambu, www. *wikimapia.org/.../SACRED-HEART-CHURCH-...*, visited on 22-08-2012.

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Our Lady of Assumption Church, Poomkavu is one of the famous pilgrim center during the Holy Week. A famous devotional service in this Church is the 'Nagarikanikkal'[92] procession. It is a procession that is done after finishing the Sacred Liturgy of Good Friday. In this procession the devotees carry the statue of the dead body of Jesus Christ in a decorated coffin and walk along the streets of the city singing the songs of lamentation. Thousands of people participate in this procession with sentiments of remorse, praying for the remission of their sins and sometimes crying being taken up by the sorrowful atmosphere. All experience in reality the death of Jesus Christ by this heart breaking ceremony.[93] This ceremony is also done many other Churches on Good Friday and the people of the respective parishes participate in it with strong feelings of devotion. But as it is a characteristic of popular devotions, only some Churches and some statues attract people from various parts of the state beyond parish confines. The initiatives of the priests and religious play a major role in giving vibrations of life to these devotional practices.

Several times in the previous chapters we have taken note of a fact that the religious ambient of the popular devotions is the ambient of the poor and needy, who find themselves helpless in their human environment. They cannot be consoled by a discourse of transcendental dimension of our existence or of our faith rather, they seek a concrete response here and now for their day to day problems. A contemplation of the humanity of Jesus is a consoling factor for them because from the childhood to his death on the cross, Jesus lived a life of the poor and underwent all the difficulties of the poor and the needy. Therefore, the simplicity of the Child Jesus, the merciful Heart of Jesus and the passion of Christ become the causes of consolation for the people who suffer lot of misfortunes in the world. They confront here a God who suffer, like them, all the limitations of human life. Therefore they hope that the same God will respond to their urgent needs of daily life.

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[92] This Malayalam word means 'make visible (show) to the city'.

[93] Our Lady of Assumption Church, Poomkavu, www. *poomkavuchurch.org/...*, visited on 22-08-2012.

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3.3.3. Devotion to Mary and Saints

Although there existed the cult of Saints in Kerala like devotion to St. George, before the coming of the Western missionaries, it is they who brought popular devotions to Saints and Mary, in a large scale among the Christians in Kerala.[94] These devotions not only mirror devotees' life styles and beliefs but also their world views which embrace various aspects of human life. The religious world view that is expressed in the cult of Saints in Kerala manifest the characteristic of a religiosity that is less absolutized and conceptualized but more earth-bound. Therefore, they have more complicated constructions of identities of worship and relations to them.[95]

While the institutionalized Christianity promotes the hope of a sure victory of good over evil as well as the privileging of the spiritual realm over the material realm, in the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala, such institutional preferences fade into the background. "In such instances, dualistically oriented prescriptions are eclipsed by or replaced with a stance more comfortable with notions of materially accessible sacred powers".[96] More than 90% of the devotes that gather around the centers and shrines of popular devotions of the Saints in Kerala are seeking material favors from Mary and Saints although the official prayers are uttered through the intercession of the Saints and Mary. Most of the people do not know much about the life and teachings of the Saints. Rather they narrate each other some orally transmitted stories of miracles and received favors.[97]

In his book, *Mariabhakthy Keralathil*,[98] the author gives a historical account of the Churches that are dedicated to Mary in Kerala. In the preface of the book he remembers the words of a Cardinal who visited Kerala in 2000.[99] Cardinal hailed the Church in Kerala for its flourishing faith life and devotion to Mary. He said that there are three reasons for the flourishing

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94 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 39.
95 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 4.
96 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 88.
97 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 89.
98 It means *Devotion to Mary in Kerala.*
99 The Archbishop of Cologne, Joachim Meisner, in January, 2000.

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faith life in the Church in Kerala. They are, a: active participation in the holy Mass, b: devotion to Mary, and c: respect and obedience that the faithful have to their ecclesiastical leaders.[100] The book states that there existed Churches dedicated to Mary from the fifth century A. D. The Western missionaries who came to Kerala wondered at the Marian devotional practices in the Church and they propagated the Western Marian devotional practices to the people like, the Angelus, Hail Holy Queen, Remember oh Merciful Mother, Rosary, Litany, Monthly devotion in the Month of May, Scapular devotion, and so on.[101] Devotions to Our Lady have been a patrimony of Kerala Christians.[102]

We get a clear picture of what is happening in a center of popular devotions to Mary and Saints from the book, *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, in which the author speaks in detail about the devotion to St. Alphonsa at Barananganam, which is situated at Kottayam district, Kerala. St. Alphonsa is the first declared Saint of the Catholic Church in Kerala. People from different walk of life and religions and cultures make pilgrimages to the shrine of St Alphonsa at Bharananganam. An overriding theme in St. Alphonsa's life that the devotees speak about is that she had led an agonizing life.

> Whether due to the mistreatment from family members or nuns in her convent, or through mental or, most commonly, physical anguish, Alphonsa – as universally understood by her devotees – was a woman who lived a life marked by excruciating pain. The composite description of St. Alphonsa, repeatedly illustrated regardless of the pilgrims' background, was of a nun who had been beaten down by life and who, after her death, became a healer of legendary proportions.[103]

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100 P. NAIKARAKUDY, *Mariabhakthy Keralathil* (Malayalam), Paulachan Naikarakudy, Muttuchira, Kerala 2008, viii.

101 P. NAIKARAKUDY, *Mariabhakthy Keralathil*, 2008, xii.

102 P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", 1986, 325.

103 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 89.

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The devotees promise her to fulfill some vows that they voluntarily take according the popular customs of the shrine at Bharananganam and pray for a powerful and miraculous intervention of St. Alphonsa in their life.[104] Although the official Church portrays St. Alphonsa as a model of asceticism for her devotees to follow, and thus gives a theological meaning to suffering, the devotees consider her not only as a means for ending bodily suffering but also for winning 'material' favors such as healing from a sickness, obtaining a job, house ownership, contracting a marriage alliance and so on.[105]

> Devotees who hope to win favors from Alphonsa, whether for healing or for a job, often perform a vow in the form of an ascetic act – through begging, fasting, or other physically and psychologically demanding acts. Many devotees thus view suffering and self-denial as a necessary means to a desired, materially 'positive' end.[106]

Thus, while the official Church promotes asceticism for a supernatural end, the devotees in the ambient of popular devotion in Kerala do ascetical practices for material goals. While the official Church portrays the Saints as spiritual and divine intercessors, the popular devotional practices give importance to their material accessibility and their intervention on the miseries of the people on earth.[107]

> Like Sr. Alphonsa, the majority of Christian Saints in Kerala are not primarily understood as models of sanctity but, rather, as sources of sacred power acting to solve earthly problems. Yet in contrast to Sr. Alphonsa, whom devotees generally call upon to treat a wide spectrum of ailments and issues, the roles that other Kerala Saints play are often more specialized. For instance in Kottayam district Keralites usually associate three of their most

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104 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 89.
105 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 90.
106 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 90.
107 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 92.

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popular Saints, St. George, St. Gregorius, and St. Sebastian, with the eradication of particular types of calamity.[108]

Malayalees attribute to some Saints special power of protection. For example, St. George is attributed with the power to protect the people from poisonous snakes which was once a legitimate concern in Kerala's tropical land. St. Sebastian was called upon to guard against contagious sicknesses like chickenpox. They pray to St. Antony of Padua to recover the lost objects.[109] One another strange belief which existed in the past generation was that if the devotees do not perform the vows that they have taken, they will be punished by the same Saints![110] Miraculous efficacy is attributed to some particular statues, pictures, relics and places.[111]

The fact that the popular devotions thrive according to the initiatives of some priest or religious is also true in Kerala, says Paul Karachira in his article:

> The fame and influence he has, the publicity and propaganda he gives, through the 'favours received' and miracles, are factors that induce people to crowd at a shrine or church as in the case of Novenas and pilgrimages. [...] This trend shall be illustrated by the fact that a particular devotion is popular and appealing in one place at one time, but not so in another place or at other times. A flourishing devotion goes weak and sometimes dead, when a priest is transferred.[112]

It becomes very clear that the people that are gathered around the centers of devotion to Mary and Saints, are in search of an assurance of the intervention of the Saints and Mary into their helpless realities of lives. They expect some powerful representatives of God whether living or dead to address their existential problems with some concrete remedies. It is also

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108 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 94.
109 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 96.
110 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 97-98.
111 D. CORINNE G., *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 2001, 101.
112 P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", 1986, 317.

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clear how the popular religious attitude of the 'masses' is one and the same irrespective of the religious differences. In other words, the Catholic popular religious ambient is very much influenced by the Hindu popular religion.

3.4. CONCLUSION

A historical and contextual analysis of the culture of Kerala makes us clear that it is 'popular' in character. This fundamental popular character is visible also in the religious ambient and it is expressed through the popular devotions. The common characteristics that are found in the ambient of popular devotions irrespective of religions and the presence of people of all religions in the centers of popular devotions reveal the basic religious sentiments of the people in Kerala. They continue to exist in the religious ambient of popular devotions as a connecting link of unity although, in the course of history, the people of Kerala became the followers of various religions.

The popular movements, either secular or religious, are taken up by the day to day affairs of human life. The people who gather around in the religious ambient of popular devotions are seeking a religious response to their helpless human existence here and now rather than a transcendental hope of joy. However, there is a healthy tension between the 'great tradition' of the 'reflective few' and the 'little tradition' of the 'masses' who are lagging behind the current of development due to various reasons. Both groups are organized into socio-political movements to safeguard their interests. Whenever the basic human values were ignored by the religions, there arose secular movements of social and religious reforms in Kerala. As a result Kerala escapes all the tendencies of extremism and exaggeration in all the spheres of human life.

The ambient of Catholic popular devotions in Kerala try to provide the devotees an opportunity to express their basic religious sentiments which they have in common with the other Keralites. The charismatic movement as an organized movement of popular devotions and the centers of popular devotions consider also the emotional aspect of religious sentiments.

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Although the official Church has a clear theological explanation about the popular devotion and their pastoral and catechetical aims, the devotees who gather around the centers of Catholic popular devotions are not aware of the basic teachings of the Church. They are taken up by the difficulties of their daily life and seek concrete responses to their existential problems. They seek a God or a Saint, living or dead, who suffered like them, with a hope that they can understand them better and console them.

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CHAPTER 4

THE PASTORAL RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH IN KERALA TO THE POPULAR DEVOTIONS

4.0. INTRODUCTION

Until the 16th century the term mission was used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, of the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son.[1] Later, the term mission began to be used with different meanings.[2] It referred to the sending of the missionaries to a designated territory,[3] the activities undertaken by such missionaries,[4] as also the geographical area where the missionaries were active.[5] It also meant a series of special services intended to deepen or spread the Christian faith, usually in a nominally Christian environment.[6] Thus, the particular dimensions of mission were stressed according to the needs of the time and also according to the understanding of mission, which is influenced by ecclesiastical and cultural factors.

The ecclesio-centric understanding of mission has its roots in Cyprian's famous dictum, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The phrase was born during a

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1 K. MÜLLER, "Missiology: An Introduction", in S. KAROTEMPREL (ed.), *Following Christ in Mission, A Fundamental Course in Missiology*, Pauline Publications, Bombay 1995, 22; A. SHORTER, *Theology of Mission*, The Mercier Press, Cork 1972, 19; VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 7 December 1965: *AAS* 58 (1966), nn. 2-3. [Hereafter referred to as AG]

2 J. KAVUNKAL, "Evolution of the Understanding of Christian Identity in the Course of the Centuries", in K. KUNNUMPURAM, E. D' LIMA - J. PARAPPALLY (eds.), *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, N. B. C. L. C., Bangalore 1997, 84-94; K. MÜLLER, "Missiology: An Introduction" 1995, 22.

3 J. PUTHENPURAKAL, *Mission in the Documents of the Catholic Church*, Vendrame Institute Publications, Shillong 1997, 2.

4 AG 6.

5 F. KOLLBRUNNER, *The Splendor and Confusion of Mission Today. An Essay on the Theology of Mission*, Mambo Press, Rhodesia 1974, 7-8; J. PUTHENPURAKAL, *Mission in the Documents of the Catholic Church*, 1997, 2.

6 D. J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1991, 1.

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particularly stormy conflict in the first half of the third century. However, the contingent character of Cyprian's utterance was forgotten and the phrase applied universally to the Roman Catholic Church.[7] The Second Vatican Council, in its Decree on Missionary Activity, says:

> [...] The special undertakings in which preachers of the Gospel, sent by the Church, and going into the whole world, carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among people, who do not yet believe in Christ, are generally called 'missions'. [...] The special end of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the implanting of the Church.[8]

With the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the term 'evangelization' became more popular to designate Church's missionary activity. Evangelization was understood as an umbrella concept[9] embracing the whole activity of the Church sent into the world: "One single term – evangelization – defines the whole of Christ's office and mandate."[10] Some authors misinterpreted *Evangelii Nuntiandi* "to have suggested the use of the term evangelization over and above that of mission."[11] Later, John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, clarified the teaching of the Church on mission.[12]

'New Evangelization', which was proclaimed by Pope John Paul II at the beginning of his pontificate, has consistently been followed up by him. It is more than re-evangelization. Many understood new evangelization differently according to their own contexts. Thus, in Europe, new

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7 J. KAVUNKAL, "Evolution of the Understanding of Christian Identity in the Course of the Centuries",1997, 91.

8 AG 6.

9 K. MÜLLER, "Missiology: An Introduction", 1995, 22.

10 PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, 8 December 1975: *AAS* 68 (1976), n. 6. [Hereafter referred to as EN]

11 F. A. OBORJI, *Concepts of Mission in the Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, Cee dee Publications, Rome 2005, 32.

12 F. A. OBORJI, *Concepts of Mission in the Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, 2005, 33.

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evangelization meant addressing the reality of a highly secularized society; in Asia, the confrontation of the ancient religions; in Africa, that of the native cultures; and in Latin America, the confrontation of the unjust structures.[13] During his first visit to Poland after his election, the Pope said in his homily at Nowa Hutay on 9th June 1979 that in this new epoch, in these new conditions of life we have to initiate a new evangelization.[14] To the Episcopal Conference of Belgium, the Pope explained new evangelization as facing the realities of a pluralistic society, secularization, laicism, alienation from religious institutions and religious indifference including atheism.[15]

Pope John Paul II expounds, in *Redemptoris Missio,* new evangelization when he speaks about three situations, which the Word of God confronts. The first situation is that of peoples and groups in which Christ and his Gospel are not known or in which there is a lack of Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate faith in their own environment and to proclaim it to other groups. Drawing on *Ad Gentes* 6, the Pope calls the task of the Church in such situation '*missio ad gentes*'. The second situation is that of Christian communities possessing adequate ecclesial structures, fervent in their faith and Christian living, bearing witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and having a sense of commitment to the universal mission. The Pope says that the Church in these communities carries out her 'pastoral ministry'. An intermediate situation is found in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in younger Churches, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of faith. In this case, a new evangelization is needed.[16] However, the Pope says that these are not watertight compartments.[17]

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[13] T. MENAMPARAMBIL, "What is New about the New Evangelization? I", in *VJTR* 61, 6 (1997), 362.

[14] V. ALAPATT, "An Investigation into the Purview of New Evangelization", in *Jeevadhara* 24, 143 (1994), 373.

[15] V. ALAPATT, "An Investigation into the Purview of New Evangelization", (1994), 374.

[16] JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, 7 December 1990: *AAS* 83 (1991), n. 32. [Hereafter referred to as RM]

[17] RM 34.

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The Catholic Church in Kerala can be spoken of as existing under three hierarchies, namely, Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara. In the Latin Hierarchy there are 11 dioceses, the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy consists of 13 dioceses and the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy has 6 dioceses.[18] If we look at the Church in Kerala we have a lot of things for which we have to praise and thank God. The very fact, that the Church in Kerala serves the Church in India and abroad by providing enormous numbers of committed young girls and boys to consecrated life and to priestly life to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, is a clear proof of her deep faith and growth. If Kerala is a model state for communal harmony and peace when most of the other states in India suffer bloodshed and chaos, it is surely also because of the Christian culture that pervaded the minds of all people in Kerala irrespective of religions. However, some recent trends that we observe in the faith understanding and the faith expressions of the faithful in Kerala call for a careful examination and immediate response especially when the human society in Kerala is increasingly influenced by the secularism and atheism.

Late Archbishop of Verapoly, Cornelius Elangikal said that although the Christianity was being introduced in Africa only a few centuries ago, yet we saw a lot of improvement in them. It is said that Kerala has a tradition of Christianity extending over 1950 years. Still there is no corresponding growth in the attitude of the people towards the downtrodden. There is decadence in the faith life of the clergy, the religious and the laity.[19] A majority of believers has only an average faith. There are also people with a profound faith who show it through their actions. Another visible group who flock to the novena centers and who seek signs and wonders have only a

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[18] *Directory 2002,* Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, The Archdiocesan Curia, Kochi, 12-16; *Directory 2001*, Archdiocese of Verapoly, Archdiocesan Gazette 35, 8 (2001), 7-13.

[19] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, (M Th. Dissertation, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong 2003) Unpublished manuscript, 154.

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superficial faith. These people cherish a selfish personal relationship with God.[20]

In this chapter, we are in search of the pastoral response of the teaching authority of the Church to the context of the popular devotions in Kerala. We make a research into the theological reflections of Indian theologians on popular devotions and we consider particularly those of Michael Amaladoss and Felix Wilfred. We study how the consecrated men and women promote the popular devotions on the one hand and how with their testimony and instruction, they give a Catholic discipline to them, on the other. We also see how popular devotions become a medium for the expression of the religiosity and the missionary vocation of the laity.

4.1.THE POPULAR DEVOTIONS AND THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

The pastoral challenge that a parish in Kerala confronts is the dichotomy between the faith that the Church wants to proclaim and the faith of the people. The popular Catholic faith of the people in Kerala is a faith based on fear and compulsion which is professed most often with material motives. The parish most often promote this type of faith to maintain the mob in the Church and not to offend the religious sentiments of the believers. But the high degree of education and a secular culture that is fast developing in Kerala demand a change in the mode of pastoral approach.[21] It is here that we have a relevance for a study on what pastoral approach the Church in Kerala should adopt to address the pastoral context in general and the pastoral context of the popular devotions in particular.

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[20] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, 2003, 150.

[21] Pope John Paul II has said strong words of caution against the phenomenon of secularism. "The present-day phenomenon of secularism is truly serious not simply as regards the individual, but in some ways as regards whole communities, as the Council has already indicated: 'Growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice.' At other times I myself have recalled the phenomenon of de-Christianization which strikes long-standing Christian people and which continually calls for a re-evangelization." JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, Apostolic Exhortation, 30 December 1988: *AAS* 81 (1989), n. 4. [Hereafter referred to as CL]

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4.1.1. The Teachings of the Indian Bishops on Popular Devotions

In a Circular, the Catholic Bishops' Conference addresses the pastoral context of the popular devotions in Kerala giving some guidelines for the proper conduct of popular devotions.[22] The bishops say that the annual feasts of the patron saints in the parish are very significant in the faith life of the people. These celebrations proclaim the greatness of God and help the people to grow in faith and communion. They manifest the faith tradition and the ritual legacy of a Christian community to the people of other faith in the locality. However, the bishops condemned the commercialization of Church feasts for money motives. They insisted that the Church feasts should be a celebration within the parish for the growth of the people in the parish. They prohibited the use of propaganda attracting the people to a particular center or Church in the name of miracles, healing and other worldly gains. The bishops discouraged extravagance in the feast celebration in the Church and in the shrines within the parish with a spirit of competition and with a motive of vain glory.

The bishops highlighted the need for Christ centrism in Christian worship and warned against the devotional practices which overshadows the purpose of Christian worship. Late Cardinal Varckey Vithayathil, in his Pastoral Letter observed that there was a tendency to give more importance to the feasts of the saints disregarding the feasts of the Lord. This can create misunderstanding among some people. The intercession of the saints cannot be projected above the unique intercession of Jesus Christ. It must be taken care that the intercession is always in and through Christ.[23]

Late Archbishop of Verapoly, Daniel Acharuparambil said in his Pastoral Letter on "Saint Alphonsa"[24] that she gave a heroic model for human life in

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[22] J. IGNATHIOS (President, K. C. B. C.), "Kerala Katholikka Sabhayile Thirunnal, Oottu Nercha, Novena Ennivayude Nadathippinu K. C. B. C. Nalkunna Ajapalana Marganirdesangal" [Malayalam] Circular 15/10, in *Sahyanadam* [Malayalam] 7, 8 (2010), 368-371.

[23] V. VITHAYATHIL, "Shrines and Feasts", in *Eranakulam Mission* 73, 7 (2003), 295-296.

[24] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Saint Alphonsa", in *Eranakulam Mission* 78, 10 (2008), 431-437.

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a Christian way. She accepted her life of the active and passive struggles with the hope of Christ. She teaches how each experience of human life leads every faithful to Christian maturity which is revealed in Jesus Christ and how each Christian can live the life of hope with Christ.[25] Thus, the bishop instructs the faithful that each saint is a manifestation of Jesus' life in the time and space of the history and that more than divine intercessors, they are great models for Christian life. The devotees who frequent the centers of popular devotions must be instructed and encouraged to live the Christian values like the saints whom they venerate.

Archbishop Francis Kallarakkal, in his Pastoral Letter gave instruction about the meaning and significance of pilgrimages.[26] He said that a pilgrimage, to be a Christian pilgrimage, the devotees are to take care of some principles. The pilgrims are not merely a mob but a holy convocation of Spirit filled faithful who praise and worship God. The day of pilgrimage is a day of thankful remembrance of the interventions of God in one's life which would enable the pilgrims to be self confident and dynamic to confront the challenges of daily life. It is a day of forgetfulness of all the sorrows and worries and a time of joy. It is also a time of self offering to God with Mary, the Mother of Jesus who said, "Behold the handmaid of God..." It is a decision to be the instruments of God.[27]Archbishop Daniel Acharuparambil said that pilgrimage is a person's exodus in his heart to God for being purified. It is a loving movement to God. To walk unto God, one needs to get rid of all those to which one is bound. For this, one is to make a journey into oneself and make oneself a temple of God. Then one's life becomes a pilgrimage of faith, hope and love. The shepherds who visited the Holy Family continued to be poor. But they learned to face the life of poverty with a 'rich heart'. With Mary's visitation, Elizabeth did not grow rich, but she became 'rich in love'.[28]

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[25] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Saint Alphonsa" (2008), 435.

[26] F. KALLARAKKAL, "Vallarpadam Thirdhadanam" [Malayalam], in *Verapoly Archdiocesan Gazette* 44/ FK-9, 15 (2010), 129-132.

[27] F. KALLARAKKAL, "Vallarpadam Thirdhadanam" (2010), 130-131.

[28] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Vallarpadam Thirdhadanam" [Malayalam], in *Verapoly Archdiocesan Gazette* 43, 11 (2009), 102-106.

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In his Pastoral Letter on the Rosary devotion Archbishop Francis Kallarakkal said if a person would begin to recite Rosary with the attitude of Mary which was revealed in her words, "Behold the handmaid of God...", at the end of the recital of the Rosary, Word of God would have become flesh in his/her heart. By the recital of the Rosary the Word must become theirs and they become of the Word. The life of Mary is challenging them to live a life of a real believer by serving others and thus becoming the instruments of the Holy Spirit.[29]

In his Pastoral Letter on pious associations bishop Mathew Anikkuzhikkatil says that pious associations are to be oriented to the faith formation of the parishioners to arrive at the consciousness that they are missionaries by nature. With this intention in mind, the members must discipline themselves according to the precepts and spiritual tradition of the associations. Each individual member by his/her personal life must witness the human dignity revealed by Jesus Christ in their respective life situations. The pious associations which are alive in the Spirit of Christ witness the living Church and the parish. They express the missionary dimension of the Church. He concludes the letter by exhorting the parish priests and the consecrated men and women to encourage the pious associations by facilitating them the opportunities of service.[30] Daniel Acharuparambil, in his circular said that pious associations make the life of the Church more vibrant among the faithful. These associations give an opportunity for the believers to fulfill their baptismal vows in a heroic way. While he writes in detail about the vision and mission of each pious association in the diocese of Verapoly he highlights of their life of witness to the Gospel values.[31]

In a Pastoral Letter speaking on "Christian sects and groups", Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the

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[29] F. KALLARAKKAL, "Japamala Bhakti" [Malayalam], in *Verapoly Archdiocesan Gazette* 44/ FK-9, 16 (2010), 133-136. (Here, the Archbishop remembers the teachings of St. Iraneus and Pope John Paul II.)

[30] M. ANIKKUZHIKKATTIL, "Saghadanakal visvasa Pariseelanathinum Sakshyathinum" [Malayalam], in *Sahyanadam* 1, 1 (2003), 145-150.

[31] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Pious associations" [Circular-30], in *Verapoly Archdiocesan Gazette* 34, 19 (2000), 125-130.

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Charismatic movement and made some pastoral responses.[32] They acknowledged that Charismatic renewal movement has contributed to the spiritual growth of the Church in Kerala. Bible reading became popular in Kerala with the Charismatic movement and there is some genuine efforts in many people to live according to the Word of God. At the same time, in the name of this renewal movement, some non-Catholic teachings and attitudes are spread among the people. Some are interpreting the Word of God outside the tradition of the Church, even against it.[33] In an article Archbishop Daniel Acharuparambil said that from the prayer of praise and worship we have to enter into the prayer of quiet to make sure that we are growing into a deep experience of prayer. He also added that if too much importance is given to the physical healing ministries, there is a danger that the ministry of Christ would be misunderstood. Jesus invited everyone to follow him taking up the daily cross with a positive hope, like him.[34]

In his Pastoral Letter on "Charismatic Movement",[35] Late Major Archbishop, Cardinal Varckey Vithayathil categorically states that the Christian faith commitment is not against reason. We must utilize the discoveries of the human and social sciences to evaluate our thoughts and religious experiences so that we may escape the risk of human error. The stories of healings and visions must be scientifically analyzed and scrutinized by the teaching authority of the Church. Although we believe in miraculous healing, the Church do not teach that ardent prayer will bring about healing from all sicknesses. Propaganda Fide instructs that the charisma of healing cannot be believed to have been given to some groups or persons. We are called to live the Christian faith in its fullness, following a person, Jesus Christ.[36]

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[32] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Christian Sects and Groups", in *Eranakulam Mission* 79, 4 (2009), 133-139.

[33] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Christian Sects and Groups" (2009), 134.

[34] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Viliyum Velluviliyum" [Malayalam], in *Jeevajvala* 20, 7 (2000), 4.

[35] V. VITHAYATHIL, "Charismatic Movent", in *Eranakulam Mission* 72, 1 (2002), 1-8.

[36] V. VITHAYATHIL, "Charismatic Movent" (2002), 4-5.

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Some sects are formed around some preachers who systematically create anticlerical attitudes among the faithful. They interpret the Bible passages and bind the people with some superstitious beliefs. They say that some inculturated elements of the Church, for example, the symbols of Hinduism like 'thali' and 'nilavilakku',[37] are the carriers of evil spirit. It creates disharmony among the people. Some speak about the direct revelation from the Holy Spirit and devalue the continuity of the apostolic authority through the bishops. The popular devotional sentiments are exploited by these sects for money motives and self glory.[38] The bishops instructed that the parish priests should take initiatives to give profound teachings of the Church in the parishes and help those who have become attracted to these sects, with a spirit of compassion.[39]

The bishops insisted that the cultural programs that are organized on the occasion of the Church feasts must be oriented to communicate Christian values and to promote religious harmony. They spoke against the fireworks that is done in connection with the feasts and insisted that a certain percentage of the money that is collected for the celebration must be used for helping the poor in the parish. They also insisted that the law of the state and the religious sentiments of the brothers and sisters of the other religions must be respected.[40]

It is to be stated that there is a Pastoral Orientation Centre (POC) as a common pastoral organ of Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference which

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[37] The Malayalam words 'thali' and 'nilavilakku' indicate the utensils of the Hindu rites of marriage and worship respectively. 'Thali' is a symbol for matrimonial contract. Like the exchange of rings of promise, in Kerala, during the marriage the groom adorns the bride with a chain (most often a gold chain or a thread) around her neck, on which, there will be a small medal and it is called 'thali'. Nilavilakku, which is a symbol of fertility cult, used during prayer service instead of candles.

[38] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Christian Sects and Groups" (2009), 136.

[39] D. ACHARUPARAMBIL (President, K. C. B. C.), "Christian Sects and Groups" (2009), 138.

[40] J. IGNATHIOS (President, K. C. B. C.), "Kerala Katholikka Sabhayile Thirunnal, Oottu Nercha, Novena Ennivayude Nadathippinu K. C. B. C. Nalkunna Ajapalana Marganirdesangal" [Malayalam] Circular 15/10, in *Sahyanadam* [Malayalam] 7, 8 (2010), 370.

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makes valuable contributions in the field of catechetical formation of the children and the training of religious sisters and the laity for leadership in various fields of the apostolate.[41] At present POC conducts catechetical programs like one year residential Diploma Course in Theology for the laity and the religious, weekend Diploma Course on Pastoral Theology for religious sisters and weekend Psycho-pastoral Course for the people of all religions. The bishops make sure that the children are given twelve years of catechetical formation in all the parishes.

The very reason, that the bishops gave some guidelines for the conduct of popular devotions, shows there is something to be corrected and attended to. The official Church is aware of the strengths and the weaknesses of the popular devotions. A healthy balance between the sentimental and the real aspects of faith must be discovered in each parish considering its pastoral context.

4.1.2. Indian Theologians and Popular Devotions

In a multi-cultural and multi-religious context in India with drastic socio-economic disparity, to theologize is a complex task. This complexity is very much visible in the perspectives of the theologians in India. This is true also in their theological responses to the ever growing popular religiosity in India. There are some who, with a rationalistic bend of mind, are inclined to brand the popular devotions as sentimental and emotional. Some others consider popular religiosity as the expression of religious sentiments of particular cultures. They say that the Church should deal with the particular expressions of faith respecting the cultural identity of the people.[42] In general the theologians in India are preoccupied with a thought of arriving at a common understanding among all the religions to create a healthy living

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[41] PASTORAL ORIENTATION CENTRE (K. C. B. C.), *A Report*, L. F. Industrial Press, Cochin 1972. 1-48.

[42] T. DABRE, "Announcing the Gospel in Subaltern Cultures. The way to be intelligible and effective in the Church's mission", *VJTR* 74 (2010), 662.

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together of the people of various religions.[43] They are taken up with the existential concerns of common people and tend to promote a definition of religion for this worldly life without forgetting the transcendental dimensions. Two Indian authors - Michael Amaladoss and Felix Wilfred - are studied to represent the perspectives of Indian theologians on popular devotions.

Michael Amaladoss

In his article, "Sickness, Spirits and Society",[44] Amaladoss says that no scientific, philosophical or theological affirmations can take full acquisition of the basic mystery of the human being. In the same way no single faith vision can express in a full manner, the religious sentiments of all human beings. He states:

> [...] a God who is present and active does manifest himself in various places, in various ways and at various times. These manifestations are at the root of a symbolic world that is historically, geographically and culturally contextualized. They give rise to sacred places, sacred events, pilgrimages and sacred times. Such manifestations, of course, have to be carefully discerned. But they cannot be a-priori ruled out.[45]

Amaladoss says that although there are differences of opinions about popular religion, it is the religion of the context and the 'religion of the people'.[46] In his book, *Making All Things New*, Michael Amaladoss says,

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[43] A. KALLIATH, "Christic-Wheel (Christological Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Abhishiktananda)", *Word & Worship* (2010), 111.

[44] M. AMALADOSS, "Sickness, Spirits and Society: The meaning of healing", in PUTHANANGADY Paul (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 538-547.

[45] M. AMALADOSS, "Sickness, Spirits and Society: The meaning of healing", 1986, 545.

[46] "The scientific elite look at popular religion as obscurantist, superstitious and an obstacle to progress. The religious elite may see it as primitive. The intellectual elite may look at it as ignorant, fundamentalist and fanatical. The political elite often misuse it as a power-base. For the people themselves, it is the way that they live their religion.", in M.

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> [...] the popular and elite religions should be seen as two symbolic forms of one religion, two moments on one continuum of expression. They cannot be understood one without the other, even if they have specific characteristics and can be looked at separately. But the separate focus should not assume a dichotomy. They are different expressions at different levels of the same meaning. [...] Living the faith in a human, social way in symbol and ritual, is to live it popularly and this is a part of every religion. [...] Some of us may be capable of reflecting on what we live, rising to higher levels of abstraction and expression, relativizing, not doing away with, the symbol, and adapting it to different circumstances. While life can continue without reflection, reflection cannot cut itself off from life without losing its significance.[47]

Here, the author describes the relation between popular religion and theological reflection and asserts that popular religion is the basis for a systematic theology.

In an article, "Double Religious Identity and Pilgrim Centres",[48] Amaladoss makes a theological reflection on a religious phenomenon in India that the devotees gather around the centers of popular devotions beyond the barriers of religions. He observes that the devotees even participate in the religious ceremonies which is strictly meant to the followers of a particular religion. He says:

> In spite official public announcements, many of [the devotees of other religions] will walk up for communion with great devotion. If we dismiss these experiences as popular religiosity,

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AMALADOSS, *Making All Things New. Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1990, 20.

[47] M. AMALADOSS, *Making All Things New. Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia*, 1990, 24.

[48] M. AMALADOSS, "Double Religious Identity and Pilgrim Centers," in *Word & worship* 1 (2010), 5-22.

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> I can evoke a list of serious scholars. Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) would have considered themselves Christian-Hindus. Brahmabandab Upadyaya (1861-1907), Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) and Vandana Mataji would have thought of themselves as Hindu-Christians. Raimond Panikkar has said: "I 'left' as a Christian, I 'found' myself a Hindu and I 'return' a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."[49]

In this article the author makes an analysis of the minds of the sincere Indian devotees who are surrounded by many vibrant religious traditions. He observes that they are going beyond the confines of the institutional barriers of religions and creates a communion of believers carrying within them more than one religious identity. In a country like India where religious fundamentalism has caused the death of thousands of people, where religion is used as an instrument to divide the people with political motives,[50] Amaladoss visualizes a new religious attitude of harmony in this phenomenon in the ambient of popular devotion. He says:

> They respond by manifesting their commitment through expressing their self-gift and surrender in faith by gestures like walking, fasting, bathing, offering gifts and sharing, honouring and praying. Their reaching out in faith to the divine and its manifestations goes beyond the religious institutional frameworks. [...] their affirmation of the Absolute relativises its

[49] M. AMALADOSS, "Double Religious Identity and Pilgrim Centers" (2010), 5.

[50] Considering the religious history of India and the ongoing sporadic communal violence, we doubt whether religion is a positive force for the unity of people and for human well being. "The strong emotional forces unleashed by religious faith are easily manipulated by astute leaders for their own unscrupulous ends.", in M. AMALADOSS, "Faith Culture and Inter-religious Dialogue", in *Ideas for Action Series* 2 (1985), 1

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multiple manifestations. The manifestations become ways to reach out to the absolute.[51]

Another important statement that Amaladoss makes in his writings, considering the majority of the people in India who struggle to make their both ends meet, is: "Religion is for life."[52] He says:

> In their search to give meaning to life people do ask ultimate questions. But the answers that they seek are supposed to tell them, not how to live in an 'other-world' after death, but how to live in this world. Even when this world is seen in the context of another world the focus is on this world.[53]

Although the symbolic expressions of religions refer to a fundamental event that constitutes the community, yet "the remembrance of that event is not made for its own sake but precisely in order to actualize it so that it can continue to constitute the community".[54] If the religion 'as a system of symbols'[55] does not carry the respirations of the daily life of the people, the people will search for another symbolic celebration of their life because "Religion is for life: it is life's symbolic celebration".[56]

Since the popular religion is a contextualized expression of the religious sentiments of the people, it reflects the day to day life of the people and the nature around them. God is presented not as an abstract being but as one who is near, who is involved with the people and the world. As a result it

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[51] M. AMALADOSS, "Double Religious Identity and Pilgrim Centers", in *Word & worship* (2010), 19.

[52] M. AMALADOSS, *Beyond Dialogue. Pilgrims to the Absolute*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 2008, 103.

[53] M. AMALADOSS, *Beyond Dialogue. Pilgrims to the Absolute*, 2008, 103.

[54] M. AMALADOSS, *Walking Together. The Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, India 1992, 13.

[55] M. AMALADOSS, *Walking Together. The Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 1992, 12.

[56] M. AMALADOSS, *Walking Together. The Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 1992, 13.

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responds to all the aspects of human life.[57] The poor and the helpless are provided with a 'distinctively this- worldly spirituality'.[58]

In his book *Do Sacraments Change?* Amaladoss, interpreting the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, said that the liturgy must be changed with the passage of time. The liturgy "is to be adapted to the needs of the secular man, of a historical and geographical context."[59]

Michael Amaladoss in his writings highlights the need to contextualize the Catholic forms of worship in India considering its multi-religious and multi-cultural context. He observes that the religious ambient of Catholic popular devotions provide a response to the needs of the context. He suggests a liturgical renewal for the people to make their life participate in it.

Felix Wilfred

In his article, "Towards an Inter-Religious Asian Public Theology",[60] Felix Wilfred, considering the multi-religious and multi-cultural context in Asia and aiming at a social and religious harmony in spite of the diversity in belief systems and standards of living, says that Asian theology must be public theology. He explains his idea by telling that "whatever belief Christians profess, need to be viewed from their public significance and their power to address matters that concern all in society".[61] The truths of faith must be addressed and interpreted in such a way that it becomes meaningful to all people. In his book *Margins, Site of Asian theologies*, he states:

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[57] M. AMALADOSS, *Walking Together. The Practice Of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 1992, 93.

[58] M. AMALADOSS, *Beyond Inculturation. Can The Many Be One?* ISPCK, DELHI 1998, 114.

[59] M. AMALADOSS, *Do Sacraments Change? Variable and Invariable Elements in Sacramental Rites*, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore 1979, 8.

[60] F. WILFRED, "Towards an Inter-Religious Asian Public Theology", in *VJTR* 74 (2010), 103-116.

[61] F. WILFRED, "Towards an Inter-Religious Asian Public Theology" (2010), 115.

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> It is often said, following Gandhi, that the quality of a civilization is to be judged ultimately on the basis of how it treats its weaker ones. The same criteria could be applied to theology. The different theologies are to be measured by the extent the poor find a place in their spirit and orientation.[62]

But, "[...] the crisis which the Christian faith faces today is that the tenets and official symbols in which faith is transmitted do not seem any more to respond to the experiences of the people, neither in the West nor in the third world".[63] Considering the modern movements of devotions and sects of the 15th century the author says that they "could be characterized as popular religiosity in so far as they stand in opposition to the religion of the elites".[64] Felix Wilfred states that a theology that speaks of lofty ideals above people's heads ignoring their actual situation, a liturgy that articulates these ideals through some symbols which are foreign to the people of a context, a religion that ignores the emotions of the people are bound to lose their significance in the life of the people.[65]

However, Felix Wilfred do not accept a categorical differentiation between official religion and popular religion. To consolidate his argument he speaks of the religious ambient of Hinduism where "the popular practices are looked as part of the same religion".[66] .He also speaks of the Roman Catholic tradition which accepted some of the popular devotions as the part of the official Liturgy. What he wants to say is that, according to him, the social, economic and political surroundings have a determining role in the formation of the religious sentiments in the people. The popular devotions,

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[62] F. WILFRED, *Margins, Site of Asian theologies*, ISPCK, Delhi 2008, 14.

[63] F. WILFRED, "Faith without 'Faith'? Popular Religion – A Challenge to Elitist Theology and Liturgy", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 608.

[64] F. WILFRED, "Faith without 'Faith'? Popular Religion – A Challenge to Elitist Theology and Liturgy", 1986, 603.

[65] F. WILFRED, "Faith without 'Faith'? Popular Religion – A Challenge to Elitist Theology and Liturgy", 1986, 603.

[66] F. WILFRED, "Faith without 'Faith'? Popular Religion – A Challenge to Elitist Theology and Liturgy", 1986, 595.

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with an intention to confront the day to day life of the people, flourish among the people who struggle to make their both ends meet, whereas, sophisticated worship forms are relished by the privileged minority. Therefore he says, "As long as the difference in the life style and exercise of power between people and the clergy exist, there will continue to be also a difference in the perception of the divine and the expression of faith".[67]

In his book, *From the Dusty Soil*, Felix Wilfred recalls what has happened in India when the religion turned out to be an institutional and clerically oppressive power who proposed a conceptual or ideological religion. He speaks of the rise of the *Bhakti* movement as an expression of religious sentiments of the common people. The dominant religious tradition with its emphasis on knowledge was challenged by the *Bhakti* movements, a religion of love and devotion.[68] It was very much a movement of the people. He says,

> A cardinal principle of this bhakti movement is the fundamental *equality* of all human persons, independent of the class or caste one belongs to. [...] It shook up the caste system and its religiously legitimized foundations by transcending purity-pollution barriers and incorporating in one common band all the devotees of the Lord. No wonder that it attracted the masses of ordinary people. Access to God did not any more require the mediation of the priestly, Brahminic class. In fact some of the great Bhakti saints themselves were people who belonged to the lowest castes.[69]

Thus the *Bhakti* movement helped to build up self-identity and self-respect in the people of the lowest strata of the society. They were accepted in the

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[67] F. WILFRED, "Faith without 'Faith'? Popular Religion – A Challenge to Elitist Theology and Liturgy", 1986, 597.

[68] F. WILFRED, *From the Dusty Soil. Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity*, Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, India 1995, 93-94.

[69] F. WILFRED, *From the Dusty Soil. Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity*, 1995, 95.

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religious ambient of this movement with equal dignity with all others.[70] Recalling the revelation of the true worship of God in Jesus Christ, Felix Wilfred says, "It is in the concrete, in the particular, that we really experience the validity of the universal. Jesus manifested his Christhood by deeply immersing himself into [... a definitive historical context]".[71]

Remembering the history of religions in India in which the majority of the people was always exploited and oppressed unjustly, Felix Wilfred is convinced that the 'human being' must be at the center of all the religious institutions and movements. In his book, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, he says,

> The Sabbath is for man and not man for Sabbath is a fundamental principle for any genuine humanism as well as for any relevant theology. No religious group or body, therefore, can exempt itself from placing at the heart of its religious quest the primacy of human being over its tradition, theology and symbols, however ancient and sacred these may be.[72]

Witnessing to the movement of the people to the various centers of popular devotions in India and elsewhere, Felix Wilfred is convinced that the religious experience of the people that they receive from these centers and the consequent change in their life challenge the 'grand theological systems and theoretical constructs'[73] and "calls for a different theological approach –

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[70] F. WILFRED, *From the Dusty Soil. Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity*, 1995, 118.

[71] F. WILFRED, *From the Dusty Soil. Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity*, 1995, 170.

[72] F. WILFRED, *Beyond Settled Foundations. The Journey of Indian Theology*, Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, India 1993, vii.

[73] "Popular religions, as lived in Asia, take hold of the whole person of the devotees with their feelings, aspirations, trust and hope, as they stand before the mystery of life. The religiousness of the people is rich in symbolism, in stories and myths; through them people interpret their experience, analyze and understand society and affirm themselves as a community.", in F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East? Asian Challenges and Christian involvement*, Chair in Christianity, University of Madras, India 1991, 197.

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one that would mirror more closely the day to day realities of life, interpret them meaningfully and help to transform them".[74]

Another important point which Felix Wilfred highlights like any other theologian in India is the need for religious harmony. In a country like India, he says,

> Encounter, dialogue, and communication among various faiths seem to be indispensable for peace, and unity among various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. [A macro level dialogue is complex and complicated.] What is required is a *dialogue of life,* a sharing in day to day life by the people of various faiths living together in a society. This is achieved when dialogue becomes a meeting at the level of popular religion with its rituals, festivals, worships, etc.[75]

For the majority of the people in India who are below poverty line, "what matters in religion are not so much metaphysical explanations of reality of ritual practices; what is central to religion is *ethics* – a way of life that leads to transformation".[76]

It can be observed that the theological perspectives of Felix Wilfred are influenced by the principles of justice, freedom and equality. He considers that the popular devotion is a spiritual movement of the poor (economically, socially, culturally, spiritually, etc.) people in search of dignity, respect, acceptance and self confidence. A theology, to have some roots in the realities of human life and in turn enrich the same, must consider the popular devotions seriously and reformulate its priorities.

4.1.2. Parish Ministry and Popular Devotions

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[74] F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East? Asian Challenges and Christian involvement*, 1991, 194.

[75] F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East? Asian Challenges and Christian involvement*, 1991, 200-201.

[76] F. WILFRED, *Dalit Empowerment*, ISPCK, Delhi 2007, 140.

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In almost all the parishes in Kerala there are practices of devotions to Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary and patron saints. In some parishes, according to the skills of animation of the parish priests[77] the devotions become popular and those parishes or shrines become the centers of popular devotions attracting people from other parishes. Most often the devotion that is more popularized in the parish would be the devotion to the patron saints. But there are some Churches in Kerala where devotion to another saint become more popular than the patron saint![78]

All the parishes in Kerala celebrate the feast of their patron saints in a grand way accompanied by spiritual renewal and cultural programs which extend from three to five days. In some Churches where the saint is more popular, the feast would be extended even to eight days or with nine consecutive days or nine days of consecutive weeks of novena in preparation for the feast. These are the days of spiritual renewal and a celebration of communion for the people in the parish. It is also a time to express the religious identity of the parishioners in a collective way to the people of other religions.[79]

Procession is an integral part of the feast of the patron saint in almost all the parishes in Kerala.[80] It is done in a grand way carrying the statue of the patron saint in a decorated vehicle. People carry colorful umbrellas to add beauty to the procession and along the way pray Rosary and sing devotional songs. In most of the Churches the processions will be guided by a band of music and the 'Chendamelam', typical to the culture of Kerala. In a multi-

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77 P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 317.

78 For example, St. Andrew's Church at Arthungal, Alappuzha is a famous pilgrim centre of St. Sebastian. St. Francis Assisi Cathedral at Eranakulam is a novena centre of Holy Mary.

79 A. ATHAPPILLY, "Popular devotion of St. Sebastian", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 379.

80 In a Circular, Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference gives some directives to the conduct of the processions. It says that the processions must be conducted without giving disturbances to the common people and without creating traffic blocks., in J. IGNATHIOS (President, K. C. B. C.), "Kerala Katholikka Sabhayile Thirunnal, Oottu Nercha, Novena Ennivayude Nadathippinu K. C. B. C. Nalkunna Ajapalana Marganirdesangal" [Malayalam], in Circular 15/10 (2010), 371.

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religious context like in Kerala, the processions are occasions to witness to one's faith publicly.[81]

Monthly devotions to St. Joseph, Blessed Virgin Mary and Sacred Heart of Jesus in the months of March, May and June respectively, solemn recital of the Rosary in the month of October, devotion to Child Jesus in the month of December, first Friday devotion to Sacred Heart, Saturday devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary, commemoration of the dead in a big way on November 2 and on other days of remembrance are common in almost all the parishes in Kerala. The Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference insists that the parish priests are directly responsible to catechize the parishioners to make sure that they grow into the maturity of Christian faith. They exhort the parish priests that these devotions shall not be commercialized.[82]

The Bible conventions, and other retreat programs which are organized during the Church feast or during the preparation for Easter are the occasions for the transmission of faith to the parishioners in a deep way. However, with regard to these spiritual renewal programs also the Bishops' Conference warns the parish priests that they may not fall into the temptation of manipulating the common people with the proclamation of material benefits. They also spoke against the propaganda for these programs outside the territory of the parish.[83]

The parish is the actual context where a popular devotion is 'born' and is flourished when it carries the religious sentiments of the faithful. It is very clear from the context of the parishes in Kerala that the ups and downs of the popularity of a devotion depend upon the pastoral animation. It is also a fact that its decadence is resulted from the misuse of the simple faith of the people. If it is animated with an intention to help the people to grow into

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81 A. ATHAPPILLY, "Popular devotion of St. Sebastian", 1986, 378.

82 J. IGNATHIOS (President, K. C. B. C.), "Kerala Katholikka Sabhayile Thirunnal, Oottu Nercha, Novena Ennivayude Nadathippinu K. C. B. C. Nalkunna Ajapalana Marganirdesangal" (2010), 369.

83 J. IGNATHIOS (President, K. C. B. C.), "Kerala Katholikka Sabhayile Thirunnal, Oottu Nercha, Novena Ennivayude Nadathippinu K. C. B. C. Nalkunna Ajapalana Marganirdesangal" (2010), 369.

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Christian maturity, popular devotions will prove themselves as a powerful tool for an effective pastoral care.

4.2. THE POPULAR DEVOTIONS AND THE CONSECRATED MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

'In a well established local Church, in a place where the pastoral, social and educational initiatives of the consecrated men and women are simultaneously taken up by other competent secular enterprises, what is the specificity of the religious life?' is a question some ask. When we look into the Church history we see how the religious orders had been the dynamic forces of renewal of the faith life of the Church. From time to time the Spirit of the Lord inspired the holy founders to assist the Church in preserving herself as the Church of Christ.[84] Thus, St. Benedict was inspired to safeguard the spirit of the ancient Christian communities; when the simplicity of the Church was at stake, St. Francis of Assisi emerged as its pillar; when there were heresies in the Church, Augustinians, Jesuits and Dominicans safeguarded it; when there arose a spiritual uncertainty in the Church, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross supported the Church with their life and teachings. In a multi-religious context in India, where Christianity is challenged by the profundity of the great world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, Mother Teresa of Calcutta incarnated the Spirit of Jesus Christ in a new way of concrete life of charity. Thus, the consecrated men and women safeguarded the originality of Christian faith, and from time to time enlarged and strengthened its horizon by discovering the new recesses of Jesus Christ by prayer and contemplation and by a public life in the ongoing context with the Spirit of Christ.

The Church in Kerala is very rich with the vocations to consecrated life. However, at present, there is an alarming decrease in religious vocations in

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[84] In CL 24, we read: "The Holy Spirit, while bestowing diverse ministries in Church communion, enriches it still further with particular gifts or promptings of grace, called charisms. These can take a great variety of forms both as a manifestation of the absolute freedom of the Spirit who abundantly supplies them, and as a response to the varied needs of the Church in history."

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Kerala due to the erosion of spiritual and religious values in religious communities and due to the penetration of materialism, secularism and individualism. At present:

> There are 355 Religious Congregations and 470 Major Superiors in Kerala: 267 women Religious Congregations, 71 Priestly Religious Congregations and 17 Brothers Congregations. Altogether there are 117000 religious in Kerala. 40000 religious work in Kerala. 60000 work in other Indian states and 26000 work abroad. Although Kerala accounts for only 1% of the total area of India and contains about 3% of the country's population, it provides more than 75% of Indian religious, clergy and missionaries.[85]

Now, we are in search of how the religious men and women serve the Church in Kerala and what are their pastoral contributions in the context of popular devotions with their life and ministry.

4.2.1. Pastoral Animators

Consecrated men and women of the Church in Kerala extend their service of pastoral animation in almost all the parishes being retreat preachers, catechism teachers, animators of Liturgy, guides to the small Christian communities, and so on. Their pastoral animation is also extended to the individuals through their ministry at confessional, through the apostolate of counseling and through the family apostolate. Each religious congregation share its uniqueness of charisma through their pastoral animation and the Church in Kerala is enriched through these diversity of charismas.

The religious missionaries are responsible for the spread of most of the Catholic popular devotions in Kerala. These devotions addressed the popular religious culture of Kerala in a Christian way. Like the worship of gods and goddesses in popular Hinduism, veneration of saints and of the

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[85] KERALA CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS (KCMS), *crikcms.wordpress.com/ Kerala Conference... visited on 26-10-2012.*

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Blessed Virgin Mary became popular among the people.[86] Considering the present developments of secularism and atheism in the society, the consecrated men and women are thinking seriously to be the sacraments of hope among the people, who are poor and needy, by witnessing the Kingdom of God on earth as a communion of believers[87] and by becoming a leaven of wisdom in the society.[88]

Almost all the Catholic spiritual renewal centers in Kerala are owned and managed by the religious priests, sisters and brothers. These centers organize various programs like life renewal retreats, seminars, classes of various types to help the faithful to grow in Christian faith. Each congregation has its own pastoral programs to address the popular religious ambient of the Church in Kerala. For example, one of the pastoral initiatives of the Order of Discalced Carmelites to address the Catholic popular religious context in Kerala is the 'mission retreat'. Mission retreats[89] are generally conducted in the parishes. The conduct of the retreat has a traditional methodology. At least one month before the retreat, well-formulated prayers will be distributed to the family units of the parish for the success of the retreat. The retreat begins on a Sunday evening and ends on the Saturday night with a love feast (*snehavirunnu*). There is a solemn reception of the retreat preachers by the parishioners on Sunday evening. At the main entrance to the Church compound, the parish priest and the parishioners will hand over to the preachers a Cross, the Bible, the key of the tabernacle and an unlit candle. All these have symbolic meanings. The Word of God is going to be shared on the Mystery of Christ on the Cross. The tabernacle key symbolises the authority over the parish and by handing it over to the retreat preachers, the parish priest hands over the authority of the parish to them during the days of retreat. The candle symbolises the parish.

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86 A. ATHAPPILLY, "Popular devotion of St. Sebastian", 1986, 380.

87 JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consacrata*, Apostolic Exhortation, 25 March 1996: *AAS* 88 (1996), n. 1. [Hereafter referred to as VC]

88 VC 10.

89 *Directory of St. Pius X Province, Manjummel 2002-2003*, Carmelite Provincial House, Kochi, 2002, 16.

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After a solemn Mass there will be an introductory talk about the conduct of the retreat. During the next three days, from morning till evening, the retreat preachers[90] will visit the houses, enquire about people's sacramental life and fellowship in the families, and bless them. If there are some interpersonal problems in the families, the animators of the retreat will try to settle them or refer to a group of priests in the parish office. The animators who visit the families will also encourage all to participate in the retreat. The Holy Mass and proclamation of the Word of God are in the evening and the programmes of the day will be over with the benediction. The themes of the talks are generally on: 'love of God', 'love of neighbour', 'sin', 'reconciliation', 'Eucharist', 'Holy Spirit' and 'Mary'.

There are institutes of the religious men and women in Kerala to prepare the pastoral animators. For example, to help in the spiritual, biblical and theological formation of the religious clergy and religious women, the Discalced Carmelites in Kerala have set up institutes of theology and spirituality centres.[91] An integral faith formation, taking into consideration the need of the time, is the purpose of these institutes. In a high literacy state like Kerala we see people endowed with the ability to speculate and ponder over the basic questions of human nature with all its complexities. To guide them in the right path we need persons with great intellectual and spiritual maturity.

The various religious congregations in Kerala offer courses in Philosophy, Theology, Spirituality and Psychology to clergy, religious and laity to prepare integral pastoral animators so that they may collaborate with the Church in her catechetical formation of the faithful in general. When we consider the consecrated men and women as pastoral animators to the religious ambient of popular devotions we envision that these men and women orient the people who gather around the centres of popular devotions to the Christian mysteries in an integral way by word and deed as

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[90] The number of the preachers will vary according to the size of the parish. For example, a parish of 1500 families will be provided with 15 to 20 priests.

[91] *Directory of St. Pius X Province, Manjummel 2002-2003*, 11; *Directory of the Malabar Province 2002*, Carmel Hill Monastery, Thiruvananthapuram,12.

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adult Catholic Christians. A short description that is made above gives a general picture of the various pastoral animation programs that the religious men and women offer to the faithful of the Church in Kerala with an aim of helping everyone to grow into the Christian maturity.

4.2.2. School Apostolate

All acknowledge that education in Kerala got its face as of today during the British rule in India by Catholic and Christian missionaries. They were keen to provide education to all sections of society and strengthen women, without any kind of discrimination. Kerala's high literacy rate is attributed to high girl literacy rate as it is said when a women is educated she would make sure that her children are well educated.[92] Due to the non-availability of documents we describe only the school apostolate of the Discalced Carmelites to get a general picture of the pastoral service of consecrated men and women in this field.

It was on 3rd December 1659 that the new Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar was erected in Kerala by Pope Alexander VII. Fr. Joseph Sebastiani of St. Mary of the Discalced Carmelite Order was appointed as the first Vicar Apostolic of Malabar with the title of the bishop of Hierapolis.[93] This was the beginning of the Carmelite mission in Malabar. They began to organize their missionary activities from Verapoly, a small island situated on the western part of Malabar, where they rebuilt the Church and their residence in 1673.[94]

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92 History Of Education In Kerala, *www.studentvisaexpert.com/.../history-of-... - India, Education in Kerala... visited on 27-10-2012.*

93 Here we must know that the Archdiocese of Cranganore and the diocese of Cochin existed before the arrival of Carmelites as the two Padroado Sees in Malabar. But the St. Thomas Christians rejected the Padroado bishops. The Christians of Malabar had a special love for the Carmelites. Similarly, the Padroado bishops could not exercise their jurisdiction in the Dutch territories of Malabar. All these caused the erection of the Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar under Propaganda Fide.

94 F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis. The First Archbishop of Malabar, A Historico-critical Study of his Life and Activities and of the Establishment of Latin Hierarchy in Malabar (1868-1897),* Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome1998, 50.

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The religious Apostolic Vicars[95] had always desired to establish schools attached to parishes. As a result of the indefatigable initial endeavours of the Carmelite missionaries in the field of education, the literacy rate in Kerala is very high in comparison with the other states in India. It was Msgr. Bernadine Baccinelli (1853-1868) who laid the foundations of modern secular education in the Vicariate by opening primary schools in every parish. It resulted in a vigorous expansion of education, giving due regard to the importance of imparting religious instruction to all Catholic children.[96]

In a Pastoral Letter dated 7th November 1872, Archbishop Leonard Mellano promulgated a scheme for a thorough reorganization of the elementary education, calling upon all the parishes to open schools, and he gave detailed instructions regarding the manner in which the Catholic schools were to be run. He asked the Vicars of the parishes to enquire of the parents, when they came for confession, whether they were sending their children to the schools, and even admonished them not to give absolution to those parents who persisted in their disregard for the education of their children.[97]

St. Albert's College and school, and St. Teresa's College for women in Ernakulam, St. Joseph's College, Cochin, St. Joseph's Girl's High school in Alleppy, St' Joseph's School in Verapoly, St. Joseph's Convent Girls' school at Kottayam, etc., are some of the existing institutions of these pioneering works in the field of education, by the Carmelite missionaries.[98]

[Hereafter referred to as F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis, The First Archbishop of Malabar*]

95 The Discalced Carmelite missionaries were at the ecclesiastical leadership in the Church in Kerala for 273 years until 1932. In 1887, with the apostolic Letter *Quod iam pridem* issued on 20th May, the Syrian Catholics were separated from the Verapoly jurisdiction, and two separate Apostolic Vicariates were instituted for them at Trichur and Kottayam., in P. J. PODIPARA, *The Latin Rite Christians of Malabar,* Denha Services, Kottayam 1986, 86.

96 F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis, The First Archbishop of Malabar*, 1998, 39.

97 F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis, The First Archbishop of Malabar*, 1998, 39.

98 F. PEREPARAMBIL, *Leonard Mellano of St. Louis, The First Archbishop of Malabar*, 1998, 43.

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The indigenous religious vocations were not greatly encouraged by the Carmelite missionaries in the beginning. It was during the office of Maurelius Stabilini, who was the Apostolic Vicar of Verapoly from 1828 to 1831, that the first indigenous Carmelite Congregation was founded on the hill of Mannanam, six miles north of Kottayam in 1831. Msgr. Bernadine took an interest in developing the Congregation with missionary zeal and virtues.[99] Later, lot of religious congregations of men and women began to rise according to the missionary need of the Church in Kerala and also for the Church's missionary activity in all over India.

In Kerala at present there are 14479 schools of which 5250 are government schools, 7957 are private management schools but aided by the government and 1282 are unaided private schools.[100] Among the private aided and unaided schools we can say that more than 80 % of the schools belong to the Christian managements. Most of these owned and run by the consecrated men and women of the various congregation in Kerala.[101]

The consecrated men and women in their school apostolate try to inculcate into the children the Christian values by presenting to them the life of saints and promoting devotions to these saints. In the schools managed by the consecrated men and women, monthly retreats and confession are organized for the Catholic children and there are the practices of some particular devotions in each school. By their personal witness and teaching, they help all the children to grow in human maturity in general and the Christian maturity in particular for the Catholic children.

4.2.3. Hospital Apostolate

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99 F. MAROTTIKAPARAMBIL, *Archbishop Bernard of Jesus (Philip Arguinzonis), O.C.D., 1897-1919, Architect of the Verapoly Archdiocese, Malabar/ Kerala,* Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1999, 58-59.

100 GOVERNMENT of KERALA, Department of General Education, *www.kerala.gov.in/index.php?... Visited on 26-10-2012.*

101 We can verify the Christian management schools from the list of private schools, in *www.zonkerala.com/Private-Unaided-Sch... - India* List of Unaided Private Schools in Kerala owned by Private ... visited on 27-10-2012.

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Health care and education are the initial steps of the Church's missionary activity anywhere in the world. With the arrival of Christian missionaries in Kerala there started the history of organized health care. According to the documents, by the time Kerala State was formed in 1956, after the independence of India, the foundation for a medical care system which was accessible to all citizens was already laid. The present high health status of Kerala is a consequence of the culture of medical care that the missionaries had implanted here. In Kerala the private health sector, both indigenous and Western systems of medicine, have played a crucial role. The Ayurvedic system of treatment practiced in Kerala dates back to centuries. There were some families of practitioners who handed over their Ayurvedic tradition of treatment from generation to generation. People had the custom of going to these traditional doctors rather than turning to self treatment. Later, with the arrival of westerners, they established their medical system.[102]

Brother Nicolas Veravon, who embraced the Discalced Carmelite religious life while having the degree of an Assistant hospital surgeon, founded the St. Joseph's Hospital at Manjummel, a village at Eranakulam district in 1887. This was the first Catholic hospital in Kerala, and second in the whole of India. For his selfless and dedicated service, he was given awards by two Maharajas of Travancore. *Drogmar*, *Carmelite drops* and *Scala* are the medicines manufactured by Brother Veravon and were well known in his time.[103]

In his article Koji Nabae states that the incredible achievements that have occurred in Kerala in the field of health care was despite of its lowest economic status.[104] This human attitude of care and concern for the sick and the needy which is predominant in the culture of Kerala must have a religious foundation and we can surely find it in the apostolate of the

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[102] Historical Analysis of the Department of Health Care facilities in Kerala State, India, *citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/.../download?...-Stati Uniti* – visited on 28-10-2012.

[103] *Directory of St. Pius X Province, Manjummel 2002-2003,* 5.

[104] K. NABAE, "The Health Care System in Kerala. Its Past Accomplishments and New Challenges", in Articoli accademici per missionaries and health care in Kerala, - *Nabae* - ... health care system in Kerala: its past accomplishments ... visited on 27-10-2012.

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Christian missionaries. Imbibing the Christian spirit of service from them there arose lot of religious congregations for women in Kerala with the charisma of hospital apostolate. They established mission hospitals in the remote areas of Kerala to help the poor people in their sicknesses.[105] While the consecrated women are directly involved in the hospital apostolate by being in the office of doctor, nurse, lab technicians, etc., consecrated men are serving in the administrative offices of the hospitals.

Health care becomes a hospital apostolate for the consecrated men and women when it is thought about from the ambient of popular devotions. What we hear in the religious ambient of popular devotions is a cry of the poor in total helplessness. Although there are super specialty hospitals in Kerala with an international standard, the poor and the needy who live on daily wages cannot afford to the high medical expenses. The consecrated men and women try to address the supplications of the poor by assisting them materially and spiritually through their various institutions. The poor people encounter in the consecrated men and women the compassionate representatives of Jesus Christ. Through various spiritual animation programs in the hospitals especially invoking the intercession of the Saints and Mary they fill the sick people with hope and courage and console them.

4.3. THE POPULAR DEVOTIONS AND THE LAY MOVEMENTS

In a cultural situation in Kerala where human dignity is hailed even above the diversity of religious beliefs, where the individual human beings are capable to recognize their rights and duties, there is a growing need to make everybody actively participate in the various pastoral services of the Church. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, where he spoke about the culture of humanism, proposed a participatory human service in all the realms of human life.[106] The Pope considered it as a

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[105] Historical Analysis of the Development of Health Care facilities in Kerala State, India, *citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/.../download?...* - *Stati Uniti* – visited on 28-10-2012.

[106] "The sign and fruit of this trend towards humanism is the growing need for participation which is undoubtedly one of the distinctive features of present-day humanity, a true 'sign of the times' that is developing in various fields and in different

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distinctive feature of the present day humanity. In the religious ambient of popular devotions we observe some elements of a participatory Church.

Although almost all the centers of popular devotions in Kerala are under the guidance of the clergy and the religious, the popular devotions, as a form of expressing the religious sentiments, can be said to have an origin in the common people. Even today these informal religious performances mediate the religious sentiments of the people who do not have a basic knowledge about the formal patterns of the worship of the Church. Since in Kerala the clerical formation or that of the consecrated men and women are conducted in a cultural ambient different from that of the people of the place, the communication of the Christian faith through them loses its appeal among the common people.[107] They do not feel that their hearts are raised to God with the prayers of these official representatives. In a centre of popular devotion or in a religious ambient of popular devotion the prayers and the religious expressions of the other devotees seem to be appealing to a particular devotee. It is here that we see an informal communion of the laity for the purpose of practicing 'their religion'.

4.3.1. Popular Devotions as an Organized Lay Movement

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ways; above all the growing need for participation regarding women and young people, not only in areas of family and academic life, but also in cultural, economic, social and political areas. To be leading characters in this development—in some ways to be creators of a new, more humane culture—is a requirement both for the individual and for peoples as a whole." CL 5.

[107] Here we have to remember the powerful words of the great visionary of the Church, Pope John XXIII: "[...] it is advisable that young seminarians never be 'educated in places too far removed from human society,' because 'once they step out into the world, they will have problems in dealing both with simple people and with intellectuals; this will often cause them to assume the wrong attitude toward the Christian population, or to regard the formation they received as a bad one.' Indeed, it is necessary that youths not only conform to the ideal of priestly spiritual perfection in everything, but also that they 'gradually and prudently penetrate the mentality and feelings of the people'- of the people, We repeat, whom they must enlight with the truth of the Gospel and lead to perfection of life, with the help of God's grace." JOHN XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum*, Encyclical Letter, 28 November 1959: *AAS* 51 (1959), n. 16.

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It is observed in the Church in Kerala that although most of the popular devotions are initiated and maintained by the clerics and religious, yet the organized lay initiatives have a considerable role in their conduct and propagation. Examples for 'popular devotions as an organized lay movement' can be seen very evidently in the ambient of charismatic movement. Even the origin of charismatic movement was the result of some lay initiatives for a spiritual renewal in the Church when "many thought that God was dead and Christianity was irrelevant in the modern age".[108] As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the charismatic movement is not considered as a popular devotion. Instead we are interested in the 'popular' religious attitude of the 'people' who frequent this renewal movement.

Although the charismatic movement do not have a formal organization with some ecclesiastical power of administration yet, there evolved an "informal organized set-up with international, national, regional and local working groups. The smallest unit is a cell or prayer group."[109] The groups are autonomous in themselves but function under the spiritual guidance and control of the parish priest or a religious institute. There are also some groups which function under the direct leadership of some lay leaders who will be personally guided by a spiritual director. In this informal organizational set-up, Kerala is divided into 21 zones with a coordinating centre. This centre conduct various programs for the lay leaders for the pastoral and spiritual animation.[110]

Similarly most of all the centers of Catholic popular devotions in Kerala have a group of men and women for the maintenance of the devotional practices with their popular characteristics and their propagation. The lay leaders are the custodians of the popular customs and the spiritual traditions of a particular center of popular devotions[111] of which the local

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108 J. PALATTI, "Charismatic Movements", in G. MENACHERY & Team (Eds.), *Indian Christian Directory*, Rashtra Deepika Ltd., Kerala, India 2006, 108.

109 J. PALATTI, "Charismatic Movements", 2006, 108.

110 J. PALATTI, "Charismatic Movements", 2006, 109.

111 For example, in Manjumatha – Our Lady of Snow Church at Palliport in Kerala has a curious custom. On Good Friday, after the Liturgical celebrations, there is a

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ecclesiastical leaders such as, parish priests, religious superiors or rectors of the centers of popular devotions may be ignorant due to the constant transfers.[112] It is also noted that the transfers of the local ecclesiastical leaders can cause a discontinuity in the maintenance of the popularity and the devotional rhythm of the centre. Here it is the organized lay groups that protect and maintain the popular religious expressions of a particular centre.

Sometimes there occur a healthy tension between the ecclesiastical leadership and the lay people with regard to the conduct and maintenance of the popular devotions. The tension is resulted from the changing theological and pastoral outlooks of various parish priests or other ecclesiastical leaders. Some parish priests or religious superiors express themselves to be too progressive and consider the popular devotions as superstitions. They will try to apply the theological height of the Church to the people disregarding the actual context and standard of the common men and women. Here, the local informal lay organization, which even may not have a structure, protect the popular devotional practices of a particular centre from decadence.

Church choir, which is an integral part of catholic popular devotions in Kerala, is an important lay initiative without which a devotion cannot be popular in Kerala. Every centre of popular devotion has a group of expert singers accompanied by various musical instruments. The melodious songs[113] which they sing during the Liturgy and particularly during the recital of Novenas or other devotions, carry the daily worries and cares of the people. We can even say that these popular songs have a considerable role in attracting people to a particular centre of popular devotion in Kerala.

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procession along the roads of the village carrying the statue of the dead body of Jesus Christ. This statue is dressed in a special way and it is done by a group of elders and no others are permitted to do it!

112 Although there are some exceptions, normally, the parish priests, members of the religious communities, or the rectors of the centers of popular devotions, are transferred once in 5-6 years.

113 M. THOMAS, *Popular Devotions and Adult Catechesis. A study based on the devotion to Infant Jesus*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2000, 77.

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The annual feast of the patron saint in the parish is celebrated in a grand way in almost all the parishes in Kerala. A celebration which lasts from three to five days with all the various cultural and spiritual renewal programs cannot be done without a dynamic lay participation. Temporary officials are nominated for the annual feast of the patron saint in the parish who accept the nomination and responsibly to carry out their duties with the collaboration of the members of the parishes in general. The big financial burden of these celebrations are also divided among the elected lay representatives of the parish. But in some parishes all the lay members take a share in the extraordinary expenditure caused by the grand celebration of the feast of the patron saint.

Another phenomenon which can be narrated here, when we study 'popular devotions as an organized lay movement' is, the annual festal celebration of the patron saints in the station churches of the parishes in Kerala. The people around the station churches organize themselves to celebrate the feast of the patron saint in a grand way with wholehearted participation from all the Christian families and the families of other religions around the shrine in all respects. It is they who decide upon the cultural and spiritual renewal programs in connection with the annual feast for which the parish priest always takes an encouraging attitude.

Like the Liturgy of the Church is protected and maintained by an official body in the Church, the popular devotion, which is often called as the 'liturgy of the people' is maintained and protected by an organized movement of the laity. The Charismatic movement is the most popular forum through which the ordinary people in Kerala express their popular religious sentiments and this movement is protected and maintained by an organizational set-up of the laity. The very fact, that centers of popular devotions continue to be popular irrespective of the discontinuity created by the transfers of the ecclesiastical leaders, revels how much the lay initiatives are decisive in their continuity and popularity. Most often, the very popular devotion becomes an expression of their identity as an internal forum organization which air their concerns and cares in a religious way.

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4.3.2. Basic Christian Communities and the Popular Devotions

A Catholic parish in Kerala is divided into various Christian communities and each community consists of 20-30 families. The number of families in the basic Christian communities and the number of communities in a parish vary according to the size of the parish, its geographic structure and according to the number of the families in the parish. A basic Christian community functions with the help of the annually nominated lay leaders and the families in a particular community come together once in a month in a house where there is sufficient space. The meeting consists of the recital of the Rosary, breaking of the Word, some cultural programs, discussion of various matters and a simple sharing at table.

Varghese Manavalan in a small article about the Small Christian Communities in the Church in Kerala[114] states that the Small Christian Communities that are appeared in the Church in Kerala cannot be compared to the Basic Christian Communities which arose in Latin American countries. In these countries, he says, the Basic Christian Communities were formed to mend the lacuna of the pastoral care and to safeguard the Christian communities from injustice, exploitation and oppression. These communities helped the faithful of these countries to maintain the spirit of Christian life in them in spite of an unchristian ambient around them. Instead in India, especially in Kerala the small Christian communities were formed with an intension of an effective pastoral care and the communion of the faithful.

Our interest here is to see how the Christian communities in the parishes in Kerala become an ambient which promote the religious sentiments of the common people, although it is characteristically different from the centers of popular devotions. While the parish Church is the place for the official celebration of the Liturgy presided over by the clergy, a small Christian community is a communion of believers under the leadership of the lay

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[114] V. MANAVALAN, "Cheruthethra Sundaram" [Malayalam], in *Thalandu* 23, 10 (2002), 13-14.

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members nominated by the same community. In this domestic Christian ambient of small Christian community the members know each other more deeply with their ups and downs of life, with their scarcity and surplus than in an ambient of a parish community in the Church. This knowledge of each other and a sentiment of being equal in the community, help the members to open themselves to God and the fellow beings in a more Christian way. Thus, there occur in the ambient of small Christian communities, not only a vertical sharing of the religious sentiments but also a horizontal sharing of their religious consciousness. This is the reason why Cardinal Varcky Vithayathil said that the origin and growth of basic Christian communities were a great gift of God's grace.[115]

The most popular devotion that is practiced in the ambient of small Christian communities in Kerala is the solemn recital of the Rosary. During the recital of the Rosary, the animators call all the members to pray for the suffering members of the community and publicly announce the various financial, moral and spiritual necessities of the community. The suffering members are given an opportunity to make a public appeal to God with all their feelings of insecurity and grief. The singing of popular devotional songs carry the words of prayer about their daily needs and the message of consolation for them.

A popular sharing of the Word of God is another attraction in the prayer meeting of the small Christian communities in Kerala. After reading a selected passage from the Bible, some people are asked to comment on the Word of God. Here we listen to the popular understanding of the Word of God and their expectations from God. The story of how God intervened in the daily life of Israel, the healing and miracle episodes in the New Testament are the often cited passages in the popular sharing of the Word of God. Finally, considering the popular comments, a representative of the ecclesiastical leadership – the parish priest, a consecrated person,

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115 V. VITHAYATHIL, "Basic Christian Communities", in *Eranakulam Mission* 74, 5 (2004), 195-198.

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seminarian or a catechist – may make an official comment on the Word of God that is read.

During some special occasions or sometimes in each prayer meeting, there are some cultural programs by which all get a chance to express themselves. The contents of various programs carry the sufferings and joy of the common people and there are also occasional effort to catechize people through these cultural programs. During Lent the devotion to the Way of the Cross is practiced sometimes going as a procession to the Church, to a mount nearby or to the various houses of the same small Christian community.

At present, in most of the parishes in Kerala, the small Christian community meeting has turned to be a meeting of women and children. Since some men are going for work to the distant places during the week days or some other important programs during Sundays they cannot be present in the meeting. The young men and women complaints of the monotony of the organization of the programs in the meeting. Although the ideal is to bring together all the members of the families, due to the practical reasons, most often the families are represented only by one member. The modern socio-economic situation cause lot of harm to the proper conduct of the small Christian communities and the communion of the faithful.

Considering the small Christian communities as an ambient that protect and maintain the popular religious sentiments of the people, we can say that the small Christian community is a comfortable place where the Christian mysteries address the actual Christian context. Here there can be a healthy dialogue between the contents of the official Liturgy and the popular Christian religious sentiments. When the official Liturgy is animated considering the popular Christian sentiments that are expressed in the context of small Christian community meeting, it can be a proper pastoral response to this context.

4.3.3. Pious Associations and the Popular Devotions

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In almost all the parishes in Kerala we can observe the presence of some pious associations who help the faithful of various age groups in the maintenance and practice of the Christian faith. Likewise there are *Thirubalasakhyam* (Holy Childhood) for the infants, Marian Sodality for the adolescents, Kerala Catholic Youth Movement[116] and Jesus Youth Fraternity for adults and the pious associations like Vincent de Paul Society and Legion of Mary are seen to be of the elder members of the parish. Paul Karachira, in his article on popular devotions in Kerala considers that joining the pious associations, which are oriented to social service like Sodality, Mission League, Vincent de Paul Society, Legion of Mary, etc., is a practice of popular devotion.[117] In his study he demonstrates that the faithful in Kerala especially the youth are interested to join the pious associations which are oriented to some social service.[118] However, there are also some pious associations in Kerala like Third Order Carmelites or Secular Carmel and Third Order Franciscans who considers prayer as an apostolate. They visit the sick and encourage the poor and the needy to persevere in Christian hope.

To introduce devotion to the 'Holy Childhood' of Jesus among the children is the objective of *Thirubalasakhyam*. Infants, until they receive communion, are the members of this pious association. It aims at the integral Christian development of the children. They are introduced to the humble and obedient life of Infant Jesus and are taught the devotional songs and prayers to infant Jesus. Life of saints, especially their childhood stories, are introduced to the children so that their mind may be formed, from the beginning, according to the Christian virtues. At present, considering the systematic effort of the secularist and the atheist movements, even misusing their political power, to let the children grow in their ideologies, bishops in their pastoral letters caution the parents against these movements. They

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116 Although K. C. Y. M., has a socio-political dimension, it is a pious association as its objectives are that of other pious associations.

117 P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", 1986, 322.

118 P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", 1986, 326.

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encourage the parents to take an active role in the faith formation of their children.[119]

After the 2nd Vatican Council the name 'Marian Sodality' was charged into 'Christian Life Community' in the 4th World Assembly in Rome in 1967. The first Sodality unit in India was established in Goa in 1607. Its origin in Kerala was in 1644 in Vaippinkotta Seminary in Chendamangalam[120] by the Jesuits. Although it was started for young boys and girls, now it is open also to the adults. Their motto is to be committed Christians and to bear witness to those human values of Jesus Christ more closely and work with his Spirit for the generation of the new humanity. They follow the spirituality and the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola which is centered on Christ and on the participation in the paschal Mystery. They honor Mary in a special way and rely on her intercession in fulfilling their vocation. Christian Living Community functions as a family of 14 diocesan communities in Kerala. Occasionally according to the need of the time they make public protest against the secularist and atheist attack against human and Christian values.[121]

Kerala Catholic Youth Movement (KCYM) is the official organization under Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference Commission for Youth spread across the three rites – Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara and Latin. It is from 1968 that some of the dioceses began the work of organizing youth with the purpose of giving them an orientation on Christian values and prepare them to work for the spread of Christian values among youth. After a long 10 years of hard work and careful planning, in 1978 the KCYM came to be reality. The members of KCYM are young boys and girls of the age group between 15- 35 years who commit themselves to the 'the Integral Development of the Catholic Youth and the Total Liberation of Human Society in accordance with the Christian values'. At various times, this movement has intervened in the socio-political issues to uphold the

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119 G. MAR DIVANNASIOS, "Devotion to the Holy childhood of Jesus", in *Verapoly Archdiocesan Gazette* 46, 3 (2010), 24.

120 'Chendamangalam' is in the central Kerala.

121 Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) - Youth Commission, *www.kcbcsite.com/kcbc_commision_youth.htm... It* is the continuation of the....visited on 29-10-2012.

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Christian values in the society.[122] Their Christian formation is directly under the KCBC commission for youth.

Jesus Youth Fraternity had its beginning in Kerala with the spread and growth of Charismatic Movement. It is an initiative of the Spirit filled young people who would like to share their joy in the Holy Spirit to the other young people. These young men and women are taken up by the love of Christ and they persevere in their prayer experience by practices of community prayer, reading the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and fellowship, and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. They actively participate in the Church's missionary activity going to other parts of India for working among the poor.[123]

Legion of Mary and Vincent de Paul Society are also very active pious associations in the parishes of Kerala. Legion of Mary exhorts all the faithful, with their life, charitable works and prayerful availability to the sick and the needy, to do service to the brethren with the seal of Christ and devotion to Mary.[124] The members of the Vincent de Paul Society, in all the parishes of Kerala, are directly involved in the charitable works through various small scale economic developmental programs.

Pious associations in general can be described as the popular devotions in action. These associations help the devotees to convert their self-centered sentimental prayers for the intercessions of the saints and Mary in their necessities to a responsible action to help the poor and needy like them. The devotees are invited to feel for the others with the same sentiments they have for themselves. As a result the devotees themselves become the representatives of the divine intercessors to do good to the people. Pious associations in Kerala especially the youth movements like Jesus Youth prove how it is possible to convert an ardent devotion to Jesus Christ into the heroic service of love for the Church and to the humanity as a whole.

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122 Kerala Catholic Youth Movement, *kcym.in*/The main aim of ....visited on 29-10-2012.

123 Kerala Jesus Youth, *india.jesusyouth.org/node/121*...Kerala (362) | Jesus Youth India... visited on 29-10-2012.

124 Legion of Mary, *www.lfchurchelamkulam.org/legion-of-mary/*...Legion of Mary | Little Flower Church...visited on 29-10-2012.

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4.4. CONCLUSION

A study on the pastoral response of the Church to the religious ambient of the Catholic popular devotions in Kerala makes it clear that the official Church has taken considerable steps to encourage the popular expressions of Catholic faith. At the same time the bishops of Kerala tried to discipline them with effective teaching. The Catholic popular devotions are the result of the missionary response of the consecrated men and women to the popular religious attitudes in Kerala. They continue to address the religious sentiments of the common people at various levels by their ecclesiastical and secular services. The theologians in India are in search of a religious attitude that help the people of various religions and culture live together in harmony. They say that although the religions have a transcendental dimension they are mainly to help this worldly life. The religious ambient of Catholic popular devotions provide the laity an opportunity to work with the Church to fulfill her missionary duty to all people.

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CHAPTER 5

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN KERALA

5.0. INTRODUCTION

It is an unquestionable reality in the nature that although God's love and grace are overshadowing every human being equally like Sun shine, rain and life giving air, yet there are grades in the realm of the possessions of the talents. The human response to the divine grace also vary due to the various conditions within and around the individual. While some members of the Catholic Church in Kerala receive a high degree of human and Christian formation and enjoy a high standard of living in all respects, many other members of the same Church are deprived of these opportunities and they remain poor in all aspects of human life. As it is stated in the previous chapters various human living conditions influence the religious consciousness of a person. The popular religious ambient of Kerala also testifies the same reality.

The same applause received by the servants who labored with five and two talents respectively, the same one denarius received by the one who came to work at the eleventh hour, and Jesus' patient and merciful approach to the poor and the sinners reveal the divine response in a human way in a context of poor religious consciousness. As the Mystical Body of Christ, it is the same compassionate and kind pastoral approach that the teaching of the Church proposes the pastors to assume when they address the religious ambient of popular devotions.

In this chapter some of the prospects and challenges of the Catholic popular devotions in Kerala are highlighted and some pastoral reflections are made looking ahead.

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5.1. PROSPECTS OF THE CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS

The religious ambient of Catholic popular devotions in Kerala provides a fertile field to develop a mission theology and a mission methodology for the multi-religious and multi-cultural context. It is an ambient of dialogue between the theology of the people and the systematic theology of the Church. It is a radical ambient where the conceptual theology and the contextual theology encounter each other for mutual enrichment. We consider here some of the prospects of the Catholic popular devotions as an instrument to carry out Church's missionary mandate.

5.1.1. A Unique Ambient for Catechesis

Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* says:

> [...] at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, 'the only Son from the Father...full of grace and truth,' who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever. It is Jesus who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life,' and Christian living consists in following Christ, the sequela Christi.[1]

It is always the vision of the Church that the faithful grow into the fullness of humanity revealed in Jesus Christ. "[C]atechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."[2] With this motive the Church would catechize the faithful so that they may be able to comprehend the 'mystery of Christ', "to understand

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[1] JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation, 16 October 1979: *AAS* 71 (1979), n. 5. [Hereafter referred to as CT]

[2] CT 18.

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the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery".[3]

The religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala provides a unique opportunity for the Church in Kerala to catechize the people because in this religious ambient, the believers are more disposed, spontaneous and open. It can be the means to provide many opportunities for the common people in Kerala "to encounter Christ in the particular circumstances of ethnic, cultural and religious customs."[4] Since in this religious ambient the Church in Kerala addresses the poor people, whose basic concern is the struggles of daily existence, the catechesis must be formulated and presented as a response to their existential problems. The Catholic faith is to be presented to them in such a way that the 'people', who are assailed by this worldly struggles, receive some consolation and courage. This is what is intended by Michael Amaladoss when he said, 'religion is for this worldly life'. The level of each individual religious consciousness must be respected and the Church must accompany the faithful in patience for the growth of each individual believer giving them a personal witness to Christ as a teacher. Pope John Paul II says:

> [...] the whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: His silences, His miracles, His gestures, His prayer, His love for people, His special affection for the little and the poor, His acceptance of the total sacrifice on the cross for the redemption of the world, and His resurrection are the actualization of His word and the fulfillment of revelation. Hence for Christians the crucifix is one of the most sublime and popular images of Christ the Teacher.[5]

The people in Kerala who gather around the centers of popular devotions in search of some consolation and remedy for their existential problems of life are not disposed to some dry teachings but to a person who express concern

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[3] CT 5.
[4] P. SIMATHY, "Popular Devotion as Adult Catechesis", in *Kristu Jyoti* 26, 1 (2010), 71.
[5] CT 9.

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and care to them like Jesus Christ. However, with great apostolic zeal, the world famous compassionate Pope, John Paul II appeal to the people, who are in constant pilgrimage to various centers of popular devotions and to the various charismatic groups, in these words:

> [...] in the name of Jesus, I exhort the young people who belong to them, their leaders, and the priests who devote the best part of their ministry to them: no matter what it costs, do not allow these groups - which are exceptional occasions for meeting others, and which are blessed with such riches of friendship and solidarity among the young, of joy and enthusiasm, of reflection on events and facts - do not allow them to lack serious study of Christian doctrine. If they do, they will be in danger - a danger that has unfortunately proved only too real - of disappointing their members and also the Church.[6]

The people are asked to make a profound study on the mystery of Christ so that they may come to the joy of hope that Jesus proclaimed. On the *Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith* the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states on what purpose the Pope declared the Year of Faith: "The *Year of Faith* is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today [...]."[7] The document also recommends to propagate devotions to the local Saints and the blessed as authentic witnesses of the Christian faith.[8]

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope speaks of some of the valid elements in the popular devotions which can be utilized for catechetical instruction:

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[6] CT 47.

[7] CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith, with the Attachment, Motu Proprio Porta Fidei*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2012, 9.

[8] CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith...*, 2012, 18.

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> Underlying most of these prayers and practices, besides elements that should be discarded, there are other elements which, if they were properly used, could serve very well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of His message: the love and mercy of God, the Incarnation of Christ, His redeeming cross and resurrection, the activity of the Spirit in each Christian and in the Church, the mystery of the hereafter, the evangelical virtues to be practiced, the presence of the Christian in the world, etc.[9]

Pope observes that a presentation of the mystery of Christ in a way appealing to the people who gather around the centers of popular devotions will produce positive results. He also insisted that the signs and symbols that are used in the religious ambient of popular devotions must have some Christian roots which, if it is needed, can be revised and improved considering the cultural context rather than appealing to the non-Christian or anti-Christian elements.[10] Patrick Gnanapragasam, in his article, speaks about the opportunity of the Church to make use of the 'potentialities of liminality', that is found in the religious ambient of popular devotions, which 'help the Church to draw continuously upon the creative freedom offered in liminality' for the purpose of catechizing the faithful.[11]

In the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala the official Church with her missionary mandate encounters the poor people who cry for help and courage to go ahead with their day to day life. They expect some visible signs of faith and concrete response to their existential problems. They expect the true representatives of God whom they can touch and talk. Here the catechesis must be done with the powerful tools of compassion, humility and patience but with the zeal of pastoral charity to help everyone to grow into Christ.

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[9] CT 54.
[10] CT 54.
[11] P. GNANAPRAGASAM, "Shrines and Pilgrimages: Liminal Experiences", in *Word & Worship* 1 (2010), 30.

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5.1.2. Integrity of Prayer and Contemplation

Jesus is the eternal model for our prayer. By word and example he teaches us how to contemplate the Father in solitude and in activity, how to adore and praise him, how to turn to him in our needs and gratefully and wholeheartedly embrace his will. United in faith with the humanity of Christ[12] as with a loving friend,[13] we too, with the help of the Holy Spirit, enter into this filial conversation with the Father.[14] In this way our prayer becomes a genuine expression of our relationship with God and the life spring of our service in the Church.

John of the Cross speaks of Christ as "the Rock", in whose "high caverns" we find everything we desire.[15] In the experience of union with Christ, all the harmonious mysteries that we cannot understand, show themselves experientially. Here John of the Cross emphasizes that these mysteries hidden in Christ are too deep to be fathomed by the mind alone. Yet, in union with him, they are known beyond our wildest expectations.[16] "There is much to fathom in Christ, for he is like an abundant mine with many recesses of treasures, so that however deep men go they never reach the end or bottom, but rather in every recess find new veins with new riches everywhere."[17]

Therese of Child Jesus speaks of the apostolate of prayer and she says that the apostolate of prayer is more elevated than that of the Word.[18] She is

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[12] TERESA of Avila, *The Book of her Life*, 22 § 1, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. I, Carmel International Publishing House, Kerala 2001, 144.

[13] TERESA of Avila, *The Book of her Life*, 8, § 5, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. I, 2001, 67.

[14] Matthew 6, 9-13; Romans 8, 15-16; Galatians 4: 6.

[15] JOHN of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 37 § 3, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. John of the Cross*, Carmel International Publishing House, Kerala 2001, 550.

[16] R. P. HARDY, "John of the Cross: Loving the World in Christ", in *Spiritual Life* 37, 3 (1991), 167.

[17] JOHN of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 37 § 4, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. John of the Cross*, 551.

[18] C. DE MEESTER (Gen. ed.), *St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teachings*, Carmel Publishing Centre, Trivandrum 1998,154.

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aware of the necessary horizontal dimension of the love of God to ratify its veracity. She says in her poem:

Living on Love is sailing unceasingly,
Sowing peace and joy in every heart.
Beloved Pilot, Charity impels me,
For I see you in my sister souls.
Charity is my only star.
In its brightness I sail straight ahead.
I've my motto written on my sail:
"Living on Love."[19]

A commitment to contemplative prayer does not imply a 'do nothing' attitude in other areas of life. Contemplation is a turning to God in a listening attitude in acknowledgment of wisdom higher than one's own, and trying to live each day in the light of that wisdom.[20] The lesson that Teresa of Avila teaches us is that contemplation and action are indissolubly united. For her, contemplation and action are really indistinguishable. Towards the close of the book, *The Interior Castle*, Teresa rejects the dualistic interpretation of Martha and Mary:

> Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and not host Him badly by failing to give Him something to eat. How would Mary always seated at His feet, provide Him with food if her sister did not help her? His food is that in every way possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise Him always.[21]

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[19] THERESE of Lisieux, "Living on Love" [Poem], § 8., in C. DE MEESTER (Gen. ed.), *St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teachings,* 1998,164.

[20] P. WILKINSON, "The Mission of Carmel: Contemplative and Apostolic", in *Spiritual Life* 35, 1 (1989), 14.

[21] TERESA of Avila, *The Interior Castle VII*, 4, § 12, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. II, 2001, 448.

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Contemplation without action is academic and barren, and action without contemplation would be material and blind.[22] Teresa says, "Whoever has not begun to pray, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good."[23] She also says, "I certainly pity those who serve the Lord at their own cost..."[24] She is convinced that a person without prayer is unprepared to live the life of Christ and act according to the Gospel values. Contemplation is not just a type of prayer but an attitude, a stance, a way of life, a rhythm of being.

When we say that we observe an integrity of prayer and contemplation in the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala, we mean that the devotees who surrender their will to God are concretely expressing it through their personal life and the works of charity. This is what Pope Paul VI highlights in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, when he spoke about popular religiosity. He says :

> It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence. It engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the sense of the cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion.[25]

The Church in Kerala witnesses the heroic generosity and sacrifice of the consecrated men and women who are taken up by the love and the sufferings of Jesus Christ. These people converted their love and commitment to Jesus into love for the Church and the poor. They go to all

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[22] J. C. HERTA, "St. Teresa of Avila: A Contemplative Activist for all Seasons", in *Spiritual Life* 28, 2 (1982), 73.

[23] TERESA of Avila, *The Book of her Life*, 8 § 5, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. I, 2001, 67.

[24] TERESA of Avila, *The Book of her Life*, 8 § 8, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. I, 2001, 68.

[25] PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, 8 December 1975: *AAS* 68 (1976), n. 48. [Hereafter referred to as EN]

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the other parts of India and to the world as missionaries to serve the poor by word and deed. They deepened the awareness of the Christian faith in the Church living the Christian values in a multi-cultural and multi-religious context and they contributed new horizons of Christian faith to the deposit of the teaching of the Church in general.[26]

The Church in Kerala also witnesses the generosity and sacrifice of the devotees of popular devotions, as lay people, through the pious associations. The pious associations can be considered as popular devotions in action. At various times of growth from the childhood to the adulthood they prepare the devotees to grow in the practice in Christian virtues and to produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Boys and girls, young men and women, and even the elderly people being taken up by the love of Christ and the testimony of the saints, enter into the human service within the Church and the society in various spheres. They even cooperate with the Church's missionary activity in various parts of India and abroad.

5.1.3. A Space for Inter-Religious Encounter

As it is stated at different parts of this work, Kerala is a unique place where almost all the great world religions were accepted and assimilated. In spite of the existence of the diverse faith traditions, there is an underlying unity in the people of Kerala. This unity of people, even going beyond religious barriers, are not the result of the conscious work of some secular or ecclesiastical official forums. It is rather a characteristic of the popular humanistic culture that was prevalent in Kerala from the ancient times. The words of the Hindu sage Narayanaguru, 'whatever be one's religion, it is enough that individual becomes good' reveals the basic cultural preoccupation of the people of Kerala.

The culture of humanism in Kerala has its strong roots in Buddhism and Jainism which emerged in India as protesting popular religious movements

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[26] CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRAMENTS, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, L R C Publications, Kochi 2002, 32.

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against the Vedic Hinduism which came to India around 1500 B. C. The socio-political organization of Vedic Hinduism systematically propagated a transcendental theology favoring the priestly class. The majority who were exploited and oppressed were given the hope that they will enjoy a better life in the next birth on earth if they commit themselves to the service according to the socio-political system. It is against this religious background some sages interpreted religion as an inward journey and proposed self discipline for a better life on earth. This religious attitude prevailed in the culture of Kerala until the gradual socio-political conquest of Kerala by the Vedic Hinduism which started from 800 A. D., and by 1200 A. D. caste system was fully established in Kerala.

Later, the popular religious sentiments of the people began to be expressed through *Bhakti* movements. In this religious ambient of love and devotion all the devotees experienced equality and freedom to express their religious sentiments in their own way without the mediation of priests. The basic concern of the religious sentiments that were celebrated in these movements through rites, rituals, prayers and songs was the struggles and the sufferings of this worldly life. It is to address this religious ambient of popular Hinduism that the missionaries who came to Kerala have introduced Catholic popular devotions. Therefore it attracts the basic religious sentiments of all believers in Kerala irrespective of religions. As a result the religious ambient of Catholic popular devotions is an inter-religious one.

It is worth speaking here about Aravindaksha Menon[27] who hail from a Hindu caste of high culture and learning. He explains himself why he accepted the Catholic faith leaving Hinduism. In his days of sufferings he went in search of the reasons for it, as a proper Hindu, to the astrologists. They said that a certain god was angry with him and therefore he had to do some religious rites to please that god. Since he did not recover from his

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27 Hindu Orthodox Brahmin Priest - Aravindaksha Menon converts ... *christtotheworld.blogspot.com/.../hindu- orthodox*... Testimony of Br. Aravindaksha Menon... visited on 28-11-2012.

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difficulties of life even after performing the prescribed rites, he went again to the astrologists. At this time the astrologists said that one another god was displeased with him. Aravindaksha Menon thought why gods were angry with him like this way in his days of difficulties. Later, becoming a Catholic Christian he said that he discovered a God who suffers with him, in Christianity!

The believers who gather around the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala beyond religious barriers share the same religious sentiments and all of them are taken up by the same challenges of material life. They seek some immediate remedies in their difficulties. They struggle to go ahead in the urbanized, globalized society of Kerala. They search a God or some godly persons who, they believe, can understand their difficulties. A sharing of hearts, a dialogue of life in an interreligious way, is also taking place between the devotees through their praying and singing together.

In the religious ambient of popular devotions where the Church encounters with the brethren of other religions, she has an opportunity to introduce the Christian faith in a popular way concentrating on the life of Jesus Christ who underwent all the limitations and human sufferings in this world. If she succeeds in witnessing and proclaiming the life of hope that Jesus Christ and his faithful disciples lived on earth, an internal dialogue of hearts will take place among the people who gather there and can transform them like leaven transforms the dough.[28]

5.2. CHALLENGES OF CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS

Although the bishops in Kerala has promoted and encouraged the popular devotions, they have also expressed their concern over their problems of growth. While speaking positively about the possibilities of evangelization in the religious ambient of popular devotions, Pope Paul VI assessed that the

[28] "Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ." in VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 18 November 1965: AAS 58 (1966), n. 2. [Hereafter referred to as AA]

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ambient of popular devotions 'is often subject to many distortions and superstitions'.[29] We consider here some of the challenges of the Catholic popular devotions in Kerala.

5.2.1. A Weak Christology

We can observe in the history of the Church's missionary activity that whenever the mystery of Christ has encountered a new culture, it has undergone a kenosis to adapt itself to the new culture. Whenever the Church, while addressing a particular culture, has accepted this kenosis, Jesus Christ was accepted into it as a true incarnate Word for them. At the same time, the Church suffered so much to maintain the 'already' and 'not yet' dimensions of the mystery of Christ,[30] the dimensions of 'being in the world' and 'out of it' in this process of inculturation. For example, to respond to the religious sentiments of the ethnic groups in Germany, "the early medieval Church accented the divinity of Christ so strongly that a certain imbalance entered into its way of considering the Incarnate Logos".[31] The presentation of Jesus for a momentary appeal and advantage diminished the integrity and the originality of Jesus, the Incarnate Word.

In India, where 80% of the people were poor, where power was the symbol of oppression and exploitation, where the Vedic religion was proposing a socio-political system of unjust social stratification, the religion of the poor cherished the gods of mercy and simplicity. The black gods like Krishna and Siva represent the theological aspirations of the poor Dravidians who were considered outcasts in the socio-political structure of Vedic religion. It is from this popular religious context in India that the concepts of 'incarnations' and 'personal god' had their origin. It is here that Christianity can discover a key to enter into the pastoral context of Catholic popular

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[29] EN 48.

[30] Antony Kalliath expressed this reality in the mystery of Christ in an Indianized way, in his article, calling it 'Christic-Wheel', in A. KALLIATH, "Christic-Wheel (Christological Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Abhishiktananda)", in *Word & Worship* 2 (2010), 118-119.

[31] M. C. NALLY, "Middle Ages", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. 9, 818.

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devotions through which the missionaries addressed the popular religious context in Kerala. The proclamation of the Incarnation of Jesus into a human ambient of utter poverty, his simple life as a carpenter, his preferential option for the poor and the week people in the society and his very strong statements against the oppression and exploitation would console and encourage the poor and the needy who gather in large number to the centers of popular devotions. They would discover a God who suffer with them and who respond to the concrete needs of their daily life.

But here the question is, what is the originality of Christian faith? What is the Good News that Christianity wants to proclaim to the poor and the needy who gather around the centers of popular devotion? The signs and the miracles that Jesus performed were momentary in nature and often he used them for the clarifications of his message. But, as in the days of Jesus, the faithful in Kerala are crazy for miracles[32] and most often the pastoral activities are also oriented to the advertisement of miracles[33] so much so the people lose Jesus, the peace.[34] The fullness of life, revealed by Jesus, is not completely made known without the proclamation of our resurrection in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul considered the resurrection to be the keystone of the mystery of Christ, the absolute criterion of the truth of his Gospel. "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied."[35] Our hope is in a "new heaven and a new earth",[36] where the Lord "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."[37]

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[32] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, (M Th. Dissertation, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong 2003) Unpublished manuscript, 147.

[33] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, 2003, 167.

[34] Ephesians 2, 14.

[35] I Corinthians 15,19.

[36] Revelation 21, 1.

[37] Revelation 21, 4.

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The centers of popular devotions in Kerala, either because of considering the level of religious consciousness of the people gathered there or because of some material motive, do not proclaim the mystery of Christ in its fullness. Instead of presenting Jesus as a Man of hope and one who proclaimed the hope of eternal life, he is presented as a wonder worker. Some centers give exaggerated importance to the saints connecting them with some material motives instead of presenting them as models in the way of Christian perfection. These give wrong understanding of the mystery of Christ to the people of shallow faith and to the believers of others religions who gather in large number in these centers.

5.2.2. The Problem of Superstitions

Most often, we notice in the popular liturgy of Kerala 'the subtle tendency to manipulate God'.[38] The meaning of the songs that are sung, the prayers of petitions that are made, the purpose for which many rush to various liturgical centers to express their expectations from God, are an evidence of this mentality. They want God to be what they choose him to be. But the liturgy is supposed to be the celebration of God, to let God be God. This God can be experienced only through the pure darkness of faith. And God, experienced through the darkness of faith beyond all the human images and categories is the real God. When John of the Cross speaks of the 'dark night' as brighter than the Sun that leads him forward,[39] the same faith experience is meant.[40]

Whenever the Church has officially spoken about the popular piety, she has cautioned the faithful against the irresponsible and childish sentimentalism.

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[38] S. GALILEA, "St. John of the Cross and Spirituality in the Americas", in *Spiritual Life*, 35. 2 (1989), 74.

[39] JOHN of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul I,* 4, § 5, in KAVANAUGH Kieran – RODRIGUEZ Otilio (trs.), *The Collected works of St. John of the Cross*, 2001, 305.

[40] A. MULLOOR, *Called to be Special. Salvation-Historical Vistas on Consecrated Life,* Jyotir Dharma Publications, Kalamassery, Kerala 2002, 22.

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Pope Benedict XVI expressed his sadness when he spoke about some pastors who systematically promote superstitions for worldly motives.[41]

In the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala some devotees believe in the efficacy of the recital of some prayers, performances of some rites or visit to some centers to receive the desired material goods in their lives undermining the responsibility of human will to cooperate with the divine grace in their personal life.[42] The exaggerated importance given to the feasts of the saints disregarding the Liturgical feasts of the Lord fail to propagate the true and integral content of Christian faith to the brothers and sisters of other religions who gather in large number in the religious ambient of popular devotions. The bishops of Kerala issued Pastoral Letters to instruct the faithful against the superstitious practices in the religious ambient of popular devotions.

Due to inordinate exaggeration of the dimension of sin in man[43] the faithful tend to ponder more over their sins and fall into a negative self-image and lose enthusiasm to develop a healthy relationship with God. Often, for the faithful in general, the novenas and the other prayers of petitions uttered during the prayer sessions of the retreats turn out to be a tug of war and bargaining with God for the fulfillment of some of their personal plans. They are trying to tie the hands of God, and shout to God to let their will be done.[44]

While the Church in Kerala consider the poor people, who maintain superstitious beliefs, with lot of compassion and understanding, she is sad about the lack of profundity of some animators who exploit the ignorance of the common people for material motives. In his Apostolic Exhortation Pope

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41 T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008, 126.

42 P. KARACHIRA, "An Attitudinal study of Popular Devotions", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 329.

43 J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, 2003, 149.

44 J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, *In Search of the Specific Role of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Church in Kerala Today*, 2003, 179.

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John Paul II pleads to the believers and to the preachers to make use of these devotions to grow into Christian maturity.[45]

5.2.3. Worship Fostered by Fear and Compulsion

It can be stated that religious sentiments have an origin in the human feelings of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, etc. The mystery in and around man was overcome by some counter mysterious rites or utterances and they assured in turn a hope and certainty. Since the feeling of uncertainty is a constant experience, to overcome them, the rites that assure certainty and hope became a compelling necessity. A study of the history of religions reveal how these negative feelings were overcome by positive assurances and how they were developed into system of thoughts and rites.

Although in the modern times most of these negative sentiments were overcome by the developments of positive human sciences, the findings of these sciences and the consequent restructuring of the religious consciousness are not reached to all the people in the human society. In the religious ambient of popular devotions, where the people of poor religious consciousness gather in large number, the religiosity is most often overshadowed by fear and compulsion. Either the devotees are frequenting the centers of popular devotions and pay homage to the deities asking for protection because of their fear of the misfortunes that may come in their life or because of the fear of being punished by the same deities if they neglect them.

The religious ambient of Catholic popular devotions in Kerala is not free from this challenge of popular religiosity. Some unqualified preachers in Kerala, either due to an improper understanding of the Christian concept of God or because of some commercial interests, 'propagate the concept of a punishing God'.[46] They manipulate the concept of sin and interpret all the misfortunes of the people as a consequence of the punishment that came

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[45] CT 47.

[46] M. GONSALVES, "Pilgrimages: Faith Experience, Expression and Formation," in *Word & Worship* 2 (2010), 97.

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from God for their sins and thus evoke fear in the devotees. As a remedy for their sins they compel the devotees to follow some popular devotions or frequent the centers of popular devotion without fail. They threaten the people of a punishment from the saint if they fail to frequent the centers or fail to honor the saint. For example, people venerate the arrow of St. Sebastian and it is taken out in procession to the streets so that they may be saved from the small pox and other pestilences. At the same time some people believe that if due respect is not paid to it, the saint will become angry and punish the devotees with pestilences![47]

The elite in Kerala, especially from the secularized and atheistic ambient, pour out strong criticisms against these kinds of exploitations and superstitions. There are efforts from the Church in Kerala to overcome these problems of growth which are seen in the Catholic popular religious ambient.

5.3. LOOKING AHEAD

Alister McGrath, in his article speaks about the "aggressive, blistering attack on religion" made by some spokes men of 'new atheism'. He says: "Religion is portrayed as being intrinsically and characteristically dangerous, poisonous, and evil. [...] Lurking within every religious believer [the author shares the ideas that the spokes men of new atheism propagate] there lies a potential terrorist. Get rid of religion, and the world will be a safer place."[48] The author interprets this 'intense anger' that they express, as the fear that the secularism and atheism are losing their appeal in the economically developed countries. However, considering the moral spiritual decadence of the religions in the past and their present lethargy of interpreting the moral and spiritual values according to the signs of the times, the criticism on religions cannot be completely ignored.

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[47] C. ILLICKAMURY, "Popular Devotions and Authentic Christianity", in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Popular Devotions in India: Research Seminar*, NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, 90.

[48] A. MCGRATH, "Bestseller Atheisms: The New Scientism", in *Concilium* 4 (2010), 11.

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The popular culture of humanism that pervades the history of Kerala has always criticized everything in the religions that went against the basic human rights and reason. Although there were no bloodshed in the name of religion in the past, the common people of Kerala suffered oppression and exploitation under the socio-political systems of religions. At present Kerala witnesses a very strong popular movement of secularism and atheism. The main land India and the entire Kerala is fast developing into an urbanized and globalized society and the religions are struggling to assert their unique identity.[49] The political parties are using religion as a tool for their survival and even the religious heads are showing some political interests for material gains. Here the Catholic Church has a golden opportunity and duty to present the transforming power of Gospel values by personal witness and proclamation.

The religious ambient of Catholic popular devotions is a unique place where the Catholic Church encounters the poor people of all religions in Kerala who cherish within them the popular religion of humanism that pervades the entire culture of Kerala. It is an urgent need that these people are to be addressed with a this worldly dimension of Christian teaching, presenting Jesus who 'lived in this world but out of it' so that they may not degenerate themselves into secularism and atheism.

5.3.1. Understanding the Essence of Christian Vocation

The Church, in her pastoral ministry, once had the attitude of St. Paul who said: "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh."[50] Today Church understands that her members are grown to take up the responsibility of growth and she would like to share the ultimate aim of her mission. The Second Vatican Council, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, says:

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[49] N. D'CUNHA, "Religions in Globalizing India. The Fundamental Values for Reconstructing Religions from Prevalent to Relevant," in *VJTR* 74 (2010), 677-678.

[50] 1 Corinthians 3, 1-3a.

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> In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.[51]

The Church would like to proclaim to the faithful that a person becomes truly Christian not by calling Jesus 'Lord, Lord', but by doing the will of the Father.[52] In Jesus, the pattern of human life is fully revealed. He established right relationship with God and man,[53] and this justice is the redemption for man.[54] Therefore, everyone has a "personal responsibility to grasp through study, prayer and reflection the timeless truth of Jesus in order to bring its power and vitality"[55] to the present challenges of Christian life. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II says:

> Jesus' perfectly human life, devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the *vocation of every human being* is to receive love and give love in return. In Jesus we marvel at the inexhaustible capacity of the human heart to love God and man, even when this entails great suffering.[56]

Jesus is the revelation of the new humanity in whom the Father was well pleased. He established a New Testament of life in relationship with God

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[51] VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965: *AAS* 58 (1966), n. 22.

[52] Matthew 7, 21.

[53] Colossians 1, 20.

[54] "In *Redemptor Hominis* I wrote that 'the redemption of the world – this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed – is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human Heart – the Heart of the First-born Son – in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity in the First-born Son to be children of God and called to grace, called to love'." in JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Apostolic Exhortation, 6 November 1999: L'Ossevatore Romano (7 November 1999), n. 13. [Hereafter referred to as EA]; JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, Encyclical Letter, 4 March 1979: *AAS* 71 (1979), n. 9.

[55] EA 10.

[56] EA 13.

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and man. He established a new way of offering sacrifices to God. Through him the fullness of divine worship has come to us. In this new sacrifice Jesus is the priest, he is the altar of sacrifice and he is the victim of the sacrifice.[57] We read in the Letter to the Hebrews:

> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,' as it is written of me in the roll of the book." When he said above, "Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Lo, I have come to do thy will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.[58]

The entire universe is filled with the presence of God and the presence of this invisible God was made visible by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He manifested the original nature of man who was created in the image and likeness of God. He made himself subject to the divine will of God which controls the entire universe. By his obedience to the divine will of God, Jesus revealed how a man can enjoy the freedom of the children of God participating in the goodness of the each being that God created. He revealed how man can also participate in the mission of making the invisible God visible in the human society. Jesus revealed that by submitting oneself to the divine wisdom, one can participate in the nature of the new man, Jesus who carried in himself the presence of God. In fact Saint Paul, in his

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57. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRAMENTS, *Instruction: Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy (IVth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy),* Vatican Press, Vatican City 1994, n. 12. [Hereafter referred to as CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRAMENTS, *Instruction: Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*]

58 Hebrews 10, 5-10

letter to the Ephesians said that all have to learn from the life of Jesus Christ the true nature of humanity and that they have to put off their old nature of disobedience and rebellion and put on the new human nature revealed through Jesus Christ, "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness".[59]

Church instructs that each Christian, by the sacrament of Baptism, is anointed with the Oil of Consecration to the priesthood of Christ.[60] Pope Benedict XVI in his book *The Fathers* states about the great responsibility that the Christians have received with the baptism. Baptism imparts each Christian the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ.[61] A Christian, when transformed into the New Man, Jesus Christ, he/she becomes a living testimony of Christian hope. It means that each Christian has taken the vow to live like Jesus Christ, in this world, to sanctify the world. Each one is called to continue the life of Christ until the end of times. Thus, all share in the priesthood of Christ and this concept is technically called, 'common priesthood of all believers'.[62] The Vatican Council Decree on the laity speaks about the apostolate of the laity as an integral part of their Christian vocation.[63] One who receives the Sacrament of the Order is called to be at the service of the priesthood of all believers. This means that an ordained

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[59] Ephesians 4, 24.

[60] "The Council first affirms the 'common' vocation to holiness. This vocation is rooted in baptism, which characterizes the priest as one of the 'faithful' (Christifedelis), as a 'brother among brothers,' a member of the People of God, joyfully sharing in the gifts of salvation (cf. Eph. 4:4-6) and in the common duty of walking 'according to the Spirit' in the footsteps of the one master and Lord. We recall the celebrated words of St. Augustine: 'For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The former title speaks of a task undertaken, the latter of grace; the former betokens danger, the latter salvation.'" in JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, Apostolic Exhortation, 25 March 1992: *AAS* 84 (1992), n. 19. [Hereafter referred to as PDV]

[61] Also see in AA 2, "[...] the laity [...] share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world."

[62] VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964: *AAS* 57 (1965), n.10.

[63] AA 2.

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priest is asked to help the laity, by word and example, to make their daily life a pleasing sacrifice before God, the Almighty.[64]

In the religious ambient of popular devotions the Church encounters people with simple faith and addresses them with much respect and compassion. But as a responsible mother and teacher, she does not like to leave these people in their infancy of faith because she understands that this simple faith would not answer the questions of their adulthood. They may lose all their enthusiasm and courage and they may lose their hope in God. Church would like to prepare them to take up their daily cross and follow Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master. She reminds every Christian through the celebration of the Sacraments and the Liturgy that they have the vocation to become like Jesus Christ, the New Man.

5.3.2. The Importance of Liturgy in Christian life

Vatican Council II, in its Constitution on Sacred Liturgy said that the Liturgy "is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church."[65] The mystery of Christ is characterized by the 'already' and 'not yet' dimensions. There are some elements of the mystery that is visible and experiential here and now and at the same time the fullness of its revelation is yet to come for which all are asked to wait in hope. The Church as the mystical body and as the sacrament of the mystery of Christ on earth witnesses, by word and deed, its 'already dimension'. She is in constant contemplation of the world to come, which, in turn gives dynamism for her life of faith and service of love on earth. In Liturgy the faithful celebrate and there by witness these essential dimensions of Catholic faith.

The purpose of the celebration of the Liturgy is to build up the faithful into "a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the

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[64] PDV 12.

[65] VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 4 December 1963: *AAS* 56 (1964), n. 2. [Hereafter referred to as SC]

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mature measure of the fullness of Christ".[66] It is the desire of the Church that her faithful become the living stones of God's house and being themselves close to the corner stone, Jesus Christ, they build a spiritual edifice for God.[67] Liturgy is the celebration of the life of Jesus Christ on earth, his passion, death, resurrection and his glorious ascension. It is also the celebration of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church in various ways through which he continues his priestly office of sanctification of men[68] and his works of redemption.[69] The sacraments are celebrated at various occasions of the life of the faithful to help them to live a transformed life in Christ for which they have taken a vow at the time of their baptism.

Liturgy also reminds the faithful of the basic characteristic of their faith, that is, of their life of hope. In the Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* we read:

> In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle; we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory.[70]

The Liturgy that is celebrated here on earth is a pre-experience of the heavenly liturgy so that the faithful may be convinced of their pilgrim nature on earth and they may witness to the world the heaven that they hope for where the angels and saints with one heart and mind eternally sing the hymns of praise and thanks to God. Thus in Liturgy there is a scope for the

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66 SC 2.
67 1Peter 2, 5.
68 SC 7.
69 SC 6.
70 SC 8.

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celebration of Catholic faith in its integrity and it is the perfect expression of Christian worship considering all the aspects of the content of faith.

When the Liturgy is considered from the religious ambient of popular devotions, it is observed that its integrity is affected by some lacunae. It is also experienced that the official Liturgy of the Church is not some times in tune with the religious sentiments of the people of a particular cultural context.[71] This is the reason why the Constitution instructs that the people should be sufficiently attuned with the signs, symbols and language of the liturgy. It says:

> But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.[72]

Considering the religious ambient of the popular devotions it is to be said that it is also the responsibility of the pastors to present the Liturgy taking into account the religious concerns of a local culture and its religious symbols. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, in its instruction on Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy, states that "the Church has no wish to impose rigid uniformity in matters that do not affect the faith or the good of the whole community".[73] In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* Pope John Paul II says, "Routine leads to

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[71] D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, "Liturgy Relevant to Life", *Word & Worship* (1973), 234.

[72] SC 8.

[73] CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRAMENTS, *Instruction: Inculturation and Roman Liturgy*, n. 1.

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stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis."[74] It speaks of the need of the constant renewal and animation of Liturgy so that it may help the people to grow into the mystery of Christ through its signs, symbols and prayers.

5.3.3. Effective Pastoral Care

In the 29th General Body Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India which was participated by 157 bishops, a survey report from the Catholic youth was presented. In it the youth from various parts of India expressed their dissatisfaction about the language, usages and the priority of values of the Church although they respected and valued the Catholic faith tradition.[75] The profound Catholic religious consciousness of the Church taking into account the discoveries of the positive sciences, and the integral faith expressions of the teaching authority of the Church are not reached at the lowest levels of the faithful. The Sunday homilies and those in the centers of popular devotions remain in the periphery of the Christian faith either due to the ignorance of the preachers or to maintain the simple faith of the people with economic and ego centric motives.

When the secular powers, either in markets or in politics, have careful planning and effective articulation of their plans with an extraordinary dynamism, the soldiers of the Church are lagging behind either because of their lack of maturity in Christian faith or because of the fact of being secularized. The religious ambient of popular devotions can be said to be a unique place where the Church encounters people with some religious sentiments in spite of the mounting secularism and atheism in Kerala. An effective pastoral care is the urgent need of the hour to help these people to grow in faith and discover the true meaning and significance of Christian life that will powerfully challenge the false presumptions of secularism and atheism. Since 'pastoral care' comprises various pastoral activities of the Church, for our convenience, we limit ourselves to the preaching ministry of the Church.

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[74] CT 17.

[75] A. D'SOUZA, "Youth: For Peace and Integrity", in *Eranakulam Mission* 80, 4 (2010), 165.

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When we look into the pastoral history of the Church we can know that the Catholic popular devotions, with their remarkable pastoral realism and zeal, have made the people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism.[76] The pastoral charity demands the pastors that they should use these popular devotions to orient the people for a true encounter with God in and through Jesus Christ.[77] Pope Benedict XVI says, "The faithful should be able to perceive clearly that the preacher has a compelling desire to present Christ, who must stand at the centre of every homily."[78] The Gospel of Christ, which has always the characteristics of the 'already' and the 'not yet' dimensions of the faith life, must be the measure against which all the expressions of Christian piety must be evaluated.[79]

The person of Jesus Christ is the center of the worship of Catholic Church whom she wants to witness and proclaim by word and deed.[80] Therefore the pastors are called to respond to the "particular expressions of the search for God and for faith",[81] which often air the sigh and cry of the people 'who labor and are heavy laden', by presenting to them the life of Jesus. Jesus is the way of human life designed by God,[82] so that all may walk on his way and be saved. Jesus reveals in himself the fullness of human life in perfect freedom which is the outcome of the possession of truth.[83] To all those who gathered unto him challenged by bodily and mental deformities Jesus said: "Learn from me".[84] Although he was also haunted by the same existential problems of human life, yet he was meek and humble of heart and did a positive, liberative and curative human service.[85]

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[76] EN 48.
[77] EN 48.
[78] BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Apostolic Exhortation, 30 September 2010: *AAS* 102 (2010), n. 59. [Hereafter referred to as VD]
[79] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Catholic Popular Devotions in Kerala. A Pastoral Challenge", in *Mission Today* 13, 3 (2011), 280.
[80] JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, 7 December 1990: *AAS* 83 (1991), n. 4.
[81] EN 48.
[82] BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Encyclical Letter, 30 November 2007: *AAS* 99 (2007), n. 6.
[83] VD 2.
[84] Matthew 11, 29.
[85] J. VAZHAKOOTTATHIL, "Catholic Popular Devotions in Kerala. A Pastoral Challenge", in *Mission Today* 13, 3 (2011), 280.

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In his Motu Proprio *Porta Fidei* Pope Benedict XVI makes it clear that the faith cannot be taken for granted, that it should be constantly maintained and deepened.[86] Like in any natural growth of a living being, every morning should witness some novelty, some new horizon of faith in a person to be sure that faith is a living reality in a person. Even the maintenance of faith without a constant growth has a risk of an eventual death. This is the reason why Pope declared an Year of Faith to rediscover the life giving power and the beauty of faith.[87] The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod of bishops in their XIII Ordinary General Assembly speaks about the various sectors where there is an urgent need of new evangelization. Speaking about the religious sector it expresses its concern over the religious ambient where they "exercise an emotional and psychological dominance and promote a religion promising prosperity and success in life".[88]

In the religious ambient of popular devotions in Kerala it can be observed that there is a healthy conglomeration of the religious attitudes of Buddhism and Hinduism. The great pilgrim centre of South India, Sabarimala, ratifies this observation. There is a mixing up of the religiosity of rites and rituals and that of the personal discipline. To a group of simple people who are ready to do any kind of sacrifices in the external forum with an ardent desire to obtain their immediate necessities, the Church can gently promote and encourage the sacrifices in the internal forum of the faithful without cancelling the existing ritual and sentimental equilibrium in the religious ambient of the catholic popular devotions.

Jesus wants to cure and free the humanity from within. This is the reason why he became man. If the salvation of humanity was a reality coming to humanity from outside, it was enough for God to command it. He became man so that man may be transformed into him and be saved. Therefore he

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[86] BENEDICT XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Motu Proprio (11 October 2011), n. 2. In CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith, with the Attachment, Motu Proprio Porta Fidei*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2012. [Hereafter referred to as PF]

[87] PF 4.

[88] SYNOD OF BISHOPS XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *The Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Instrumentum Laboris, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2012, nn. 63-66.

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proposed a shift from the outward practice of worship to an internal one: a shift from the cult of sin offering to forgiveness; a shift from the cult of peace offering to the practice of justice; a shift from offering of thanks with lips and cult to the life of mercy; a shift from law to love; a shift from sacrifices of animals to the sacrifice of the self; a shift from worldly exodus of ego and senses to the exodus of the spirit; a shift from word to flesh; a shift from old man who evades the personal responsibility to the new man who takes up even the negative responsibility of the other; a shift from institution to person; a shift from a mob searching bread to disciples searching words of eternal life; a shift from cultic priesthood to the priesthood of all believers; a shift from worship here and there to worship in spirit and truth; a shift from the contemplation of human weaknesses to the contemplation of positive human possibilities; a shift from the blessing of God interpreted as worldly prosperity and happiness to the blessing of God as a spiritual attitude and joy.

5.4. CONCLUSION

The religious ambient of popular devotions is a fertile field where there occur a radical encounter between the academic reading of theology and the theology of the common people, an encounter between conceptual theology and the theology of the context. It is the unique ambient where the Church encounters the people with the docility to the Holy Spirit, who are open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is an ambient where there is an integrity in the surrender of human will to God and the consequent heroic human service. In Kerala, the Catholic popular religious ambient is an inter-religious ambient where there is a celebration of religious sentiments in an inter-religious way. Like any other human ambient it is not free of human limitations. It demonstrates problems of growth in various ways either in the realm of religious consciousness or in the realm of religious aspirations. It is also a reality that some are fishing out of this troubled water. Looking ahead, it can be said that considering the growth of the human communities in the secular spheres, the Church should concentrate into the sharing of Christian faith in a more profound way and help the faithful to be responsible adult Christians.

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GENERAL CONCLUSION

A partial study on the missionary challenges of the Catholic popular devotions brings down our theological reflections from the ideological heights to the concrete daily living of Christianity. It reveals the drastic difference between the Christianity of too much abstract concepts and the Christianity that is practiced. It calls for an ongoing kenosis of the ideological heights of Christianity to respond creatively to the concrete and real Christian life of the people with a view to bring them up to the freedom and joy of Jesus Christ. The study reveals how the Church was sensitive to the popular devotions in the history and how with pastoral charity she tried to catechize the people to make them grow to the Christian maturity. When she observes some limitations that are present in the ambient of popular devotions and the lack of integrity in the celebration of Christian faith, she cannot but be a zealous missionary even to her own children. She must be keen to address the religious ambient of popular devotions with an updated theology and Liturgy to make sure the growth of each faithful to the Christian perfection by word and deed.

Catholic popular devotions emerged in the history of Christian worship either because of the Church's effort to address a people of different culture or because of the people's spontaneous effort to express their religiosity which the official Liturgical worship could not represent. An analysis of the biblical tradition of worship reveals that there existed popular religious sentiments and their expressions side by side with the original Hebraic tradition of worship. It occurred mainly due to their confrontation with other cultures and also because of the changes in their life styles. However, we observe in the Bible that both sentimentalism and ritualism in worship were condemned by the prophets.

The liturgical tradition of the Church witnessed the presence of the popular religiosity from the beginning of its existence and the Liturgy and popular piety complemented each other in helping the people to grow in their faith life. It can be said that the popular religiosity is the basis of all the worship

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patterns, and the theology is their systematization in the course of time in favor of an integrity and unity. The history of the Church witnesses that whenever the institutional prayer patterns became inadequate to express the aspirations of the religious sentiments of the faithful, the popular devotions, 'the liturgy of the people', consoled and encouraged them to follow Jesus taking up their daily cross and prepared them for a heroic Christian service. Although the Church always appreciated the popular piety, yet when their exaggerated expressions overshadowed the integrity of Christian mysteries, she began to instruct that Liturgy is superior to the popular piety.

A theological reflection on the Catholic popular devotions make us clear that they reflect the basic religious consciousness of the faithful in general. The religious consciousness of the faithful is influenced by the social, cultural, political, economic, historical and geographical dimensions of a human community. Even the people of same culture in a space and time vary in their degree of religious consciousness due to the basic natural diversity and the unequal standard of living which is resulted from the unjust social structure. Therefore, although God's self communication is given to all equally, the human response always vary from time to time and place to place. The popular devotions express the ongoing dynamism of the religious consciousness with its ups and downs which is conditioned by various human realities in a space and time. They represent the response of the faithful based on the practical application of the self communication of God in a time and place. A theology to be integral and relevant for the present day and to the context, it must consider the religious sentiments that are expressed in the religious ambient of popular devotions.

That all the baptized are to be transformed into Christ is the pastoral project of the Church. Jesus is the way of human life designed by God. Therefore, all the endeavors of the pastoral ministry of the Church are oriented to help the people to grow into Christ and thus become adult Christians. However, although Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father in heaven, yet his way is so large that it can contain the diversity of individual faith responses. Jesus' merciful attitude to the poor and the week instructs the Church constantly on how she has to address the faithful who are in the process of growth.

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Therefore, although the Church envisions a 'thoughtful' and an 'enlightened' faith for every baptized Christian, yet it must respect the simple expressions of faith waiting for the work of God in the faithful, giving them integral pastoral assistance.

The popular devotion often expresses the religion of the people of the lowest strata. The very reality that there are people of the lowest strata in the Church, justifies the existence of the popular expressions of Christian faith. Since the revelation is mediated also by the concrete life of the people, a theology to be true Christian theology, must be rooted in the 'religion of the people'. The religious ambient of popular devotions prove that a healthy symbiosis of the Liturgy and the religious sentiments that are expressed through the cultural signs in the popular devotions of a particular context provide an integral form of Christian worship for the faithful of that context. There must be an ongoing renewal of the Liturgy making it more near to the total human person, rather than an ideological celebration, so that it may be intelligible and credible for the new generation. The limitation and the stagnancy of the theology and the Liturgy which is conditioned by space and time is overcome by making an ongoing study on the popular expressions of Catholic faith and consequent renewal.

History of the religions shows how Kerala was a cradle of all the world religions from the time of their origin and how the people of Kerala have witnessed their ups and downs in the course of history. When the confrontation of various religions created great tension and bloodshed in various other parts of India, the people of Kerala lived as brothers and sisters although they were strict followers of their respective religions. A search for an underlying principle of unity which kept them together in spite of the religious and cultural diversity in Kerala will take us to the popular religious ambient which existed there before the entrance of the various religions. This popular religious ambient promoted a culture of humanism which was based on the principles of equality, freedom and justice. Although this humanistic culture was destroyed by the socio-political order of Vedic Hinduism, the popular religious ambient in Kerala celebrates these

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basic principles of humanism in a religious way going beyond the religious and cultural barriers.

Centers of Catholic popular devotions in Kerala is a meeting point of Kerala's popular religiosity and the Catholic Christian faith. In these centers the prayer service is accompanied by some popular songs and prayers which carry the religious sentiments of the people who gather there. Also, some common religious symbols of the popular culture in Kerala are used in a Catholic way to satisfy the religious needs of the people. All these attract believers from all the religions to these centers of Catholic popular devotions. Thus the centers of Catholic popular devotions provides a religious ambient in Kerala where the Church can share her faith to the brothers and sisters of other religions. This reality calls for an integral proclamation of the Christian faith on the one hand, and gives some impulses to the Church to update her mission methodology, on the other.

The devotees who gathers around the centers of popular devotions in Kerala carry the burdens of their daily life. They are restless either because of the existential problems of poverty, sickness and unemployment or because of the heights of ambitions that are imposed by the globalized markets. They are in search of some representatives of God who can sympathize with them and guide them with some concrete solutions. They see in the various expressions of the humanity of Jesus, in Mary and saints and in the poor people who gather around the centers of popular devotions someone who suffer with them, who can understand their sufferings. They are in search of justice and equality at least in a religious way. Here the official representatives of the Church must cure and console the people with the pastoral attitudes of compassion and simplicity of life.

Pastoral charity impels the Church in Kerala to address the religious ambient of popular devotions through an effective pastoral care especially in a mounting socio-political context of secularism and atheism. Although the level of popular religious consciousness among the Catholics in Kerala has promoted the devotees for heroic ecclesiastical and human service in Kerala and in various parts of India and abroad, the diminishing number of

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vocations to priesthood and religious life calls for a profound study and communication of the mystery of Christ in its integrity. The people who are eager to perform rites and sacrifices, who are ready to take up the tiring and hard bodily disciplines to obtain their necessities are to be invited for an internal discipline and sacrifice so that they may improve their life standards and be able to worship God in spirit and truth. The saints are to be introduced as the manifestations of the spirit of Jesus in the course of history. The catechesis is to be accompanied by witnessing to a radical living of an integral Christianity. Thus they may share in this world itself the religious experience of their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, in spite of being surrounded by all the human frailties.

Popular devotions in Kerala provides an ambient of worship for the believers beyond the structural limitations. The fact that the believers of all the religions gather together in the centers of popular devotions in Kerala, is a call for the transformation of the liturgical and the institutional structures with a missionary motive. At the same time care must be taken to make sure that the brothers and sisters of other religions receive the original Christian message in its integrity. The Church has a golden opportunity, in the religious ambient of popular devotions, to facilitate a dialogue of life in an interreligious way based on Gospel values.

The centers of popular devotions in Kerala are the religious ambient where the lay people fulfill their apostolate and missionary vocation. These centers continue to remain popular only because of the effective lay collaboration for the conduct of the spiritual service. The pious associations in Kerala reveal how the popular devotions are efficacious to convert the faithful into zealous missionaries. Lot of boys and girls, filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, find time to serve the Church and humanity in various ways through the initiatives of the pious associations. Thus, the religious ambient of popular devotions gives the official Church an opportunity to encourage the lay initiatives in the Church and the laity in turn receives an occasion to collaborate with the Church as adult responsible Christians.

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The commercial attitude of some people in this religious ambient scandalizes the thinking men and women in Kerala and as a consequence atheism and secularism receive lot of appeal. To exploit the simple faith of the people with a material motive is contrary to the Christian values and give deep pain to the body of Jesus, the Church.

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THE CATHOLIC POPULAR DEVOTIONS IN KERALA

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Dr. John Vazhakoottathil OCD

This work is an attempt to investigate into the social, cultural, religious, political and pastoral context of the Catholic popular devotions in the Church in Kerala with a view to discover how Church can exercise her evangelizing mission in this context, how these devotions can be effectively used as instruments of catechesis and how the ambient of popular devotions can be converted into that of dialogue with people of other faiths. It is also a search to see how much the popular devotions can be a help to promote an attitude of contemplation which is already present in the other religious traditions in India.

The study is limited to the Catholic popular devotions in Kerala although a quick look is made into the general picture of the popular devotions especially that of popular Hinduism. Since its major concern is pastoral, the cultural, social and anthropological dimensions of the popular devotions are not studied in much detail. The study uses mainly the works of the Indian theologians for the development of the theme although some Church documents and other theologians in general are referred to.

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