

WORLD OF SPIRITS

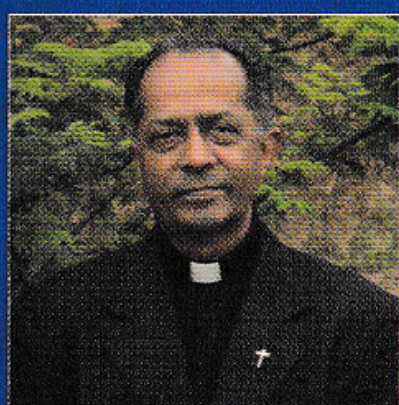
Dr. Michael Karimattam



Translated by Sr. Glorista Arackal SABS

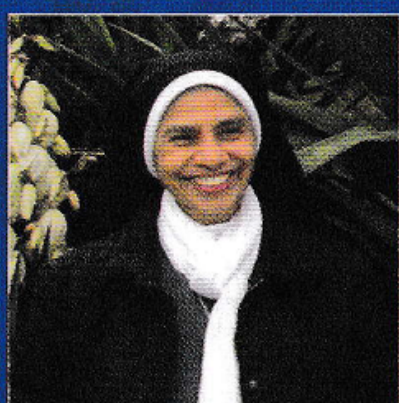
WORLD OF SPIRITS

What happens after death? Is conversion possible after death? Why did Jesus descend into Sheol? Will the souls of the dead roam around and possess people? Will children be punished by God for the sins of their parents and ancestors? Can one atone for the sins of previous generations? If yes, how? Angels and demons - are they real or just the creation of human imagination? What are the evil spirits that possess people? Are they real spiritual beings or the unconscious mind taking control of the person? Who is Satan? What does Satan do? This book tries to give an answer to these and several other similar questions in the light of the Bible and the official teachings of the Catholic Church. It will be an excellent guide in matters of Catholic faith concerning life after death and the world of spirits.



Dr. Michael Karimattam

A Catholic priest, of the Archdiocese of Tellicherry, Kerala, India, Born 1942; Ordained 1968; holds Licentiate in Theology from Pontifical Urban University and Doctorate in Sacred Scripture from Pont. Biblical Institute, Rome. Worked as one of the three chief editors of the POC Malayalam Bible; 15 years as director, Bible Apostolate, Tellicherry and 4 years as principal of Divine Bible college, Muringoor. Since 2002 teaching scripture at the Marymatha Major Seminary, Trichur.



Sr. Glorista Arackal SABS

Sr. Glorista Arackal belongs to the Tellicherry Province of the SABS Congregation. Studied in USA and obtained BA in English; MA in History, and Counselling; did Clinical Pasotral Education (CPE) up to Supervisory level and thereafter worked 8 years in a parish in USA. After returning to India, worked 15 years at the Bible Apostolate in Tellicherry, following which 5 years in Italy and then 7 years in the Generalate of the SABS congregation. At present is engaged in translation for the purpose of the congregation.

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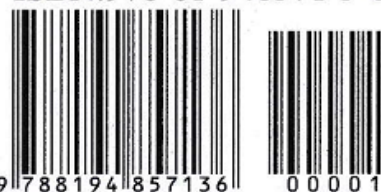
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Bible Studies

WORLD OF SPIRITS

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Dr. Michael Karimattam



atmabooks@gmail.com

English

World of Spirits

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REVIEW OF THE ENGLISH EDITION

Ann Marie Lee

(Ms. Ann Marie Lee holds a Master in Social Work, MSW, LSW and California teaching credential. She has worked as both a Social Worker in various fields and classroom teacher. She has also been a grateful volunteer and supporter of Divine Retreat ministries since 2003 using her services as teacher, preacher and singer for the ministry in both India and USA.)

The World of Spirits helped me to see how unstable and “tossed to and fro...by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14) is the Christian without the rock foundation of Catholic teaching. Fr. Michael Karimattam expounds, explains and reveals Biblical and doctrinal truths about the soul, the afterlife, the devil, hell and heaven. Recently, I was telling one of my Catholic friends here in New Jersey, USA about how some people in India believe that the soul of the disturbed dead person can wander around and enter/possess a person. I was shocked when she said that she believed that too!! Such false understanding about the life of the soul exists everywhere! I advise those who desire to protect their Faith from popular, but incorrect beliefs about these matters to study this book!

The first section covered is about the eternal life of the soul after death. The Bible and the Catholic Church have given clear and complete teachings about the soul after death. This is not left up to our imaginations nor to popular belief! The author presents these teachings for us in this section and explains them thoroughly. An excellent resource for teaching! Biblical citations are even given about the existence and purpose of Purgatory. Although it is unpopular in Western culture to talk about the existence of Hell, Biblical passages refer to it and even Jesus frequently warned us of its reality. The origin of the concept of Hell and its etymology are given which is very interesting and provides the reader with an educated understanding of this most distasteful location as a permanent place of residence!

The last judgment of each individual soul will take place for each one of us. Thus we are made aware that the choices we make today will shape our eternal placement - heaven/purgatory or hell. Once again, Fr. Karimattam corrects the wrong ideas and false beliefs. He explains why souls do not roam around after death and thus cannot enter another person to possess or bother them. One cannot preach to souls after death in order to convert and save them-it is too late for this. The living are not punished for the sins of their ancestors, thus there is no need for *Ancestral Bondage Deliverance* retreats! The visit of Jesus to the Netherworld/Hell is explained; there have been many misunderstandings about this event! Father Michael makes appropriate use of the Apocryphal books to assist in the understanding and explanation of these truths.

The second section takes up the mysteries of angels and devils and Satan. This educated presentation is, once again, full of Biblical citations and Church teaching. From the Old Testament through the New Testament the appearance, identity and function of the angels is explained. The fantasies about angels and their depiction in drawings gives way to the very concrete reality of

these mysterious beings and their function in the heavenly court as well as in human life. Though they do not have bodies, the angels and devils are real and impact our human lives for the good or evil. It is very helpful to have the author guiding us through this section. Both the Old and New Testament are carefully cited about the existence of evil and how it is in operation against human salvation. We learn that pictures of demons came from the human/animal “gods” of other ancient cultures considered to be demons by the Hebrews.

Satan is explained; we must know the enemy to avoid him. Once again, Fr. Karimattam provides us with the research about this enemy of our salvation and the problem of evil. The origin of the name of Satan and various other names which refer to him are something which was new to me. Since our Western society hardly believes in hell it also gives very little importance to knowing about Satan. There is a long explanation about his different names: *man of Anarchy, Belial, diablos, Beelzebul, Mammon* and more! A very important aspect of this section is that it covers the activities of Satan and promotes awareness of being tempted. Fr. Karimattam explains how the temptation to do evil does not appear as evil. Jesus’ and the Apostles’ struggles with temptations are presented so that we can see evil is real and personal to each one of us.

Finally, a section is included which handles issues related to Christians and non-Christian relations in India. Aspects of Hindu worship may be cultural and not actually a part of worshipping a god which would compromise a Christian’s participation in certain activities. It is explained here how to differentiate between actual activities which would be harmful to the faith of the Christian and those which are simply cultural practice. A Christian visiting India

for the first time who is not familiar with the culture and Hindu worship should be aware of what they are doing if they are invited to participate in banquets, weddings or even a puja where a god may be worshipped. Even Christians in the USA may encounter Native American rituals and rites which, if one participates, may compromise their Faith.

World of Spirits is a unique book for our times! In it one delves into the spiritual world under the guidance of the author who is a Master in Biblical studies and Catholic teachings as well as a dedicated priest who wishes to protect souls from harm.

THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

A Word of Thanks

After a break of seven long years, with deep gratitude, I am taking the pen in my hand for writing a book. Due to certain reasons I was forced to stop writing in 1997. I did not know if I would ever be able to resume writing. But the Lord guided me through various ways and now an opportunity has come for me to resume the writing. Only with a grateful heart I can think those unique experiences.

In the midst of carrying out the responsibility as the director of the Divine Bible College, I was submitted to emergency surgery due to a blood clot in my head. After the surgery, the Doctor said to me, “You had a miraculous healing and you are thoroughly brain washed.” (In fact he meant that he had to wash out the clot from the brain). When I was rushed into the operation theater in the Heart Hospital in Trichur, my condition was so precarious that anything could happen to me. Dr. George Kovoov, the Neurosurgeon, was not sure if I would survive the operation and even if I did survive whether I would regain mobility and memory. But, the Lord preserved me intact.

After four weeks, again I had bleeding in my head and on 20 June 2000, I almost died and then returned to life. My sister and nephew and some close friends who were with me at the

time, still have tears in their eyes when they talk about those moments. How wonderful are His ways! I am surprised that after two years of break, I am able to get involved in the ministry of the Word.

It is providential that I am picking up the pen after seven years to write about spirits. I had almost died and then the prayers of many brought me back to life. How can I thank the Lord for the second chance I am given! (Ps 116, 12). The content of this book is not the visions I had at the moment of near death experience. However, I still remember one thing. At a certain moment I felt I was somehow getting out of the body. I saw a vague human form like a shadow in the midst of light, and heard a sweet, soft voice, telling me “You are Welcome Home”! I do not know where the sound came from, whether from outside or from my inside. I have no words to describe the peace and tranquility I experienced at the moment, immense joy and satisfaction of going “home” after years of imprisonment! Later I was told that they all had thought that I was gone, and it was after about three hours that I opened my eyes.

But, slowly I came to the realization that the plan of God had not been completed in me. This book is part of that awareness. Recently there have been many developments, in particular regarding the departed souls that have been disturbing the faithful of our Church. I was thinking of writing an article about it but it ended up being a book. This will not have the dynamics of personal experience or result of extensive research. This is a humble attempt to explain certain things in the light of the Bible and the teachings of the Church.

I remember with gratitude all those who helped in the process of writing this book. First of all I express my gratitude to Almighty

God for guiding me back to active life and ministry. Deciphering my handwriting and suggesting the necessary corrections, the press copy of the Malayalam edition was prepared by Sr. Glorista SABS. She encouraged me and supported me to start writing again. Now it is the same Sr. Glorista who did the English translation as well. Rev. Dr. Cyprian Illickamury OFM Cap has written a review, of the Malayalam edition, highlighting the importance of the theme. MSs. Ann Marie Lee has checked the translation and suggested necessary corrections. She has written also an illuminating review of the book. It is Fr. Jibin OFM Cap, the director of Atma Books, Calicut, that has requested me and then took charge of publishing this English edition. I am deeply grateful to all these friends. I am happy and thankful if I succeeded to shed some light into the world of the spirits that is normally filled with confusion and lack of clarity. I hope this humble attempt will help the readers to encounter the world of the spirits with some certitude and face life and death without undue fear.

REVIEW

Malayalam Edition

The World of the Spirits, In the Light of the Bible by Rev. Dr. Michael Karimattam is not only relevant today but also essential in today's situation because this book handles the issues that are causing much confusion and misunderstanding among the Kerala Christians. A lot of stories, imaginations about the souls of the dead, the devils, and lost souls, are spreading among the people and even people with deep faith appear to be confused and perplexed over these issues. Many are aware of the fact that some publications and prayer centers take initiative in spreading these misunderstandings. When these people quote Bible verses to support their ideas, not only nominal Christians but also people who have received some theological training become confused.

Although many parts of the Bible are simple and give the message of salvation clearly, there are many things in the Bible that are difficult to understand without the help of Bible Scholars. The main reason for this confusion is that the books of the Bible were written in about one thousand years namely from B.C. 1000 to A.D. 100. The knowledge and situation of the people during the time the Bible was written were quite different than they are today. The people of the time did not have the scientific knowledge we have today. Hence it is difficult to understand the relevance of many facts written at that time.

Bible is the Word of God written by inspired human beings. As it was written by human persons, it would reflect the peculiarities and limitations of the people of the time. We have to distinguish between the divine and the human elements in the Bible; the message of eternal salvation has to be distinguished from the literary forms used. We cannot properly understand or interpret the Bible ignoring the various literary methods such as text criticism, forms criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, narrative criticism etc., Unfortunately, without any knowledge of these facts, some try to teach Bible authoritatively explaining many complicated issues according to their own imagination and experience.

It is in this situation that Rev. Dr. Michael Karimattam, deals with the spirits of the dead, Satan, and lost souls in the light of the teaching of the Bible, Church documents and the Catholic church's official teachings. Some lay people and even some pastors seem to claim that they can exorcise the spirits of the dead that possess some people and torment them. Apparently they are convinced that the souls of the dead are roaming around seeking salvation. Even some Christian preachers and councilors appear to believe that they can bring back the souls of the dead and make them reveal some secrets. We have heard stories that the souls of the dead appeared to some people and asked them to pray for them. They spread such rumors basing on certain Scriptural passage, such as 1Sam 28, 3-25.

The author who is a Bible scholar has analyzed those Bible texts and asserts that the souls of the dead never come back to the earth, wander around the world or possess some living persons and torment them. By the influence of some other religions, some people believe in the superstition that the souls of the dead wander around. In a society where there is a fear about the souls of the

dead, the behavior of some mentally weak persons would give the impression that they are possessed by the soul of some dead person and imitate that person's behavior. The author advises that one should take into consideration the valuable insights provided by modern Psychology regarding such phenomena. Some sudden shock or stress experience could weaken the control of the conscious mind and the unconscious mind may take control of the behavior of the person, making the individual speak and act like the dead person and give the impression of being possessed by his spirit. Psychology has proven that such persons could be brought to an understanding of the reality through hypnotism. Anyway, the souls of the dead would never come back and possess living persons. This book will bring some insights and consolation for many.

Another fact that creates a lot of confusion is the teaching that the souls of the dead people who during their life time did not know Jesus or even after knowing Jesus did not believe in him, are roaming around, seeking salvation, and they could be converted through evangelization and we have to save them. Some publications and retreat centers try to prove this theory and support it by quoting certain Bible passages. The author demonstrates that they misunderstand and misinterpret those Bible passages in order to support this erroneous teaching. By using other Bible passages, the author proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that one's destiny is decided with death and there is no change in the state of the soul after death. A conversion is impossible after death and so the repentance of a person who died with mortal sin is absolutely impossible.

Some retreat centers frighten the people saying certain illnesses and misfortunes are caused by the sins of their ancestors.

Such a teaching was common during the Old Testament times as well as the New Testament times. Some go one step further and teach that the cause of the suffering is that the souls of the ancestors are tormenting them. To remedy these misfortunes, a lot of prayers and severe penances are suggested. Many are disturbed by these teachings. The author clearly explains what kind of responsibility people have for the sins of their ancestors and how atonement can be performed for those sins. He also explains what structural sin is and how it can be dealt with.

All would agree that this book, “The World of Spirits in the Light of the Bible” reflects a profound knowledge of the Bible and of the teachings of the Catholic of the Church. A lot of ideas against the teachings of the Bible and of the Church are spreading rapidly, creating misunderstanding and confusion among the faithful. At a time when nobody had come forward to answer such questions of the faithful, it is only providential that Rev. Dr. Michael Karimattam, a well-known Bible Scholar, took the initiative to respond to these issues. This book is both a blessing and the need of our time. It contains many teachings that should be studied not only by the ordinary Christians but also by priests, pastors, retreat preachers, Catechism teachers and all those who deal with Faith issues. I conclude congratulating the author, with the hope that this book will get a wide circulation and many would profit from the insights and teachings it provides.

Rev. Dr. Cyprian Illickamury, OFM, Cap.

INTRODUCTION

“I believe in one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God...”

This is the beginning of the Creed of the Council of Nicaea, proclaimed in 325 A.D. The creation includes not only that which is visible but also all that is invisible to our naked eyes. This is one of the fundamental facts of the Catholic faith. There are some who claim that they only believe the things that are subject to the senses. Experience proves that this is a senseless claim.

Though the atmosphere is filled with the melodies of Radio and T.V., if we do not have the instruments to catch the waves and present them as sounds and pictures, we can neither see nor hear them. Those who are deaf cannot experience sound and the blind cannot understand light. There are truths that are beyond the reach of the five senses. The universe is millions of times greater than what we are able to see and hear.

The spirits are part of the invisible universe. Human souls, angels and evil spirits belong to this group and have been a subject of attraction to people for centuries. Today, the souls of the dead and evil spirits have become the center of attraction for many.

What happens after death is a question that has always

concerned humanity. Various answers are given to this question. Some claim that everything will be over at death and the body will dissolve in the earth. The breath of our life will join the air and the person will cease to exist. But, the majority of people believe that the human soul would continue to exist in some way. Some people believe that the dead go into eternal sleep while, on the other hand, many believe that souls after the death of the body will experience either joy or pain.

Many of the Hindus believe that those who did wrong while living on the earth would make atonement for their sins through their rebirths. There are many who believe that the souls of those who encountered sudden death by accident and those who were not buried properly will come back to torment people. Another popular conviction is that the souls that do not go to heaven become devils and wander around hurting human beings.

There are different opinions and beliefs about life after death as well as the various misfortunes people suffer. Some families continuously suffer from some serious illness, physical and mental handicaps, financial losses, accidents and untimely deaths. Those who seek the causes of these problems often end up believing that the cause is the possession of evil spirits or the sins of their ancestors. They think that they can become free of these sufferings if they perform penance for the sins of the ancestors or exorcise these evil spirits. In our country, India, there are a lot of superstitions and stories about possessions by evil spirits.

Besides these problems that affect all people, Christians are facing another faith problem. It deals with participating in the celebrations, festivals and banquets organized by non-Christians. Many are disturbed by the use of a spot on the forehead, usually with sandal wood paste either white or red, or some other mark

as a beauty spot, lighting the lamp made in the typical Hindu fashion, consuming the food from the temple etc. Recently, some have started to spread rumors about disastrous consequences of these practices among the Christians and that is creating, much confusion and disturbance among the people. Hence, it is important that we clarify the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning these issues. This book is a humble attempt to deal with these problems.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the issues related to the life after death. First, the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding life after death is presented. It is followed by certain misunderstandings that have been developed recently, and an attempt is made to point out the misconceptions and their sources. Then, the possibility of the conversion of a person after his death is discussed. After dealing with the sins of the ancestors and their punishment, the abode of the dead, the netherworld, Hell, Jesus visiting Hell, the proclamation of Jesus to the souls in captivity and so on are discussed in detail. Some of the matters present in the Apocryphal writings would help us to understand the matters presented in the Bible and so those too will be discussed.

The second part deals with the theme Angels and demons. There is a variety of opinions concerning this theme not only among common people but also among scholars. There are many who categorically deny the existence of both. Among those who admit the existence of angels and demons, there is no unanimity of understanding about their origin, nature, works and motivations. There is more misunderstanding and false interpretations concerning devil and demons rather than angels. There is also confusion about the terms Satan, Devil, Demon, Evil Spirit etc.

These topics are studied in the second part, in the light of the teaching of the Bible and of the Catholic Church.

The third part, under the title of “Lampstand and Oblation from Temples” discusses the approach one needs to adopt while dealing with the religious practices and observances of people of other religions. In the process of evangelization, it is important to engage in dialogue with the local culture and practices. Through such contacts and relationships the Gospel will take root in that culture. In fact, it is a continuation of the Incarnation of the word of God.

When the eternal Word became flesh and was born as a human being He set aside his Divine glory and accepted all the limitations of a human being. At the same time, the Divinity of Jesus raised humanity to a divine level. Thus, all received the opportunity and ability to become the children of God. Similarly, during the process of evangelization, the Gospel takes root in the culture and transforms it into Christian culture. In this transformation, without changing the essence of the Gospel values, some external changes are accepted. By accepting the positive qualities and values of other cultures, the Good News is enriched. This give and take process of the Church is called enculturation.

All through the history of the Bible we can see the process of such dialogue and enculturation. After discussing these universal phenomena, attention is directed to some problems Christians encounter in our society. Certain practical guide lines are put forward after analyzing certain relevant issues presented in the epistles of St. Paul. With that, the third part is concluded.

Today some of the faith issues of the Catholic Church are being questioned and misinterpreted. An attempt is made in this book to deal with those issues in the light of the Bible and official

teaching of the Catholic Church. In order to help ordinary people to understand these things, a simple but comprehensive approach is taken while presenting the material. I would be grateful if this book helps people to have a real understanding of their faith and respond to at least certain fundamental questions they might have in their mind as well as those presented to them by those who oppose the Catholic Church and faith.

PART - I

THE SOULS OF THE DEAD

What happens to the soul after death is a question to which various answers have been given down the centuries; also today we find many such answers. Basing on their faith, vision of life and experience, people form and hold various opinions and attitudes about life after death. In this first part, an attempt is made to present the teaching of the Bible and of the Catholic Church, regarding the life of the soul after death. Some of the new teachings and practices that have emerged recently will be analyzed in the light of the teaching of the Bible.

1

DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope” (1Thes 4,13).

The message St. Paul gave to the Thessalonians who were grieving over the dead is relevant at all times. Paul calls the dead as “those who are sleep” in the letter, quoted above. The Bible and the Catholic Church have given certain clear teachings about death and life after death. A brief presentation of the same is being made in this chapter.

DEATH - the Result of Sin

God did not want man to die. He was created to live. Starting with the third chapter of the Bible, we see that human beings went against God's plan and His commandment, an action that caused death to come to humanity.

When God created man and woman in His own image, there was no seed of death in them. However, they were warned about the danger of losing their eternal life: “And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you

shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2, 16-17). By breaking the command given by God, man lost the divine, eternal, life in him. With that, he became subject also to physical death. God said to him, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3, 19). “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever . . . therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, . . . He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3, 22-24).

The book of Wisdom presents the cause of death.: “God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it” (Wis 2, 23-24). St. Paul gives the same teaching when he writes: “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (Rom 5, 12). He repeats it again by saying, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6, 23). If death was caused by sin, one can become free of death only by overcoming sin and the way to overcome sin was revealed to humanity gradually.

Emptiness after Death

During the early part of the Bible, we see nothing about the life after death. For a long time people believed that everything ended with death. It is a no return journey. At death man enters into darkness and becomes lost in eternal emptiness. They used to think, “The dead know nothing” (Eccl 9, 5). “Those who go down to *Sheol* do not come up” (Job 7, 9). “One wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten” (Job

13, 28). Man “flees like a shadow and does not last” (Job 14, 2). “But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they?” (Job 14, 10).

Even when people believed that with death everything ended and there would be no return, still we get the impression that people thought that there is some kind of existence that continues even after the physical death. Here we see the idea of eternal sleep in the sheol or netherworld (The concept of netherworld will be discussed later). The following statement gives a certain hint that there was a conviction that everything did not end with death. “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it” (Eccl 12, 7). “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl 12, 14).

Hope in Resurrection

Slowly, the faith arose that man would rise from the dead. A certain statement in the book of Job gives us a hint: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19, 25-26). “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise” (Is 26, 19). This part of the text in the book of Isaiah was written in apocalyptic style. The hope of resurrection is repeated by prophet Ezekiel through the image of dry bones putting on flesh and becoming living persons (Ez 37, 1-14). The vision primarily pointed to the restoration of Israel through the return of the exiled Israelites to Jerusalem. However, it gives a hint about the resurrection of the dead also.

By second century B.C., faith in the resurrection of the dead became stronger among the Israelites. This faith became more widespread and stronger during the time of the religious

persecution of the Jews by the Syrian King, Antiochus IV. The prophecy of Daniel: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12, 2) is a clear evidence of this belief. The courageous mother who encouraged and motivated all seven of her sons to sacrifice their lives was a strong advocate of faith in the resurrection. “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws” (2 Mc 7, 9). She told her sons, “I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws” (2 Mc 7, 22-23). The book of Wisdom was written in the first century B.C. and by then resurrection was a generally accepted truth. “The righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them” (Wis 5, 15-16).

During the New Testament times, the Pharisees believed in resurrection but the Sadducees did not believe in a life after death (Acts 23, 6-8). Resurrection of the dead was part of the teaching of Jesus: “This is indeed the will of my Father that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day” (Jn 6, 40). By giving life to the dead and through His own resurrection, Jesus confirmed this teaching.

The resurrection of the dead is part of the Creed of the

Catholics. St. Paul emphasizes that this is one of the fundamental teachings of our faith. He asserts: “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1 Cor 15, 13-14). The resurrection of the dead will take place only at the end of the world, (Mt 25, 31; 1 Cor 15, 20-58; 1 Thes 4, 16 etc.). “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thes 4, 14-16).

JUDGMENT

At the moment of death each person will be judged according to his/her life in this world . “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl 12, 14; Heb 4, 13). “It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment” (Heb 9, 27). “Judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment” (2 Jas 2, 13). The judgment that happens at the moment of death is called personal or particular judgment.

According to the teaching of the New Testament, besides the personal judgment, there will be a universal judgment at the end of the world and with that the good and the evil will be totally separated (Mt 13, 39-43.47050; 25, 31-46; Rev 20, 11-15). During the Last Judgment the personal judgment will be confirmed and proclaimed in public. There will be no change in the personal judgment that is pronounced at the moment of the individual's

death. This would mark the completion of history and establishment of a new age, the New Heaven and New Earth.

HEAVEN

Though the resurrection of the body will happen only at the end of the world, those who die in perfect union with God will enter heaven immediately. Those who have not sinned and those who have obtained absolution through real repentance and conversion are the ones who will enter heaven immediately after death. The promise Jesus made to the one crucified with him is a proof of this: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23, 43). Jesus taught about the Heaven through parables and through direct instructions. For example, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25, 34).

HELL

Those who have committed serious sins and have been cut off from divine life will receive eternal punishment. The words of Jesus addressed to the condemned points to the possibility of eternal damnation, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25, 41). They are cut off from God forever: “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers” (Mt 7, 23). Jesus taught about the eternal punishment through various parables such as being thrown out of the banquet hall, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 22, 13); denial of entry to the bridal chamber, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you” (Mt 25, 13); and being thrown into the furnace, “They will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 13, 42). The subject of hell shall be discussed in more detail later.

PURGATORY

Those who die without attaining perfect union with God will be sent to purgatory to prepare them for the entrance into heaven. There are many hints about this in the Bible. One of the important texts is given in the Book of Maccabees. “He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2Mac 12, 43-45).

There are various indications in the NT about the purification after one's death. “The one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating” (Lk 12, 48). The Evangelist Mathew talks about getting out after paying off the debt: “Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny” (Mt 5, 26). The remark about giving an account refers to a temporary purification after death: “On the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter” (Mt 12, 36). St. Paul's teaching to the Corinthians suggests a time bound purification, “If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3, 15).

The official teaching of the Catholic Church

The teachings of the primitive church about death and life after death are summarized in the Apostles' Creed: “He will come

to judge the living and the dead. . . . the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” Thereafter the Catholic Church has expressed its belief in a life after death through many official documents. For example, the document of the Council of Toledo in 675 A.D. states: “We profess that following the model of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, all people will have a resurrection and that will be not with any other body but with the very same body that they are living in at present”

The document of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 A.D. declared: “At the end of the world, Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. According to each one's activities one will be elected or rejected. Each one will be judged according to his/her actions and all will rise to receive reward or punishment in accordance with their deeds of good or evil. They will rise with the body they have now. Those who committed evil will go with Satan for eternal punishment and those who did good will receive heaven with Christ”.

The Council of Lyons in 1274 further clarified the teaching of the Church about the resurrection of the dead: “Each one will rise with the body they have. Those who fall into sin after receiving Baptism do not need to receive Baptism again. They can receive absolution of sins through real repentance. Even if a person dies in grace, if he/she not completely atoned for the sins of omission or commission, they will be sent to Purgatory to be purified. The faithful can help them through Holy Mass, prayers, alms giving and other pious exercises. Those who have committed no sin after Baptism and those who have been totally purified enter heaven immediately. Those who die with mortal sin or original sin will go to hell but they will receive different kinds of punishment. The Holy Catholic Church believes and teaches that at the last

judgment all will have to stand before Christ the Judge to give an account of their lives”.

Pope Benedict XII further clarified the teaching about the Church regarding the entrance into heaven of those who have been purified or lived without sin and the vision of God.

The Council of Florence in 1439 A.D, gives a detailed teaching about heaven and purgatory in the decree prepared as a document for Greeks: “Those who commit sin after Baptism, even if they have repented about their sins, after death, will go to purgatory if they have not done enough penance to purify themselves from the shortcomings committed by omission or commission. The faithful can help them in the process of purification through Holy Mass, prayers, acts of charity and other pious practices”.

The Council of Trent in 1563 repeated and confirmed the traditional teaching of the Church regarding life after death and Purgatory.

In 1964 the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church “*Lumen Gentium*” the teaching about life after death has been clearly presented with ample bible quotations and references.

To emphasize faith in the resurrection, the Church Fathers and Councils used the phrase “With the same body.” This was to affirm that it will be the same person who comes back to life. At death the body and soul separate. As the body decays in the soil, it loses the human personality. At the time of the Last Judgment the body and soul will re-unite and the person attain the perfection of human personality. The Church is declaring with its teaching authority something that is still beyond human comprehension.

The expression “with the same body” does not mean that a

person would come back to life with exactly the same present body with all its defects and characteristic marks. St. Paul explains this in his first letter to the Corinthians: “But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body... So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body (1Cor 15, 35-44). The body is not coming back in the same substance; it is renewed and transformed into a spiritual body through resurrection.

We have before us the resurrection of Jesus and His resurrected body as an example of what will happen with our body. The contemporary teaching of the Catholic Church about the resurrection of the body gives emphasis to this aspect of mystery. The Bible and the modern teaching of the Church regarding the transformation of the resurrected body is presented in connection with the renewal and transformation of the universe (Rom 8, 18-23; Rev. 21, 1-4).

The Vatican II Document, “Church in the Modern World”, published in 1965, has dealt with the concept of “New Heaven and New Earth” in a way that will be understandable and acceptable to the modern world:

“We do not know the moment of the consummation of the earth and of humanity (Acts 1,7) nor the way the universe will be transformed. The form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing

away (1 Cor 7, 31) and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor 5, 2; 2 Pt 3, 13) whose happiness will fulfill and surpass all the desires of peace arising in human hearts” (1 Cor 2, 9; Rev. 2, 4-5). “Then death will have been conquered, the daughters and sons of God will be raised in Christ and what was sown in weakness and dishonor will become incorruptible”; (1 Cor 15, 42). “Charity and its works will remain” (1 Cor 13, 8-14) and “All of creation, which God made for humanity, will be set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom 8, 19-21).

“We have been warned, of course, that it profits us nothing if we gain the whole world and lose or forfeit ourselves. Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectation of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society.

“When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise - human dignity, sisterly and brotherly communion, and freedom - according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom “of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.” Here on earth the kingdom is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection” (Church in the Modern World, § 39).

“The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith” has reasserted the traditional teaching about life after death in a

document that was promulgated on 17 May 1979 with the approval of Pope John Paul II. The following are certain relevant excerpts from that document.

1. The Church believes in the resurrection of the dead.
2. The Church understands that this resurrection deals with the full personality of the person. For the chosen, it will be partaking in the resurrection of Christ.
3. After the death of the body, the spiritual part of the person continues to exist and it contains self-knowledge and will and the Church calls it “Soul.” This word was taken from the Bible. Although there are various nuances for this word in the Bible itself, there is no sufficient reason to abandon it. Besides, the Church considers certain words are imperative to explain the faith of Christians.
4. The Church negates all the arguments that discourage or consider meaningless the prayers and Liturgical practices offered for the souls of the dead.
5. When teaching about life after death, the Church refutes anything that discourages or devalues the Assumption of the Blessed Mother. The Assumption and glorification of the Blessed Mother is a foretaste of what all the faithful are going to receive in the future.
6. In conformity with the New Testament tradition the Church believes that all the just will enjoy eternal life with Jesus Christ and all who die with mortal sin will receive eternal punishment. They would be deprived of the presence of God and this punishment will affect the entire being of the individual. It is possible that before being in the presence of God, the chosen ones may go through a period of purification which is entirely different from eternal

punishment. This is the teaching of the Church about purgatory and hell.

7. The document warns those who create misunderstanding and fear in the people about life after death through exaggerated explanations and frightening depictions. This is a sphere of mystery filled with unknown facts. There are two things we can firmly believe. The eternal life we are going to enjoy in the future will be a continuation of this present life in Jesus Christ we live today with the power of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, there will be substantial difference between the two.

There will be a time when faith will give way to fulfillment, and as St. John teaches, “When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is” (1 Jn 3, 2). Though we cannot imagine this, it is attainable for the heart.

The text book “Catechism of the Catholic Church” (CCC) published on 11 October 1992 with the approval of Pope John Paul II, in articles 988 to 1060 discusses this theme in detail. However, this is only a confirmation and detailed presentation of what the Church had been teaching for the last 2000 years regarding the life after death. While discussing the subject of life after death, the relevant parts from the CCC will be taken into account.

2

CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS

Though the teachings of the Catholic Church about life after death is very clear, recently certain new ideas and teachings have emerged and the advocates of those ideas are trying to popularize them. Many of these ideas and principles have been declared as erroneous by the Church.

Some Dangerous Concepts

One of the erroneous teachings is that the souls of those who die in a state of sin will become evil spirits and they will enter and possess human beings and cause difficulties and problems. Some people claim that the souls of those who did not know Jesus or did not follow His teaching even after coming to know him, are roaming around seeking liberation and that they may be saved through preaching the Gospel to them. Another teaching is that the eternal punishment will begin only after the Last Judgment and until then the condemned sinners have time to be saved. Hence the lost souls should be saved as soon as possible. They propagate this teaching through mass media and retreat preaching. The faithful who are concerned about the state of their dead relatives and friends become confused and disturbed by this teaching.

In this situation it is essential that the teaching of the Catholic

Church regarding life after death, be presented in simple and clear terms. Before entering into a detailed presentation of the same, we need to take certain precautions.

The Sphere of Faith

We have to remember that we are discussing matters that are beyond our senses and intellectual capacity. What happens after death cannot be analyzed and studied through scientific methods. It is an area of Faith. Hence, superstitions and imaginations may appear wearing the mask of real faith. We might not find all the things we want to know in the Bible or in the official documents of the Church as they are written for didactic purposes, not to satisfy our curiosity. In such cases, some people give certain explanations according to their imagination and the simple faithful might believe them to be true. Those who believe such things could fall prey to superstitions and eventually follow malpractices.

Insight of Psychology

When discussing the cases of possession, we need to understand the insights we get from modern psychology. While dealing with such cases, the various levels of the mind and the way they operate should be taken into consideration. Many of the so called possession cases are caused by mental illness created by suppressed matters in the unconscious mind. This does not mean that there is no possession by evil spirits or we can explain all the unusual phenomena by using psychological insights. Before we decide that someone is possessed or not, a detailed study of the matter should be conducted and make sure that the situation is not created by natural causes or events in the life of the person.

Biblical Hermeneutics

The basic teaching about the interpretation of the Bible also

needs to be taken into consideration while dealing with such new teachings. Many of those theories are presented with the support of certain Bible passages. It often happens that verses from the Bible taken out of context are interpreted literally and twisted according to the interest of the preacher to convey the desired message. Here the teaching of Vatican II regarding Biblical Hermeneutics, **Dei Verbum**, should be taken into consideration.

“However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

“To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

“But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the

whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.” (Dei Verbum § 12)

If the verses are interpreted literally without taking into consideration the literary forms and contexts, one will not be able to understand the message God communicates through the Bible. In the same way some of the words used in Greek and Hebrew cannot be fully translated using Malayalam/English words, for example heaven, hell, nether-world etc. When these words are used to translate the original Hebrew or Greek words they take on new nuances. All these would require detailed research. Rather than get into those issues, an attempt is made here to give a brief explanation of the passages that are being misunderstood and misinterpreted.

3

SOULS OF THE DEAD ROAMING AROUND

With the death of a person, the soul departs from the body and goes to the netherworld. Jesus opened the gates of the netherworld when He went down to visit them and the gate has remained open since then. Hence, it is believed that the souls could get out. Such souls will then sometimes possess individuals and torment them. They can be cast out through prayer and command in the name of Jesus. Upon compulsion such souls reveal their names and so we can know whose souls are roaming around. These kinds of ideas are being propagated by certain groups and many simple people believe them.

In the Gospels we see a number of accounts in which the evil spirits were cast out by Jesus. Once, the name “Legion” (Mk 5, 9) was revealed. In reality it is not a name but a term that denotes it was a big group. This is clear from the explanation that “we are many”. “Legion” is a division of Roman army that has about 15,000 soldiers. All it means is that many evils spirits had possessed one man, and that they are mighty like a formidable Roman Legion. There is no indication that they were the souls of dead persons. The same thing could be said about the spirit that

when exorcised goes around searching for a place, and finding nothing suitable, returns with seven more evil spirits (Lk 11, 24-26). Some claim that the evil spirits are the souls of those who died in a state of sin but there is no ground for this claim. The subject of evil spirits will be discussed in more detail later.

Will the Dead Come Back?

Samuel was dead and Saul wanted a message from him. Saul had expelled all the Mediums from the land and so he went to Endor searching for a person who would summon the souls of the dead. This incident is narrated in 1 Sam 28, 3-19. The soul of Samuel was not roaming around. Upon compulsion it came, pronounced the judgment and returned. The Medium woman told Saul, “An old man is coming up; he is wrapped in a robe. So Saul knew that it was Samuel...Samuel said ... the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, ... Moreover the Lord will give Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines” (1 Sam 14-19). The Bible emphasizes that Saul did something that was forbidden to the Israelites, namely, consult a Medium of spirits.

We can see the reflection of a belief that existed in the society at that time. The Canaanites believed that they could summon the souls resting in the netherworld and get from them certain secret information that is not known to living men. The technique is called necromancy. The Israelites were tempted to do it and so God told them through Moses to guard against this temptation (Dt 18, 9-13). Gathering information from the dead was forbidden to the Israelites.

The subject of discussion here is not if the dead would come back or not, but to teach the people of God not to try to find out secrets that God has hidden from human beings. Repeatedly Saul disobeyed God and so he was removed from the throne of Israel and David was anointed as King in his place. It was through the prophet Samuel that Saul came to know of this. Saul came to know the will of God through Samuel. Upon hearing that the Philistine army was going to attack Israel with a huge army, Saul sought all the possible and permissible ways to know the will of God. As none of them worked, Saul tried to contact the deceased prophet Samuel with the help of a Medium. This is recorded in the Bible to warn people not to do such a forbidden evil thing. By narrating further that Samuel was furious with Saul for summoning him from the dead and the punishment he pronounced marked the end of Saul and his family and that the very next day Saul and his sons were killed by the Philistines, the Bible wants to show that what is kept in secret should not be forced to reveal, using the souls of the dead.

The Experience of Saints

According to the biography of certain saints, the souls of the dead have appeared to them and requested prayers. We read such incidents from the biography of St. John Maria Vianney, St. Padre Pio, St. Euphrasia, St. Faustina etc. God might have allowed such incidents to instruct us to help the souls in Purgatory with our prayers and spiritual exercises. It does not mean that certain souls were let out from Purgatory to give a message and then they returned to the same place. Besides, the concept of time and place is relevant only to people living in this world. With death, the soul is freed from the limitations of place and time. This will be discussed in more detail while dealing with the concepts of the netherworld and hell.

Working of the Unconscious Mind

Modern psychology provides valuable information regarding the name and other matters gathered from the spirits before they are exorcised from a person. Here, the spirits that are possessing and going around are not the souls of some dead person but either the suppressed feelings in the unconscious mind which have taken over the operation of the person or some evil spirit that lies. It is not easy to know which one it is. In a society where there is a common belief that the souls of the dead can possess persons, such an experience is possible, especially for persons with weak minds.

Due to some shocking event, the unconscious mind might topple the operation of the conscious mind and take control of the individual. With that the person might act and speak like a certain deceased person. Psychology has proven that a person can be brought out of this condition through hypnosis and then help the person to regain control of his/her mind. In a society that believes that exorcism is possible through prayer and other spiritual exercises, this could be done to bring the person back to normal behavior. We have to be aware of the operation of the unconscious mind while saying that a person is possessed or the spirit has been exorcised.

Besides the operation of the unconscious mind, possession by evil spirits can also cause this kind of behavior. The Bible, especially the Gospels, has recorded many cases of possession and exorcism. Jesus gave permission and authority to the disciples to expel evil spirits and they effectively used that authority (Mk 3, 15; 6, 7-13; 16, 17; Lk 10, 17), but nowhere it is said that the evil spirits they cast out were the souls of the dead.

The souls of the dead are either in the presence of God (Wis

3,1-9; 4,7-14; Eccl 12,7-14; Lk16,22-25; 23,43) or suffering punishment (Lk 16, 23). Various aspects of the netherworld shall be discussed later. In short, the souls of the dead do not roam around or possess and torment anybody.

4

CONVERSION OF THE DEAD

Some people are propagating a dangerous idea that those who did not know Jesus by their own fault or otherwise, and those even after knowing him did not live according to his instructions, could get another opportunity after death for repentance and to correct their mistakes. They use certain Bible verses to support this idea and add a statement that God does not desire anyone to perish.

An incident recorded in 2 Maccabees 12, 38- 45 is often used to support the above position. “As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and they kept the Sabbath there. On the next day, as by that time it had become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kinsmen in the sepulchers of their fathers. Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen... And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent

it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering... Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Mc 12, 38-45). Two things are revealed here: Belief in resurrection and the forgiveness received by the dead. It teaches us that we must pray for the dead and through our prayers they might receive forgiveness for their sins.

Conversion Impossible after Death

The Catholic Church has been teaching from the beginning that after death one can do nothing more for one's own salvation. That is why the Church asks the faithful to pray for the souls in Purgatory. It does not mean that a decision made before death can be changed after one's death. The basis of this teaching is the difference between mortal sin and venial sin. “That slave, who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Lk 12, 47-48). Jesus was talking about the personal judgment that takes place at the moment of one's death. He pointed to the possibility of purification and salvation when he said, “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter” (Mt 12, 36).

Jesus also talked about sins for which one cannot attain forgiveness and deserves eternal punishment, “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Mt 12, 32). This points to the willful rejection of the truth known and that person continuing in that state of rejecting the Truth till death. Repentance is not possible

after death and judgment. “Mortals die once, and after that the judgment” (Heb 9, 27). People must repent while they are alive if they wish to be saved. “How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?... The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10, 29-31). The advice of St. Paul to the Church at Philippi should be taken seriously: “Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2,12).

There is the tragic possibility of being too late to take a decision to live according to the teachings of Jesus who has repeatedly said that once the door is closed it will not be open and so one must not put off the decision to start a holy life (Mt 24, 45-51; 25, 11-13; 25, 30). Jesus has given the serious warning: “Night is coming when no one can work” (Jn 9, 4) and again, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going” (Jn 12, 35). The condition of the person at the moment the soul leaves the body is decisive and final. No conversion is possible after that. From the Bible, the idea we get is that Purgatory and purification are for those who died only with venial sin.

Baptism of the Dead

Some words of St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians: “What will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?” (1Cor 15, 29) are pointed out as an argument to prove the possibility of repentance and conversion of the dead.

However, it has to be understood that these words do not speak about the conversion of the dead, but about the living people receiving a baptism for those who died without knowing Christ and receiving the baptism when in fact St. Paul is trying to convince the Corinthians about the truth of resurrection from their own practice. In Corinth some people had argued that there is no resurrection but still they received Baptism for the dead. St. Paul questioned why they did so if they did not believe in resurrection. The very fact that they received Baptism for the dead proved that they believed in the resurrection of the dead.

There might have been a practice of receiving Baptism in the name of persons who died without knowing Jesus. It in no way refers to having the soul come into a person and that person receiving Baptism for the dead soul. The Apostle has not said anything about the validity or merit of that practice. All he was doing was emphasizing the fact that at the end of the world, there will be resurrection of all the people who have died. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16, 19-31) proves that repentance is not possible after death. The statement that Lazarus will not be sent to the rich man suffering in hell shows that there can be no change in the judgment. It shows that a person will be judged according to his/her life in this world and the person will receive either heaven or hell. What was needed has already been taught through Moses and the prophets. If one lives neglecting those teachings and then expects a miracle to take place after death, that person would be making a foolish decision.

Conversion is something that should happen while a person is alive. God respects the freedom of the individual. Each one is given an opportunity to know the will of God and live accordingly. If one chooses to ignore the will of God and lives in a way according to one's own desire and decision, God will respect

that decision and will not interfere. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3, 20). The one who does not enter before the door is closed (Mt 25, 11) will have to stay outside. All these show that one must take this life seriously and it would be foolish to think that one could repent after death and attain salvation.

5

PUNISHMENT FOR THE SINS OF THE ANCESTORS

There is a tendency to believe that all the problems people face such as incurable diseases, accidents, bad habits, physical and mental defects, suicidal tendencies, etc. are caused by the sins of the previous generations. Some claim that the ancestors who committed hideous crimes are roaming around and tormenting the successive generations, causing the above mentioned problems. The solution they suggest is that these spirits be exorcised and freed from their sins through prayers and other spiritual exercises. When people hear that if this is done their present suffering will come to an end, many become enthusiastic because they would do anything to be free of their current suffering.

The Influence of Original Sin

The Bible, logic and some branches of science agree that the result of virtues as well as sins will affect successive generations. But, the concept of the souls of the dead ancestors roaming around is a superstition formed by the influence of some other religions. The effect of the sins of the ancestors is one of the basic teachings of the Bible. This is evident from the punishment meted out to the first parents: “Cursed is the ground because of you; ... you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3, 17-19). Cain who

killed his brother also received a similar punishment: “Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Gen 4, 10-12). The Bible asserts that sin is the root cause of all evil including death. “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (Rom 5,12).

This is the fundamental teaching of the Bible regarding Original Sin. By birth all participate in the sin of the first parents and its consequences. The Bible further teaches that besides this participation in the effects of the original sin, future generations would suffer the consequences of the actions of their ancestors (Ex 20, 5-6; Lv 26, 14-43; Nm 14, 18; Deut 5, 9; 2 Sam 12, 10-11; 1 Kg 9, 9; Jer 32, 18; Lam 4, 13; 5, 7-8; Amos 1-2 etc.) Not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament there are certain verses that confirm the above claim. The words of Jesus himself (Mt 23, 35-36; Lk 23, 28-29) can be seen as proof for this. Nevertheless, one should not overlook the fact there are also passages in the Bible that oppose or correct this view.

Personal Responsibility

There is a gradual development concerning the responsibility of sin of the people. Initially the entire humanity and especially the people of Israel were considered as one person, or a corporate personality. In this context, the whole community as well as each one will be responsible for the good and evil done by the individuals. But slowly this concept changed and more importance was given to the responsibility of the individual. This change became very evident towards the end of the eighth century B.C,

especially with the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and dispersal of the ten Tribes. This line of thought matured in the so-called Deuteronomistic School, whose ideas are clearly presented in the Book of Deuteronomy. “Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death” (Deut 24, 16).

The prophet Jeremiah took up this teaching and developed it further: “In those days they shall no longer say: The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge... But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge” (Jer 31, 29-30). A more forceful stance about personal responsibility is expressed by the Prophet Ezekiel in chapters 18 and 33. The argument of Ezekiel can be summarized in the following one verse, “Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die” (Ez 18, 4). As more insight was gained regarding the forgiving love of God, the view of punishment that lasts through generations underwent certain changes.

Endless Mercy

While it is stated that the punishment for the sins of the ancestors would last three or four generations, one should not forget that the teaching of the Bible that the mercy of God would last for a thousand generations (Ex 20, 5-6; Deut 5, 9-10). It shows that God's mercy is a thousand times greater than punishment. To understand the teaching about punishment, one needs to know about the concept of “corporate personality” which existed in Israel. This attitude about collective responsibility existed among almost all the people. Just as the children enjoy the wealth of the parents, they have the responsibility to pay off their debts.

Genetic Science and psychology have proven that children inherit the character traits of their parents.

Childrens' Responsibility

A clear understanding of the responsibility of the children regarding the sins of the parents is inevitable. If the deceased parents have accumulated wealth through injustice and violence, that wealth should be returned to the rightful heirs. The children must try to atone for their parents' crimes as much as possible. If one has accumulated wealth through cheating the poor, it should be returned to them or to their children. One cannot escape this responsibility by donating the money for prayer or to some pious cause. Here the decision of the rich tax officer Zacchaeus is a guide for action, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" (Lk 19, 8). Jesus approved of his decision and responded, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19, 9).

Structural Sin

This teaching of the Bible has far reaching effects. This cannot be limited to the responsibility of individuals. The responsibility of doing atonement for the sins of the past is entrusted to the society and nations. We are referring to a particular nature of Structural Sin.

The sins of individuals create certain effects that go beyond the personal spheres. But a sin repeated by a number of people creates an attitude, lifestyle and world view. These sins end up being the written and unwritten law that guides and leads a society. Thus the sin that was started by an individual spreads into the society and then move into an international level. Thus the evil structure becomes the order of the day.

Some people in society are considered as slaves or low class

and they are forced to work for very little or no wage and thus the so called high class people become rich and powerful. Those who accumulated the unjust wealth have the responsibility to share their wealth with the oppressed and give a helping hand for their total well-being. Some white skinned people had convinced themselves that dark skinned people had no soul and enslaved them. For centuries they were forced to work without any human rights and these “Masters” have the responsibility to make reparation for the crimes their ancestors committed for years and upon which their current economic prosperity rests.

Here, reparation is needed not because the souls of their ancestors possessed them but they are burdened by the guilt of committing years of atrocity. This would cause a continuation of evil in the society. To change this on a personal as well as social level people have to act justly, “You. . . have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others” (Mt 23, 23). As a community people have to do reparation for the crimes done to the poor and that is the only way to escape sin and punishment (Mi 6, 8). There is no short cut for this.

If one has engaged in black magic, Satan worship etc. he/she should repent, confess the sins, renounce such practices and return to the Lord. Conversion should take place in the heart, not in external activities such as re-building the house or filling the well. If the person has objects of black magic or any materials such as medals, statues etc. dedicated to idols, these should be destroyed. True liberation from evil can be obtained only by fully and willfully refusing and rejecting every relation with the powers of evil.

Meaning of Negative Incidents

There is a general feeling that misfortunes are happening as a punishment for some sin committed by the person or his/her

ancestors. Once, the Apostle Peter asked Jesus about a blind man: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” (Jn 9, 2). Jesus answered saying, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (Jn 9, 3). This shows that all misfortunes are not caused by the sins of the ancestors.

One must also keep in mind that all misfortunes may not be real losses. Some consider the birth of a handicapped child as a punishment for the sins of their ancestors, but there are many who feel that it was a real blessing to have such a child in the family. There are some who consider financial loss, illness and accidents etc. as a curse. But these could be a blessing as they become an instrument of getting God's blessing. Some see the blessing of God only in material gain. This happens only because they have a materialistic attitude. Those who really believe in God, who is the Creator, Provider and above all the Loving Father, will be able to see all that happens in their lives as being allowed by God for their own good and for the greater glory of God.

Accept Personal Responsibility

Some attribute all their misfortunes to ancestral sin. This is really evading the responsibility for one's own personal actions. The tendency to avoid personal responsibility is as old as the first parents Adam and Eve. But God does not approve of this escape. One will do well to keep in mind the strong warning of St. Peter: “If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile” (1 Pt 1,17). We should also remember that “Before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account” (Heb 4, 13; Eccl 12, 14; Rev. 20, 12).

6

NETHER WORLD AND HELL

Various ideas are prevalent among people regarding the life or condition of man after death. Some people select the one they like and propagate it as the sole teaching of the Bible. They will be able to find certain Bible verses to support their theory. While dealing with this subject, we must be aware of the uncertainties that exist regarding this subject.

To describe the abode of the dead, the Bible uses various words and each one has its own meaning and historical background. There are considerable differences between the way the Old Testament and the New Testament present this subject.

Netherworld Sheol - Hades

The knowledge about life after death gained clarity slowly. In the beginning of the Old Testament times, the thought was that all the dead were sleeping in the Netherworld, a sleep from which they will never wake up. To depict this situation the Hebrew word “Sheol” was used. In Greek it is translated as “Hades.” According to the imagination of the people it was supposed to be a huge cave or tunnel. In order to bury the dead the Israelites used to dig a pit and bury the body in it. The tomb was considered as the entrance into “Sheol.” This is a one-way trip as there is no

return and no escape for the ones closed in Sheol, as it can be seen from the following passages and many similar ones.

“Those who go down to Sheol do not come up” (Job 7, 9). “I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, the land of gloom and chaos, where light is like darkness” (Job 10, 21-22). “Mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep” (Job 14, 12). “The shades below tremble, the waters and their inhabitants” (Job 26, 5). “Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness” (Is 38, 18; 30, 9). “In death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?” (Ps 6, 5). “Do not invite death by the error of your life, or bring on destruction by the works of your hands” (Wis 1, 12; Is 5, 14). “Like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep” (Ps 88, 5-6). After death there is no difference in status, all are equal, all are equally helpless and exist in a kind of vacuum. “Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, and the sound of your harps; maggots are the bed beneath you, and worms are your covering” (Is 14, 11).

The Problem of God's Justice

The above view of the dead in the early days raised a question regarding God's justice. Once dead, there is no joy or sadness; no reward or punishment. With no difference all remain in a vacuum state. There is no hope or feeling and they fall into a deep, eternal sleep. This made it difficult for the faithful to accept death as it meant to be removed from the presence of God and thrown into eternal emptiness. All without exception, rich and poor, good and wicked, oppressed and oppressors were thrown

into the same plight. Hence some began to think that if they are to die and be thrown into nothingness then they should enjoy life in luxury as much as possible while they are alive (Wis 2, 1-9). In short, life became a meaningless exodus.

In this view of Sheol, the faithful encountered two problems. The greatest cause of pain is that one would never be able to see God or sing His praises. At the same time, one cannot understand the justice of God if this theory is true. As a rule it is the wicked and selfish people who enjoy the riches of this world and live in luxury. The just usually face poverty, suffering and oppression. This theme is dramatically presented with all its intensity in the book of Job.

Hope in Resurrection

Slowly the concept of Sheol changed. The first ray of hope in resurrection can be seen in the very book of Job in which Job raises his hope against hope in the justice of God: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19, 25-26). By the passage of time, this hope gained strength. “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead” (Is 26, 19). By 2nd century B.C. the hope in resurrection had become very strong, “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me” (Ps 49, 15). This same idea is seen in Ps 73, 23-26; 2 Mic 7; 12, 44; Wis 3,19).

Different Levels of Sheol

As the belief in resurrection became stronger, the view of Sheol also underwent certain changes. A belief gradually

developed that Sheol has many compartments and levels and the just and unjust will be sent to these different places. Eventually the conviction that the virtuous will be taken to God became prevalent. With that, they became convinced that sinners will be punished in Sheol. A teaching that all will be called to give an account of their activities gives a hint about the judgment after death and the punishment or reward each one will receive. “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl 12, 14).

This difference is more evident in the book of Wisdom that was written in the first half of the 1st century B.C: “The righteous, though they die early, will be at rest.... There were some who pleased God and were loved by him ... the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good... for their souls were pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took them quickly from the midst of wickedness” (Wis 4, 7-14). This view became more popular by New Testament times as can be seen in the writings of the Rabbis and the Apocryphal literature as well as in the teaching of Jesus. The parable of the “Rich Man and Lazarus” makes it very clear. “The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side” (Lk 16, 22). Being with Abraham meant the person was consoled and rewarded for his/her suffering. This was the situation before the resurrection of Jesus.

Bosom of Abraham

The earlier belief was that the dead were sleeping with the ancestors. The children were buried in the same tomb as the parents. Having a tomb for the family and all in the family being buried in the same tomb was important for the people of the Old

Testament. That is why Abraham was willing to pay an unreasonably large amount to buy a field where there was a cave to bury his wife Sarah (Gen 26). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were buried in that tomb (Gen 25, 9; 35, 27-29; 49, 29-50). Joseph had told his brothers to bury him with his ancestors (Gen 50, 22-26) and they complied with that wish.

People used to think that when the generations are buried in the same tomb, the successive generations continue their lives on earth. This led to the formation of a law, “When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband to her, for the sake of his dead brother, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel” (Dt 25, 5-6). This was the reason why Naboth refused to sell the vineyard he inherited from his ancestors, to King Ahab (1 Kgs 21, 3)

The hope of resting with one's ancestors gave rise to the formation of the concept of being with Abraham. The mode of celebrating a banquet gave a concrete picture to the life of the dead. During the time of Jesus, the Roman culture had great influence on Palestine. The Romans reclined while eating and feasting with the main guest seated near the head of the household. Resting at the bosom of the host was considered the greatest honor, acceptance and a sign of love (Jn 13, 23). The just are resting with Abraham while awaiting the resurrection. This demonstrates the idea that after death one could get reward as well as punishment.

Other Symbols

Some other symbols were used in the New Testament to denote the state of the just after death. The promise of Jesus to the repentant thief, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23, 43), uses a symbolic language. After death, he will be with Jesus and that is Paradise. The book of Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3 called “Paradise” the state of being with God. St. Paul, who wished to die to be with Jesus, expresses the same idea (2 Cor 5, 8; Phil 1, 23).

While the letter to the Hebrews tells about being with God: “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12, 22). The book of Revelation depicts the situation of the martyrs as being under the altar: “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given” (Rev 6, 9); and “Standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, ... singing Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen. ... they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God..., the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7, 9-17).

All these clearly express the belief that after death, the just will enjoy everlasting happiness with God while the sinners will be condemned to suffer punishment in Sheol. Thus, Sheol became a place of punishment, away from God. But there is a notion that this Sheol would last only until the Last Judgment and after that it will be called Hell.

Abyss - Dark Hole

Hades in the NT is presented as a place where the souls of the sinners are imprisoned and tormented. There is yet another word used in the NT, namely, “Deep Abyss” that derives from the Greek word “*Abyssos*.” “They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit (*Abyssos*); his name in Hebrew is *Abaddon*, and in Greek he is called “*Apollyon*” (Rev. 9, 11). It is considered to be the abode of the evil spirits. When Jesus ordered the evil spirits to leave the possessed man, “They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss” (Lk 8, 31). It is from this abyss that the evil spirits who torment the human beings come up (Rev. 9, 12; 11, 7; 17, 8). Satan is imprisoned there for 1,000 years (Rev 20, 1-3). This is supposed to be a bottomless pit below Hades.

Only once the Greek word “*Abyssos*” is used in the New Testament to denote the abode of the souls of the dead, “Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)” (Rom 10, 6-7).

St. Jude presents the same idea when he writes that the sinful and defeated angels will be kept in the dark until the Last Judgment: “The angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day” (Jude 1, 6). Here, for prison, the Greek word “*Fulake*” is used. St. Peter also expresses the same idea when he writes: “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment” (2 Pt 2, 4). Here for prison he uses the Greek word “*Tartaros*”.

During the ancient times, many of the prisons were like big

wells under the earth. The Greeks compared these dark holes to Hades where the souls of the dead were sent. Probably the “Deep Abyss and Dark Hole” came from this image of prisons. One should not forget that all these images are used to explain certain spiritual truths. Symbols are used to present what man has not seen and that which is beyond human comprehension.

7

HELL

In the New Testament the word “hell” is used to indicate the place of eternal punishment. Three times the word “Hades” is translated as “hell” in the New Testament (Mt 16, 18; Lk 16, 23; Rev. 1, 18); and it is explained as the abode of the dead, a place under the rule of Satan, a place of torment. All these refer to a place of eternal punishment. Another word used for hell was “*Gehenna*”. A brief explanation of these words would be helpful to understand the way the Bible depicts the place of eternal punishment.

Gehenna

This is a loan word borrowed from Hebrew, used without any modification in Greek as well as English. In the New Testament, this word appears twelve times as referring to the place of eternal punishment (Mt5, 29-30; 10.28; Lk 12, 5). Sometimes it is connected to an undying furnace or fire. Knowing the origin of the word would be helpful to understand the meaning of the word.

The original word was “*Ge Hinnom*” which means the valley of *Hinnom*. It was a valley on the Southern border of the city of Jerusalem. It used to be called “*Topheth*” and the valley of “*Ben Hinnom*” (sonsof Hinnom). While talking about the

boundaries of Jerusalem, the Book of Joshua states: “The boundary goes up by the valley of the son of *Hinnom* at the southern slope of the Jebusites (that is, Jerusalem); and the boundary goes up to the top of the mountain that lies over against the valley of *Hinnom*, on the west” (Joshua 15, 8). Before the Babylonian captivity, many Kings of Israel had performed idol worship and offered even human sacrifice in this valley (2 Kgs 23, 10; 2 Chr 33, 6; Jer 32, 35). The prophets, especially Jeremiah, had spoken strongly against it. “Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it will no more be called *Topheth*, or the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in *Topheth* until there is no more room” (Jer 7, 32; 19, 2. 6).

After the Babylonian captivity, idol worship in this valley stopped and it became a dumping place for waste. Because all the waste of the city of Jerusalem was burned there, there was always fire and smoke. There were worms crawling in the waste that was not on fire. The picture of this place was often used in order to depict hell, the place of eternal damnation. Be thrown out of the city, be burned and become the food of worms- that is what the Bible means by *Gehenna*. However, it should not be forgotten that *Gehenna* is a metaphor, pointing to eternal damnation and should not be taken in the literal sense.

Outer Darkness

Being thrown into the darkness is another fimageused to depict eternal punishment. The Gentiles and out-casts will enjoy the presence of God, “While the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8, 12). The same punishment will be meted out to the one who entered the banquet hall without the wedding robe (Mt 22, 13) and the unfaithful servant who buried the talent he got (Mt 25, 30). This meant that they will not be

allowed to enter heaven, eternal happiness. The awareness that one has lost heaven and will be subjected to an existence away from God in Hell will cause lasting grief and hopeless despair.

“Eternal fire” is another symbol used to depict eternal punishment. The New Testament has presented this figure of speech about 20 times to refer to the suffering in eternal flame. It is seen from the preaching of John the Baptist to the book of Revelation. John used it to show that the one who comes after him will pronounce the judgment over the people, “The chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3, 12).

Through many parables Jesus taught that the sinners will be thrown into hell only after the Last Judgment. Just as the servants burn the weeds, “The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 13, 41-42). The same truth was taught through the parable of the Fishing Net (Mt 13, 48); at the Last Judgment, the sinners will be thrown into eternal fire. “Then he will say to those at his left hand, You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25, 41).

Lake of Fire

The book of Revelation presents a “Lake of fire that burns with sulfur” to refer to eternal punishment. This usage is found only in the book of Revelation (19, 20; 20, 10. 14.15; 21, 8). Only after God has wiped away all evil, only after Satan and death are thrown into the “Lake of Fire” will there emerge the New Heaven and New Earth. The Bible concludes with the promise that God will wipe away all evil and there will be a world where only the virtuous exist.

While saying that those thrown into the Lake of Fire will be tormented for eternity, it is depicted as the second death (Rev 20, 14). Eternal punishment is presented as eternal torment and eternal death. In reality being away from God, the source of life, is death. The greatest pain is that they failed to reach their destination because of their own evil doing.

The Teaching of the Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, from Nos. 1033 to 1037, given below, presents the official teaching of the Catholic Church regarding Hell and eternal punishment.

“We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: “He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (Jn 3, 14-15). Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren (Mt 25, 31-46). To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell.”

“Jesus often speaks of “Gehenna” of “the unquenchable fire” reserved for those who to the end of their lives refusing to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost (Mt 5,22; 10,28; 13,42; Mk 9,43-48). Jesus solemnly proclaims that he “will send his angels, and they will gather all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire” (Mt 13, 41-42) and that he will pronounce

the condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire!" (Mt 25, 41).

"The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire." The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

"The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7, 13-14).

"Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth."

"God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores

the mercy of God, who does not want “any to perish, but all to come to repentance.”

Even when the Church teaches that “hell” is a reality, the Holy Mother Church wishes no one to go there. The Church teaches about “hell” to help the faithful to live in a way that they would not have to go there. The Catholic church has officially declared that a great many souls have become saints and enjoy eternal life with God but has not taught that anyone has gone to hell. The words of St. James give us hope, “For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2, 13).

8

JESUS' VISIT TO THE NETHERWORLD & PROCLAMATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

The fifth phrase of the traditional Apostles' Creed says, "Died, buried and descended into the netherworld". One of the aims of this statement is to prove that the death of Jesus was a reality. At a time when the conviction was that all the dead rested in *Hades*, or the netherworld, to say that Jesus went down to *Hades* means that He entered into the state of all the dead persons. With that the incarnation of God as man reached its completion. Such a statement was made in response to some people's claim that Jesus did not die.

This statement that Jesus went down to Hades is also an introduction to the "Proclamation of Faith" that Jesus rose from the dead. He won victory over death by fully participating in the human condition, from birth to death. He went down to *Hades* but did not stay there forever. He resurrected and ascended into heaven, ensuring the resurrection of all the humanity and opening the door to heaven for all the faithful who lived according to the Gospel values.

The visit to *Hades* and Ascension into heaven are two sides of the same coin. They are intrinsically related to each other and totally fulfilling each other as one would not make sense without the other. While descend to *Hades* marks the completion of death, the resurrection and ascension into heaven marks the proclamation of victory over death. It is the One who went down that came up and it is the One who died that Resurrected and attained victory over death. With that supremacy of death, evil, ended. It is to ensure eternal reward, heaven, for the dead that Jesus died, went down to *Hades*, resurrected and ascended into heaven.

Nos. 531-637 of Catechism of the Catholic Church has given a summary of this proclamation of faith. Given below is the text of those articles.

“HE DESCENDED INTO HELL. ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN”

631. Jesus “Descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph 4:9-10). The Apostles’ Creed confesses in the same article Christ’s descent into hell and his Resurrection from the dead on the third day, because in his Passover it was precisely out of the depths of death that he made life spring forth: Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all mankind, your Son who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen”.

632. The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was “raised from the dead” presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection (Acts 3:15; Rom 8:11; I Cor 15:20; cf. Heb 13:20). This was the first meaning given in the apostolic

preaching to Christ's descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Saviour, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there (I Pt 3:18-19).

633. *Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, "hell" - Sheol in Hebrew or Hades in Greek - because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God (Phil 2:10; Acts 2:24; Rev 1:18; Eph 4:9; Ps 6:6; 88:11-13). Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil or righteous, while they await the Redeemer: which does not mean that their lot is identical, as Jesus shows through the parable of the poor man Lazarus who was received into "Abraham's bosom" (Ps 89:49; I Sam 28:19; Ezek 32:17-32; Lk 16:22-26). "It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Saviour in Abraham's bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell."⁴⁸¹ Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him.*

634. *"The gospel was preached even to the dead"(I Pt 3,19). The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus' messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ's redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption.*

635. *Christ went down into the depths of death so that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25; cf. Mt 12:40; Rom 10:7;*

Eph 4:9). Jesus, “the Author of life”, by dying destroyed “him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Heb 2:14-15; cf. Acts 3:15). Henceforth the risen Christ holds “the keys of Death and Hades”, so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Rev 1:18; Phil 2:10).

Today a great silence reigns on earth, a great silence and a great stillness. A great silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has risen up all who have slept ever since the world began. . . He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow Adam in his bonds and Eve, captive with him - He who is both their God and the son of Eve. . . “I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. . . I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead.”

IN BRIEF

636. By the expression “He descended into hell”, the Apostles’ Creed confesses that Jesus did really die and through his death for us conquered death and the devil “who has the power of death” (Heb 2:14).

637. In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him.

The CCC after explaining in brief the article of faith concerning the visit of Jesus to hades, . tries to interpret, in the light of the Bible, the purpose of that visit. The document is calling attention to a theme that has been misunderstood and misinterpreted

To Liberate the Dead

The main focal point here is that “He went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison” (1 Pt 3, 19). Who are the imprisoned souls? What was the Good News Jesus proclaimed to them? What was the result? The answers to these questions are not easy. They are difficult to understand and so subject to many misinterpretations and erroneous explanations.

Some think that St. Peter was talking about the people who died without repenting and through the visit of Jesus, they received absolution from their sins and they were saved. They give this interpretation reading together: “This is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does” (1 Pt 4, 6) and “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people” (1 Pt 4, 8). When it says, “He ascended, that means he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things” (Eph 4, 8-10). In the light of this interpretation certain superstitions and erroneous practices have become widespread.

Some Superstitions

Regarding life after death, certain superstitions have become popular today. The above teaching leads many to misunderstanding and mental conflicts. Their interpretation may be summarized as follows: If Jesus freed the souls who were in

the state of sin through his visit to hell, then such liberation is still available. People who did not know Jesus or even after knowing Him refused to live according to His teaching could, therefore, be freed from the grip of hell. With the visit of Jesus the gates of hell were opened. A bridge was formed between the big Abyss separating the company of Abraham and the hell where the rich man was tormented. This erroneous belief asserts that it is possible to free the souls that are suffering in hell.

To attain this liberation, they just need to listen to the Good News of Jesus and repent about their sins. Just as Jesus proclaimed the Gospel to the souls in hell, today the souls in hell must listen to the Gospel. To do this nobody needs to go to hell but they believe these souls come out through the open door of hell seeking the Gospel and liberation. They are roaming around prayer meetings and retreat centers, begging to be liberated. Those who do not come voluntarily could be summoned by people who have special gifts. When they have listened to the Good News and converted, they will be freed from Hades forever and enter heaven. These people teach this message with the help of visions and other experiences, which they claim to have.

Those who are engaged in this service believe that the most urgent need today is preaching the Gospel to the dead! The faithful are obliged to do this to free as many souls as possible from eternal punishment. They believe this ministry is possible only until the Last Judgment. Since we do not know when the world will come to an end, the souls should be freed as soon as possible. Freeing these souls from hell has been taken as some people's God given duty. Many people have been attracted to this teaching especially because they feel that they can free their relatives and friends who had died and were not sure if they had gone to heaven or hell. Hence, it is imperative that we look into

the true meaning of the Bible verses they use to support their assumptions.

Imprisoned Spirits

The above mentioned beliefs and practices originated from the assumption that St.Peter in his letter was speaking about the souls of the dead who are imprisoned in Sheol. At a superficial reading this assumption might appear to be valid, especially in the light of the statement: "the gospel was preached even to the dead" (1Pet 4,6).

The statement of St.Paul: "When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives" (Eph 4,8) is adduced in support of this assumption. All these three statements, namely, Jesus' visit to Sheol, proclaiming the gospel to the dead and liberating the imprisoned souls, are taken together as proof and evidence for preaching to the dead in order to convert and liberate them. Hence these passages have to be studied in detail.

1 Peter 3, 18-20

This is the the bible passage mainly used by those who argue that the Gospel can and should be preached to the dead. But when the circumstances under which it was written and its relationship to the rest of the Bible are examined, these verses take on a different meaning. Regarding the imprisoned souls, the Apostle s writes, the spirits "Who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water" (1 Pt 3, 20). If the imprisoned spirits are the souls of those who died in sin and are being punished in Hades or hell, why did the Apostle talk about Noah and the Ark? Were there only the contemporaries of Noah in hell? It is clearly stated

that Jesus went down to the place where all the dead rested. If so, it would not be correct to interpret the dead as only the contemporaries of Noah. The claim that sin reached its zenith during that time also is not acceptable. Those who did not obey God existed not only during the time of Noah but at all times. Hence, the Apostle is not talking about the souls of the people who are imprisoned in Hades.

Circumstances

The main aim of the epistle was to give courage and support to the faithful members of Christianity who were undergoing religious persecution. The Apostle wanted to motivate them to remain firm in their faith even in the midst of severe persecution. He wanted to teach them the salvific meaning of the passion and death of Christ. Through their suffering they could participate in the suffering of Jesus and attain the salvation that has been made available to the faithful. A large part of the epistle, especially the central part (3, 13 - 4, 19), deals with Christian suffering. “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” (1 Pt 3, 13). “Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good” (1 Pt 4, 19). While explaining the meaning of suffering, the Apostle emphasized the importance of remaining firm in their faith.

When seen against this background it would become evident that the proclamation of the Good News mentioned in 1Pet 3, 18-19 was not made to the imprisoned souls to liberate them. Under the circumstances the concern was not freeing the souls suffering eternal punishment in Hades. Such an explanation or interpretation is not relevant here. It is totally against the main aim of the epistle which was to motivate the faithful to remain firm in their faith in spite of persecution and suffering. If they could be freed at a later

period, even after death, it has to concluded that through the proclamation of the Gospel, there was no point in suffering to preserve their faith! Hence, the verses (18-19) were written for another purpose. This calls for a detailed examination of the proclamation of the Gospel, imprisoned spirits and Jesus's visit to Hades.

Proclaiming the Good News

As a rule, the Bible uses the Greek word “Evangelizo” to refer to the proclamation of the Gospel aiming at repentance. But here the Apostle used the word “Kerusso” which means announce, declare etc. It does not have the same meaning as “Evangelizo.” The reason for the suffering of Christians is their faith in Jesus Christ who attained victory over all the evil through His suffering, death and resurrection. Through the verses, (18-19), the sacred author was teaching that Jesus attained total victory over all the evil forces. In this situation He, “made a proclamation to the spirits in prison”; all it means is that He made his victory known to the spirits. This meaning is more relevant to the situation under consideration. It does not convey the message that Jesus converted them and freed them. In short, Christians do not have to fear any evil force as Jesus has won total victory over all of them. Therefore, Christian hope has a solid foundation.

Spirit - Evil Spirits

When there is an understanding of 1 Peter 3, 18-20, as explained above, the imprisoned spirits are not the souls of the dead people remaining in the captivity of Satan. The word used for souls in verse 10 supports this idea. The Greek word “*Pneuma*” - plural *Pneumata* - was used to indicate what was translated as “souls”. When the word stands alone it means only “spirit”. When talking about the people saved through the Ark in verse 20, the word “*Psyche*” is used. Since the word “*Psyche*” is

used to indicate those saved, the same word should be used for those who perished in the flood also. But here the word used is “*Pneumata*”. Hence it should be concluded that here the word stands not for the souls of dead people but for some other spirits. Since the Apostle was trying to demonstrate that Jesus Christ had won total victory over all evil, he might have meant the enemies of all that is good and that means Satan and his companions are the imprisoned souls.

Visit to the Netherworld

Though the Apostles' Creed says that Jesus went down to hell, the words “hell” and “descended” are not in the Bible verses under discussion. Not only that, the state of Jesus also deserves special attention. “Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison” (1 Pt 3, 18-19).

Upon examining these verses, certain important facts come to light. Not only the death, but also the resurrection of Jesus is mentioned here. 1Pet 3,18 is talking about two different states. Died in the body and resurrected in the spirit. Here the subject of discussion is not the human soul that departed from the human body of Jesus but Jesus Christ who rose from the dead. The one who is “alive in spirit” is the one who resurrected. What is presented here is the common theme of the New Testament that Jesus made available to humanity namely, forgiveness of sins through his death and new life through His Resurrection. In short, Jesus died and resurrected to open the gates of heaven for human beings.

The above quotation does not say “went down to hell” but it

says: "made alive in spirit, in which also he went" . The Greek word used is "*Poreuo*" which means "'go". The same word was used to proclaim that Jesus entered into heaven (1 Pt 3, 22). When there is a question about the meaning of the word used, it is important that the original language is consulted to clarify the meaning. In the verses 19 and 22, the same word was used and it has great importance here. It would be better to use the word "entered" instead of went down or went up.

The Bible commonly uses the Greek word "*Katabaino*" to mean "descend". To depict that Jesus "descended into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph 4, 9), the same word was used in the letter to the Ephesians. In the Bible verse under discussion, nothing is said about the netherworld. What is used is the word that meant "entered" to denote went or reached. Then to where did the resurrected Jesus go?

The literary meaning of the words used to mean spirits in captivity is "spirits in prison". What is this prison? Where is it? How did Jesus descend and enter the prison? Here the Greek word "*Phulake*" that means "prison" is used instead of "*Hades*" which means the "netherworld". A close examination is needed to decide what this "prison" is and who are the spirits in it. It will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The Gospel was proclaimed to the Dead - 1 Peter 4, 6

Another important verse commonly used to support the concept of saving the souls of the dead through conversion is 1 Peter 4, 6. "This is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does" (1 Pt 4, 6). Who are these dead? Who is going to preach the Gospel? When did it happen? Since there are various opinions these also require detailed study.

There are four different interpretations

1. Jesus who died and went down to the netherworld proclaimed the Gospel to all the dead and gave them a second opportunity for conversion.
2. Jesus who died and descended into hell proclaimed the Gospel only to the souls of the just and the Good News was that they could enter into heaven.
3. This referred to the Evangelization of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ with the aim of giving spiritual life to those who were spiritually dead.
4. Those who had listened to the Gospel proclamation while alive and then died or were killed during the religious persecution.

Of the four, the 4th one is fitting to the circumstances of the epistle and the common teaching of the New Testament. If we examine the verse in its context this would become clear.

Context

The epistle was written to encourage the Christians to remain firm in their faith in the midst of religious persecution. The main purpose was to inspire them to accept death without fear. 1 Peter 3, 18-22, stated that Jesus proclaimed his victory over all the evil. All the Disciples of Christ are called to partake in this victory that is attainable by partaking in the suffering of Jesus without any fear of persecution or becoming slaves to material gain.

Heirs of Divine Life

The Apostle through his writing reminded the faithful that many have lost their lives on account of their fidelity to Jesus Christ. What happened to them? The answer is given through

verses 4 and 6. Those who were “judged in the flesh” are the ones murdered for their faith. Today they live with God and enjoy eternal glory. The statement means that they are partaking in the Divine life with God. This is the common teaching of the New Testament (1 Jn 3, 2; Phil 1, 23; Jn 14, 3; 17, 24). Hence, confess your faith and perform the responsibility entrusted to each one and thus give glory to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pt 4, 7-11). The Apostle continued to explain the persecutions a disciple of Christ would have to encounter and the attitude they must have in the midst of suffering (1 Pt 4, 12-19).

From this general context, the meaning of the verses under discussion becomes more evident. St. Peter is not talking about proclaiming the Gospel to the souls of the dead imprisoned in *Hades*. He wanted to teach the faithful under persecution, what happened to the dead who believed in the Gospel and died. The subject of discussion here is the salvation attained by those who have accepted the Gospel and then died.

Even to the Dead

This usage has caused some misunderstanding. In the Greek origin it says, “The Good News was proclaimed to the dead”. The concept that the Jesus proclaimed the Gospel to the souls in the Hades caused the translators to add the word “even”. From the circumstance it is possible to add “even” and so we cannot say the translation “even to the dead” is not totally wrong. But, when considering the context of the epistle and its aim, this use of the word “even” could lead to certain misunderstanding.

Proclaimed the Gospel

It is a passive statement. It does not say who proclaimed. There are not enough reasons to believe that it refers to Jesus who descended to Hades and proclaimed the Gospel to all the

dead. The dialogue seems to be addressed to the Disciples of Christ who died in religious persecution. The faithful were in a crisis similar to the experience of the faithful in Thessalonica.

St. Paul consoled the people of Thessalonica by teaching them about the resurrection of the dead (1 Thes 4, 13-18). St. Peter was assuring the faithful who were victims of religious persecution and were condemned to death that they would live in the spirit with God. This is not the Good News heard after death but heard while alive and about those who accepted the Gospel. They were promised that they will have eternal life with God.

Based on this part of the Bible, one cannot prove that God gives a second chance for conversion after death. It is not an exception to the general teaching of the New Testament that those who did not convert listening to Moses and prophets, while living, would not receive another opportunity after death. This is the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church also.

Rooted in the words of Jesus, the Catholic Church encourages praying for the dead. The aim of the prayers is to help the souls undergoing temporary purification. The Church teaches that our prayers help them to complete their suffering and purification in order to enter heaven. It does not change the situation the soul was in at the time of death. The decision a person takes in the presence of God at the moment of death will be the final decision. Therefore all should remain vigilant against falling into a misconception that we can move the souls of the dead to repentance, preach the Gospel to them, convert them and send them to heaven.

The Angels in Captivity - Jud 1,6

Another Bible passage that speaks about the Sheol and imprisoned souls is Jude 1, 6. “The angels who did not keep

their own position, but left their proper dwelling; he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day” (Jude 1, 6). The author does not say who the angels are and what was the sin they committed. St. Jude seems to assume that the readers clearly know the answer. He presents the example of the angels and Sodom and Gomorrah cities, to teach that if the people continue in a state of sin without repenting, they will receive severe punishment

From the letter of St. Jude alone we cannot gather enough information regarding the angels and their sins. It is certain that the angels were punished for their sin and they will never be freed as they are kept in captivity to be sent to eternal punishment in hell. We examined the condition of the souls imprisoned in 1 Peter 3, 19. Though, it cannot be said definitely that both are referring to the same incident, the statement of St. Jude points in that direction.

The Prisoners He took with Him - Eph 4,8

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men" (Eph 4,8). This proclamation of Paul is often interpreted as Jesus descended into the Sheol, raised the souls of the dead to life and took them with Him into heaven. This interpretation gives rise to the belief that Jesus liberated from Sheol all those who died before Him, and consequently it is our duty now to liberate the souls of those who died after Jesus from sheol through preaching the gospel of them.

Here also one has to take into account the context of the passage, its meaning in the original language and its relation to the other parts of the bible. First of all it has to be noted that St. Paul is not speaking about evangelization, but about the various gifts the Risen Lord showered from on high, in order to build up the

Church, His mystical body, after being glorified through His death and resurrection (Eph 4,11-12). The reign of Christ that is being completed through the Church will embrace the whole universe, including sheol. When it is said that "He ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things: (Eph 4,10), the apostle points to the universality of Christ's Rule. The teaching about Jesus' descent and ascent have to be understood against this background.

A Quotation for Ps 68

The statement: "He led a host of captives" is a quotation from Ps 68. The Psalm is depicting the triumphal march of God who has defeated all His enemies. The reference to the numerous captives points to the practice in ancient times, when the king returns to the capital after defeating the enemy, the prisoners are paraded before him as the visible sign and proof of the victory. The Psalmist is using this image in order to describe God's victory. However, this is not to be taken literally, because the triumph of God over evil and the victory of earthly kings over enemies belong to two different levels. Therefore, this should be taken only as a metaphor, emphasizing the glory of God's victory.

Ps 68 proclaims the miraculous victory God gave to the people of Israel. Now the apostle makes use of this Psalm to describe the victory Jesus has won over sin, death and all evil forces that ensnare humanity. While exhibiting the prisoners as a sign of victory, the kings used to give gifts to his people lined up to welcome the King and his cohort. The verse, "He gave gifts to his people" (Eph 4, 8) should be taken in this sense.

Captivity Made Captive Eph 4,8

When examining who were taken as captives here, an important element becomes evident. The English translation of the Greek phrase is often confusing, such as: He led a host of

captives, he led many captives, a train of captives etc. It is surprising, however, that in Greek there is no mention of prisoners at all. The word used is "aichmolosia", which means captivity or slavery. It does not say that he took any prisoners with him but that he imprisoned all who make men slaves to evil. Taking prisoners with him would not give the force the original usage envisioned. Hence the official translation into English (NRSV) used the phrase that "he made captivity itself a captive". What is being proclaimed here is the victory, Jesus accomplished over all the powers of evil. This does not mean that he freed the souls of the sinners in the netherworld and took them with Him to heaven.

The same truth is taught by St. Paul in the letter he wrote to the Colossians. "God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col 2, 13-15).

Descent - Self Emptying Eph 4,9

When St. Paul said, "He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph 4, 9), it did not mean that Jesus went down to convert those in the netherworld. The intention of writing the letter was to build up the Church and in this the victory of Jesus includes heaven, earth and even the netherworld. It was to accentuate this concept that the author said that Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth.

When He became man, Jesus set aside His Divinity and accepted the form of a servant and accepted death like a slave. St. Paul talked about this self-emptying and glorification in his letter to the Philippians (Phil 2, 5-11). The same truth is presented here in connection with the Church. By saying "the lower parts

of the earth”, it is not clear whether it referred to Hades or Sheol. In the Greek the word used in Eph 4,9 is “**kathothera meretes ges**” which means the “lower part of the earth”.

In short, what is intended by Ephesians 4, 8-10 is to communicate the truth that the head of the Church, Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, had won victory over all His enemies. He continues to protect and enrich His mystical body, the Church, by showering blessings from heaven. With these blessings the Gospel will be preached to all nations. The concept that Jesus freed the souls suffering in Hades and took them to heaven is the result of interpreting the Word of God without paying attention to its context and according to one's whim in order to support one's personal opinion.

The subject of discussion here are certain ideas that were formed in a cultural background that is totally different from ours. Hence, to understand the intended meaning one has to study about the thought pattern, view of the universe that was prevalent during the time, the literary forms used etc. Attention will be given to this in the next Chapter.

The Dead who Hear the Voice of the Son of God (Jn 5, 25).

Another verse used to support the concept that the souls of the dead can listen to the Gospel, be converted and attain salvation is a statement in the Gospel of John. “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (Jn 5, 25). Who are these dead? It is not the physically dead who could listen to the Gospel and be saved. It means the dead in spirit who do not have the Divine life in them. The Woman at the Well (John 4) is an example. She listened to Jesus, the Son of God,

and attained new life. All those who are spiritually dead can listen to the Good News Jesus preached and attain new life. Hence, a spiritual awakening is what is envisioned here. Some add to the above verse, the following verses (Jn 5, 28-29) that talk about the resurrection and take them both in the same sense.

“Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5, 28-29). Here, those in the tombs are those physically dead and buried. The point of discussion is the eschatological event, the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment.

Two kinds of death and resurrection are discussed in the above verses. Those who listen to the Gospel and accept the teaching of Jesus would attain spiritual life. They will not suffer spiritual death or eternal punishment. But those who refused to listen to Jesus are spiritually dead. By their very refusal to listen to Jesus, they have pronounced their judgment. What takes place during the Last Judgment is the confirmation of this personal judgment. By writing about the resurrection and confirmation of personal judgment, the author is affirming that no conversion or change in the judgment is possible after death.

Conversion before Death

All the discussions above prove that conversion is possible only when one is living in this world with body and soul. The warning, “Night is coming when no one can work” (Jn 9, 4), should be taken seriously. Once the body and soul are separated, the soul cannot take any new decision or change the decision taken before. Though others can help the soul through their prayers, the basic decision cannot be changed. “See, now is the

acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor 6, 2). Hence, efforts should be taken not to convert the souls of the dead but for the conversion of the people living. Evangelization is needed not for the dead but for the living!

9

INSIGHTS FROM APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

During New Testament times, the view of the universe, man's nature and end, angels, devils, evil spirits, heaven, hell etc., were different from the contemporary view of those concepts. Understanding the views of the Jews and Christians who lived during those times, could help to understand the matters written by the authors of the time. There are many books that present the view of the universe during the New Testament times. Those books, written between B.C. 2nd century and A.D. 2nd century, are called “*Apocrypha*” by the Catholic Church and “*Pseudepigrapha*” by the Protestant Churches.

Neither the Jews nor the Christians consider them as books written according to the inspiration of God. But, the authors claim that they contain matters God revealed to them. Those books were written under the name of certain famous people who lived in ancient times. Those names were used to prove that those books were written with authority. Most of the books claim that God revealed to them through angels secrets regarding the origin, history, and end of the universe. Angels and devils are the main characters in these books. They give detailed information regarding the origin of devils, the punishment they received, their dwelling

place and their activities. Though these books are not officially approved, they are helpful to understand certain expressions in the New Testament.

We get an idea about how people thought about the understanding of the universe and its operations during the New Testament times from books such as Book of Jubilees, Book of Enoch, the Testament of Twelve Patriarchs, The Sibylline oracles, Assumption of Moses, Revelation of Baruch, the Book of the Secrets of Enoch etc. Of these the two Books of Enoch will be most helpful for the subject under discussion.

During New Testament times and a few centuries that followed, those books affected the thought pattern and view of the universe. By the 4th century A.D. the influence of these books began to diminish. Because they propagated exaggerated ideas, and imaginary stories that could mislead people, the Fathers of the Church, such as Hilary, Jerome and Augustine strongly opposed these books. Some of these books have again become popular in the 19th century.

Today there are some people who consider the contents of those books acceptable and propagate them. This is done mainly by those who broke away from the Catholic Church and established their own churches. They are particularly attracted to these secret revelations. Those books are valuable only to understand the thought patterns and culture of people who lived in the distant past. They should be used with care as they contain many things that are not suitable for the Christian life.

Though the Church does not accept the apocryphal books as inspired by God, some of the ideas presented in them have been accepted by some of the New Testament books. Hence, they are not to be rejected totally nor accepted as authoritative books but we should accept only the truths that are congruent

with the ideas of the Canonical books. To do so, one needs to have a deep knowledge about the Bible and the teachings of the Church. Accepting all that suits one's imagination as inspired by God is misleading.

The Visions of Enoch

This book was written in the 2nd century B.C. and it is known as “Ethiopic Enoch”. The original text written in Hebrew and Aramaic are lost. Today it is available only in the Ethiopian language and that is why it is called “Ethiopic Enoch”. A century later another book was written and it is called the book of the “Secrets of Enoch”. It is available only in the Slavic language and so it is called “Slavonic Enoch”. This book was based on Genesis 5, 18-24. The statement, “All the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him” (Gen 5, 23), led to many confusing explanations. Because Enoch was faithful, God took him and the authors claim that the content of the books are the matters God revealed to Enoch. The creation of the universe, the origin of angels and devils, the past and future history of man, the end of the world and many other subjects are presented as matters God revealed to Enoch.

The Fall of The Angels

Chapters 6-11, of the Book of Enoch, narrate the fall of the angels, origin of the devils and evil spirits, and the souls in captivity. As far as our subject of discussion is concerned this is the most relevant part of the book. The explanations for the origin of these creatures were based on the book of Genesis. “When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the

LORD said, My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years. The *Nephilim* were on the earth in those days— and also afterward— when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown” (Gen 6, 1- 4).

The narration in the books of Enoch about the origin of evil spirits can be summarized as follows. About 200 Angels from heaven felt attracted by the beauty of the daughters of men and wanted to produce children with them. They were afraid that God would not like such a move. Semmiassa, the leader of the group, feared that after the angels accomplished what they wanted they would blame him for everything and deny their responsibility. But all 200 angels assured him that it would not happen and they made an oath to that effect on Mount Hermon and promised to remain with their leader, no matter what happens.

Accordingly, each one took the woman he liked as his wife. They taught them magic, various tricks and sciences. The children born from this union grew to be giants with 2000 feet tall. People were forced to feed these giants and when they could not get enough food, they began to eat human beings. The leader of the angels, called “Assasel”, taught the people to make weapons such as swords, spears, shields, etc. and also how to get the metal needed to make them. The earth was filled with wars and crime increased. The cries of the oppressed people reached heaven.

The Archangels, Michael, Uriel, Raphael and Gabriel heard the cry and they mediated before God for the human beings. God in turn immediately pronounced the punishment. The Angel Uriel was sent to a man called Noah to build an Ark to be saved from the flood that was going to destroy the world. Assasel was bound and put in the dark hole to be thrown into the fire on the

last day. Raphael was asked to heal the earth and the people. Gabriel was asked to make the giants, who were persecuting the people, fight with each other and die. Michael was asked to bind Semmiassa and his companions and imprison them in the netherworld.

Ten Heavens

Regarding the angels bound and imprisoned in the netherworld, some explanation is given in the “Secrets of Enoch”. On the wings of two angels, Enoch was taken to the presence of God. What he saw on the way is described in the “Secrets of Enoch”. One after another, he saw ten heavens where different persons and things are kept. A detailed account of all that he saw is given in this book. In the first heaven there was rain and snow. The second one is totally dark and the fallen angels were suffering there. Endless cries could be heard from this dark hole. Paradise was in the third heaven where all kinds of trees and tasty fruits grow and in the middle he saw the tree of life. The just who did not succumb to temptations or renounce the faith but lived helping those in need, lived in this third heaven. On the Northern side of this heaven, there was a dark hole where the souls of the sinners were persecuted. The fourth heaven was the abode of the sun and moon. The leader of the angels imprisoned in the second heaven was bound and kept in the fifth heaven. The stars and angels who control the people on earth are in the sixth heaven. The seventh heaven is the place of the Archangels. The angels in the eighth heaven controlled the climate on the earth. In the ninth heaven he saw twelve stars. Above all these, in the tenth heaven resides God.

Imprisoned Spirits - Angels Confined

From the description of the assumption of Enoch and the

vision he had of each heaven, a clear picture of the subject under discussion, namely imprisoned spirits, can be gathered. The Apostles, who depicted the Ascension of Jesus, were familiar with these descriptions. A reflection of the account of the assumption of Enoch is seen in some of the New Testament accounts such as Eph 4, 8-9; Col 2,15; Heb 7, 26; Phil 2, 9-10. The imprisoned spirits described in 1 Peter 3, 19 were the spirits confined to the second and sixth heavens in the vision of Enoch. Jesus visited them during His Ascension into heaven but what was proclaimed to them was not their liberation but the victory He (God) won through His death and resurrection, over all the forces of evil. Here we see the picture of a king who defeated death and entered into the glory of God.

If the matters presented in symbols are interpreted literally, the meaning derived would be different from what was intended by the author. Many symbols from the Apocrypha books are also found in the New Testament. It was part of the literary style of the day. When St. Paul talks about a man lifted up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12, 2) the readers of the time understood that he was talking about the third heaven (Paradise) described in the book of Enoch. The abode of God, tenth heaven, is envisioned when the Apostle wrote, Jesus “ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph 4, 10). The following passage is difficult to understand without an understanding of the vision of Enoch, : “Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6,12).

Confined From the Time of Noah

Now here is a better understanding of the “spirits imprisoned”. As an introduction to the flood during the time of Noah, the sin of the angels (Gen 6, 1-4) was presented. The angels and their

giant children were the ones who did not obey God who waited with patience until Noah completed the building of the Ark. St. Peter says, “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment” (2 Pt 2, 4). St. Jude describes the same as, “The angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day” (Jude 1, 6). Therefore, the spirits imprisoned are not the souls of the dead and what the Gospel proclaimed to them was not for their liberation but a declaration about the victory Jesus won over the powers of evil. This declaration is different from the evangelization found in 1 Peter 4, 6.

PART II

ANGELS AND DEVILS

The subject of discussion in this part is certain realities that are invisible to the eye and cannot be understood by intellectual research and logical analysis. There are many who ask the question: are there any spiritual beings, apart from God and humans? The answer can be both yes and no. It is not only atheists who deny the existence of angels and demons. Among those who believe in God and even among theologians who do research and teach, there are many who give a negative answer to this question.

There are many who claim that devils and demons are the personification of evil that exists in the world and also the negative experiences people have. They assert that the evil spirits have no freedom to make personal decisions and that they are only the creation of human imagination. In the same way, they consider angels to be a product of human imagination. A lot of people think that angels are used to point to what is good and devils are used to indicate evil.

On the other hand, some see evil spirits everywhere. Certain people consider devils to be responsible for all of our negative experiences. There are also people who seek the help of the angels and sometimes worship them.

Even those who agree that there are angels and devils, disagree about their nature and activities. However, the belief in angels, especially in devils, has much influence in society and may even lead to superstitions and unreasonable fears and malpractices. Hence this subject requires immediate attention.

10

ANGELS

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

“He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire” (Heb 1, 7; Ps 104, 4).

The word “Angels” signifies more the nature than the essence. It is derived from the Hebrew word “Malaak” which means one who carries a message or messenger. They are mentioned more than 200 times in the Old Testament.

The presentation in the Old Testament does not leave room to doubt about the existence of angels. But it is not easy to find answers to questions such as who are they, what they do, what is their relationship to God and humans. We may not find an unequivocal answer to these questions from the bible. Sometimes the answers found might even seem to be contradicting each other.

The revelation about many subjects such as faith and morality was gradual over a long period of time. Clarity about the angels also came about slowly. The first task in this section will be to look into the various characteristics of the angels. All of them are interrelated like many pieces of a Mosaic picture. Hence, it is not possible to take one of the descriptions and conclude that, it is the teaching about angels. All the descriptions together might provide a rather clear picture of the angels.

Messenger of God

The first image of the angel that captures our is “Messenger of Yahweh”. Bible scholars consider that this might be the beginning of the view about angels in the Bible. Hagar ran away from her mistress Sarah and an angel appeared to her in the desert and told her to return to her mistress and at the same time promised protection to her. This is the first appearance of an angel in the Old Testament. From the response of Hagar we see that it was God who appeared to her. “You are El-roi”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” (Gen 16, 13). Many such events are recorded in the Old Testament.

The “messenger”, who prevented Abraham when he took the knife to sacrifice his only son, was none other than the Lord (Gen 22, 10-18). That is the impression we get from the description given. The messenger who appeared to Moses in the burning bush was the Lord. “There, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am” (Ex 3, 2-4).

Three messengers appeared to Abraham and at the end it became one (Gen 18, 1-15). Was it the Lord or His messengers? The explanation that continues (Gen 18, 16-39) states that it was the Lord. The same explanation is given in the Exodus Event regarding an angel going before the people of Israel (Ex 14, 19; Jgs 2, 1; Is 63, 9). It was not a messenger, it was the Lord. The Psalmist talked about the protection God gives, “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them” (Ps 34, 7).

God Who Opposes

Many incidents in the Old Testament present God as an unknown power who encountered man like an adversary. This marked the beginning of the revelation about evil. Jacob on the way back from Haran, spent a night on the bank of Jabbok river. Behind him was Laban and before him was Esau who was coming with 400 servants to meet him. Jacob was afraid of both Laban and Esau. After sending his wives, children and all his wealth to the other side of the river, Jacob alone stayed on the Eastern bank of the river with an idea of running away, in case Esau confronted him. That night a stranger wrestled with him (Gen 32, 22-32). Who was the stranger? It could have been a messenger of Yahweh or Yahweh Himself. God appears to be an unknown force that attacked Jacob at night. Jacob could not escape; so he fought. Through this wrestling, Jacob became courageous and received a new name "Israel". The apparent evil was, in reality, a blessing for Jacob.

Moses who encountered God on Mount Sinai returned to Egypt with a mission to liberate his people. On the way, the Lord sought to kill Moses and he escaped death by the timely interference of his wife, Zipporah (Ex 4, 24-25). It is difficult to understand why God tried to kill Moses whom he had chosen and sent as his representative. Some unknown facts are behind this incident. It might have been to teach him that the one who is going to lead God's people must obey all of His laws. The Lord tried to kill Moses because he had failed to circumcise his son.

Angel of Death

As the revelation of God gains clarification, certain concepts disappear and new ones appear. Exodus 12, 23-29 had said that the Lord passed by killing the first born of Egypt. Later an explanation was given to the effect that it was an "angel of death"

who did the killing and that became more popular. When King David took a Census, God sent an “angel of death” to carry out the punishment (2 Sam 24, 16-17; 1 Chr 21, 12). When the Assyrian army set up siege against the city of Jerusalem, “That very night the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies” (2 Kgs 19, 35; Is 37, 36).

While stating that God is invisible to the human eye and beyond the intellectual comprehension, the picture of the “angel of the Lord” is helpful to demonstrate God’s love and care. As the vision of His holiness and magnificence gains clarity, the distance between God and man increases. The concept of the angel started to be seen as a bridge between God and man. Eventually, the truth that God and His messenger are not two but one and the same gained clarity. Not only that, more explanations were given about the number of angels, the different groups and different missions entrusted to them .

Servants of God

Angels are servants who do the will of God. They are appointed to give protection as well as to discipline man by punishing the ones who refuse to repent. In the first part of the Bible, there is hardly any difference between good and evil angels. Eventually, this view changed and angels became channels of good and devils became channels of evil.

The Bible presents heaven as a King’s court on earth. These descriptions give the impression that just as the king is served by advisors, praise singers, army captains and other servants, in heaven God is served by numerous groups of angels and those servants of God were called “Sons of God” (Job 1,6; Ps 29,1) and “gods” (Ps 82,1.6; Jn 10,34).

In the Old Testament we can see that there are different divisions of angels and they have different duties to perform. The two main groups mentioned in the Old Testament are Cherubs and Seraphs. Besides these there is an army of God, messengers and Archangels. More details about the angels are given in the apocryphal books that were popular among the Jews during the New Testament times. The New Testament also includes such descriptions.

Seraphs

Seraphs sing praises to God at all times. Only in Isaiah 6, 1-2, do we see them. They have 6 wings and they cover their face and feet with their wings and proclaim the glory of God. Through this action they confess that they are not worthy to stand there or to look at God. The two wings are used to fly shows that God is present everywhere. They give praise and glory to God constantly.

Cherubs

Cherubs are another division of angels. They first appear in the Bible as guards of the door to Paradise (Gen 3, 24). Statues of Cherubs were placed above the Ark of the Covenant as if to guard the Ark (Ex 25, 18). The Israelites believed that the throne of God was above the Ark and that might be the reason they would say, “The Lord, who is enthroned on the cherubim, which is called by his name” (1Chr 13, 6).

Cherubs are pictured not only below the throne but also as the carriers of the Lord, “He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind” (Ps 18:10; 2 Sam 22:11). A more detailed description about the Cherubs is found in the book of the prophet Ezekiel (Eze 1, 5-28; 10, 1-5). They had the forms of man, eagle, oxen, and lion, all put together. “They

were of human form. Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. . . .they had human hands. . . . the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle...each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. . . .they went, without turning as they went” (Eze 1, 5-12). In this description we can see a reflection of the image of the Cherubs prevalently in Mesopotamia.

The name “Cherubs” is derived from the word “Kerubu” which meant mediator or guard. At the main gate of the palaces and temples in Mesopotamia, they had huge statues called Cherubs. They had the face of man, wings of the eagle, body of a lion, and the legs of oxen. This figure that was a combination of wild animal, domestic animal, flying bird and intelligent man was considered a wonder creature with immense power. Adapting the image the concept of the Mesopotamian cherubs and purifying their ideas, the division of angels called Cherubs were formed.

Since angels are spirits, none of these explanations are to be taken literally. God who uses the Cherubs with wings could reach anywhere at any time. To say that God is omnipotent, this metaphor is used. The same idea is conveyed through, “He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind” (Ps 18:10).

Archangels

Michael

The name “Michael” was formed from the Hebrew word, Mi-ka-el which means “who is like God”. It is a proclamation that God is One and there is no one equal to God. The name is like a challenge against those who oppose God. An explanation of this is found in Rev. 12, 7-8:“Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but

they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven”.

Though Michael has great importance among the people of Israel and in the Christian Church, his name appears only five times in the Bible (Dan 10, 13-24; 12, 1; Jud 9; Rev. 12, 7). In the book of Daniel, Michael the Archangel is presented as the patron and protector of the people of Israel. Apocryphal books present St. Michael, not only as the commander in chief but also as the patron who prays for the people of Israel and he is called the Angel of the Holy Presence. He is the one who guards the gates of Heaven. On Mount Sinai it was through Michael that God gave the Decalogue to Moses. Such pictures are painted in the apocrypha.

The influence of the books of Apocrypha is evident in the letter of St. Jude as he said, “When the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1, 9). The background of the argument was that when Moses died, St. Michael argued that as a person specially chosen by God, Moses should be allowed to enter the Paradise. But Satan argued that he broke the commandment of God and was prevented from entering the Promised Land and so he should be sent to Hell.

St. Michael is the special patron and guardian of Israel. As God's commander-in-chief, St. Michael led the war against Satan and was victorious. The Catholic Church gives great importance to this Archangel and seeks his protection in its fight against the evil.

Gabriel

The name is derived from the Hebrew word “Geber” which means powerful. By adding “el” to this word we have the name

Gabriel which means the “powerful one of God”. Four times we see this name in the Bible, twice in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament. In the book of Daniel (16, 9-21), we see that Archangel Gabriel was appointed to explain to Daniel, the secrets of Salvation History. It was Gabriel who appeared to Zachariah (Lk 1, 19) and announced the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Then this Archangel was sent to Mary (Lk 1, 28) to announce the birth of Jesus, God Incarnate. In Apocryphal books, Gabriel is presented as the most powerful angel since it was he who destroyed all the wicked; he is seated at the left hand side of God. Gabriel is the symbol of the strong protection God gives; he is also appointed to communicate God's message to people.

Raphael

The name “Raphael” was formed by adding “el” to the Hebrew word “Raphaa” which means to heal. The name means “God heals”. In the Bible Raphael is seen only in the book of Tobit. It was Raphael who guided the young man, Tobias, on his journey, giving him protection all the way. He liberated Sarah from the demonic possession and prepared the way for the marriage of Tobias and Sarah. He also healed Tobit from his blindness. Raphael is the patron of families especially of the newlyweds.

Legions of Armies

“Lord of Hosts” is a title given to God in the Old Testament. This title occurs in the Book of Isaiah more than 50 times. This image was used to emphasize the power of God is able to subdue all enemies. At the same time, it shows that God uses His army to execute His commands.

In Hebrew it is called “Yahweh Sabaoth”, the army of the

Lord. The root of this word is “Saba aa” which means army or war. For some reason in English the phrase “Lord of Hosts” is used to indicate God is the Lord of the army. It has been used many times in the Old Testament, (Dt 4, 19. 17, 3; 2 Kgs 17, 16). The heavenly bodies in the sky (sun, moon, stars, etc.) are considered to be the servants of God. None of them are gods but only the creation of God (Gen 1, 14-19).

These planets that lost their divinity were the army of God or heavenly host (Is 34, 4; Neh 9, 6; Jer 33, 22). In poetic language it is said that these planets joined with the Lord for war. “The stars fought from heaven” (Jud 5, 20). The basic belief was that God would use the powers of nature for the execution of His plans. It was from here that the idea of the army of God was developed.

The vision of the prophet Micaiah sheds some light on one of the characteristics of the angels. “I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him” (1 Kgs 22, 19). Joshua who crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land saw an angel standing with a drawn sword and he said, “As commander of the army of the LORD I have now come” (Joshua 5, 14). Another example of the host of the Lord can be seen “The angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kgs 19, 35).

The faith that the angels are the army of God became a widely accepted fact among the Jews and Christians by the New Testament times. Jesus had spoken about “legions of angels”. He asked his disciple who struck with the sword the slave of the High Priest, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mt 26, 53). This idea was presented more powerfully with in the

book of Revelation (Rev. 19, 14. 19). No matter how strong the power of Satan is, God's force is greater and would defeat it. By demonstrating the power of the army of God, the sacred author assures that those who put their trust in God have nothing to fear. The same is emphasized by presenting the glory and power of the angels (Dan 10, 5-9; Rev. 10, 1-2; 18, 1; 22, 8-9).

Angels in the Service of Humans

After the Babylonian captivity, the belief in angels became more popular and clear among the people of Israel. They believed that God had appointed an angel for each people and nation, to protect them and guard them. They believed that as instructed by the prophet Daniel, Archangel Michael was appointed as the protector of the people of Israel (Dan 10, 13-21).

God has appointed an angel to protect each person as well as the society. Raphael who came to accompany Tobias is an example. After the Babylonian Exile, the faith that the angels bring the prayers of the people to the Lord and act as mediators became stronger (Tobit 12, 1-22; Dan 10, 12). The angels performed many services for people, such as explaining mysteries (Eze 40, 3; Zach 1, 8-9; Dan 8, 16; 9, 21-23), healing the sick (Tobit 12, 14), and giving protection during journeys (Ps 91, 11-12). As a result, the concept of the guardian angel was formed.

Pictures of Angels

Christian artists, especially during the middle ages, drew pictures of angels as women and children with wings. Their influence is still evident in the drawings of angels today. These pictures are considered to be symbols of beauty and holiness. Beyond that, to understand their characteristics or activities these pictures do not help. The Angels in the Bible are very powerful servants of God. They are spirits and so to appear to people

they accept a form but it is not part of their nature. After the journey, the Archangel Raphael revealed to Tobit and family his true identity and he told them, “What you saw was a vision” (Tobit 12, 19). The wings stand for speed. Angels are not beings with wings and bodies.

11

ANGELS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

All that was said about the angels in the Old Testament was accepted and gained more clarification in the New Testament. The angels played a significant role in the lives of Jesus and the Apostles. Jesus often spoke about angels to explain certain truths in the light of the faith that was prevalent at the time. He did not go into the nature and existence of angels. The book of Revelation deals with the angels more than any other book of the New Testament. Of the 175 times angels are mentioned in the New Testament, 67 of them appear in the book of Revelation. In the New Testament, the angels appear to be the messengers of God and protectors of humans.

Jesus Christ and the Angels

It was an angel who announced the birth of Jesus (Lk 1, 26-38) and proclaimed that Jesus was the Savior for all humanity (Lk 2, 9-14). The angels sang the praises of God at the birth of Jesus, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Lk 2, 14) and this praise has been resounding for more than twenty centuries in churches in the Christian world. It was an angel who gave the message to save

the Child Jesus from the hands of the enemy and also commanded to come back from Egypt (Mt 2, 13-21). “The messenger of God” has been discussed while dealimng with Angels in the Old Testament.

After Jesus received the Baptism, “He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him” (Mk 1, 13). “Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone” (Mt 4, 5-6). “Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test”” (Mt 4, 7). The night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed to the Father in great agony and “Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength” (Lk 22, 43).

From the beginning to the end of the earthly life of Jesus, there was the active presence of the angels. Though Jesus knew that the Father would send more than 12 Legions of angels (Mt 26, 53) to save Him from his enemies, He surrendered himself for the fulfillment of the Divine plan. It was an angel who rolled away the stone from the face of Jesus' tomb (Mt 28, 2). Just as the angels came to announce His birth (Lk 2, 9-14), they came to announce His resurrection (Mt 28, 5-6; Lk 24, 4-7) and they also announced His return at the end. After the Ascension of Jesus, the Apostles stood there looking up, “Suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 113:Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1, 10-11).

The angels appear to be the link between God and man.

Jesus told Nathanael, “Very truly, I tell you; you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (Jn 1, 51). Jesus taught that the dream of Jacob (Gen 28, 12-13) will be fulfilled in Jesus. This also gives intimation about the glorification of Jesus Christ. St. Peter added two more attributes to the angels, authority and power. “Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him” (1 Pt 3, 21-22).

Jesus has given certain insights into the nature and activities of the angels. “I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven” (Mt 18, 10). “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mt 22, 30; Mk 12, 25). The angels rejoice in the conversion of sinners, “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk 7-10). They carry the ones who die in the grace of God, “The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham” (Lk 16, 22). At the Last Judgment, the angels will sound the trumpet, “He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call” (Mt 24, 31). “Then, he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mk 13, 27).

Angels will accompany Jesus when He comes in glory for the Last Judgment (Mt 16, 27; 25, 31; 2 Thes 1, 7). It will be the duty of the angels to separate the wicked from the just and throw them into hell (Mt 13, 39-41, 49). An angel is appointed to protect and care for each individual (Mt 18, 10). Though the angels are powerful and filled with wisdom there is a limit to their knowledge

(Mt 24, 36; Mk 13, 32). In short, the angels are the servants of God and helpers of humans.

Jesus is more glorified than all the angels (Heb 1, 4). When God became man, He set aside his glory and put on the form of a servant and appeared to be lower than the angels (Heb 2, 7-9; Ps 8, 4-5). Though they are powerful like fire and wind, the angels worshiped the Son of God, Jesus (Heb 1, 6-7).

Angels in the Life of the Faithful

In the Acts of the Apostles we see that the Apostles constantly received the help of the angels. “During the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out” (Acts 5, 19). Peter was condemned to die but the angel helped him to escape. “Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly’. And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said... follow me. Peter went out and followed him; ...they came before the Iron Gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, ... suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting’” (Acts 12, 7-11). Here the Angel is mentioned seven times in five verses.

In the process of Evangelization the angels gave clear instructions to the Apostles. Philip was told to go to the man from Ethiopia, “Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8, 26). It was the angel who prepared the Roman centurion, Cornelius to receive the Gospel, “One afternoon at about three o’clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius... your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside' "(Acts 10, 3-7). God sent angels to help the Apostles who met with accidents. When Paul was in a shipwreck, an angel appeared and gave him courage. "There stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship" (Acts 27, 23).

More than in any other Biblical books, the angels appear in the book of Revelation. The legions of angels offer ceaseless praise and worship to God. They present the prayers of the people together with their worship to God (Rev. 5, 11-14; 8, 3). The mediation of the angels hasten the completion of the plan of salvation (Rev 8, 5). The Angels interpreted and explained the plan of God to the disciples (Rev. 1, 2; 17, 7; 18, 1).

Each local Church was put in the care of an angel, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches" (Rev.1, 20). The angels are responsible for announcing the decisions of God and executing the punishments He prescribes (Rev. 8, 6-12; 10, 1; 14, 14-20; 16, 1-21). They are mighty warriors who reflect the glory of God (Rev10, 1; 18, 1). The angels led the war against Satan, a "War broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven" (Rev. 12, 7-8). An angel was responsible for binding and throwing Satan into Hades (Rev. 20, 1). The faithful are supported and helped by the angels in their struggle to remain faithful to God in the face of severe religious persecution and as a sign of the protection they receive, a seal was placed on their forehead (Rev. 7, 2-3). As a sign of the security God gives them, the angels block the wind that causes destruction (Rev. 7, 1).

Though the angels are strong and take part in the glory of God, like human beings they too are the creatures and servants

of God. They are the friends and helpers of humans and so they deserve respect and honor but none of them are to be worshiped. “I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’ “ (Rev 22, 8-9). St. Paul warned against worshipping the angels (Col 2, 18).

The awareness that the angels are our brethren and servants of God like us gives us much consolation and strength. In our fight against evil, God is with us and He has assured us the help of the angels who are strong and fast to act. It is not a fantasy that God has assigned an angel for the protection of each person; Jesus himself confirmed it. “Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven” (Mt 18,10). Here, seeing the face of God includes a hint about intercessory prayer and also a hint that God has given an angel to guard each person. This mediation is not avoiding Jesus, the sole Mediator, as it is done with and through Jesus.

Teaching of the Church

The teaching of the Council of Nicaea, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible”, includes faith in the angels. The Church Fathers and many Councils of the Church have emphasized and clarified this belief. St. Augustine has made a short but comprehensive definition that “the angels are spirits in nature and messengers in their mission”.

The Council of Braga, Portugal, in 561 A.D. proclaimed that the angels are the creatures of God but not part of God. Based on Job 38, 4-7, the Church teaches that they were created

before the creation of man and the universe, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ... On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?” (Job 38, 4-7).

In 1215 A.D., the Lateran Council IV taught about the creation of the angels. Pope Gregory I taught in 600 A.D. that the angels have intelligence and knowledge that surpass human beings. Through the Apostolic Letter “*Humani Generis*”, Pope Pius XII, in 1960 taught about the personality of the angels.

The Bible is the basis for the teaching on the angels in the Catholic Church. The teaching about the angels is presented in Nos. 328-336 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The following is a summary of this teaching:

Scripture and Tradition teach the existence of spiritual, non-corporeal beings (angels). While seeing the face of God, they also are his messengers who “hearken to the voice of his Word” (St. Augustine). Angels are personal, immortal, spiritual beings who have intelligence and will. By their glory, they surpass all visible creatures. Christ is the center of the angelic world because “in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible” (Col 1:16). The angels are messengers of his saving plan. “Are they not all ministers sent forth to serve?” (Heb 1:14). The service of the angels was made available to Jesus from conception to resurrection.

The Church benefits from the help of angels in all her activities. At funerals, the angels are asked to lead the deceased into Paradise. All believers have a guardian angel who watches them from conception to death. Angels surround all human life with their care.

There is a guardian angel for each of the faithful, as guide and protector from birth to death. They intercede for the person entrusted to him/her before God. Man is called to offer ceaseless praise and worship to God with the angels in heaven. We can have a foretaste of this heavenly bliss with God and the angels on earth when one surrenders with joy to the will of God.

12

SATAN, DEVIL, EVIL SPIRITS

“These signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16, 17-18).

This was the promise the Risen Lord gave to the Apostles when He commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel all over the world. Exorcising evil spirits was the most convincing sign for those who listened to the Apostles. The poison of snakes and illness were presented as part of the possession by the evil spirits. Hence, exorcism became an essential part of Evangelization.

St. Mark recorded that one of the aims of selecting the Apostles was exorcising evil spirits. “He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons” (Mk 3, 14-15). Even during the life of Jesus when He sent out the Apostles for Evangelization, one of the most important missions entrusted to them was casting out demons (Lk 9,1; Mt 10, 8) and they performed that mission successfully (Mk 6, 13; Lk 10,7). The Acts of the Apostles has recorded that the disciples continued to perform this mission after the Ascension of Jesus (Acts 5, 16; 8, 7; 19, 12).

Before sending out disciples to cast out evil spirits, Jesus performed exorcism many times. It was an integral part of the Good News Jesus proclaimed (Mt 8, 16; Mk 1, 27; Lk 6, 18; 7, 21). This was further clarified in the proclamation by St. Peter at the house of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem” (Acts 10, 38-39). Exorcism was one of the good deeds Jesus performed.

All these examples make one thing clear, that Jesus cast out evil spirits and commanded the Apostles to continue to do so, as one of their major duties. It was intrinsically related to the Good News of the Kingdom of God. But, who is Satan or the devils? What is their nature? What do they do to people? How are they being cast out? Today various answers are given to such questions.

Some Christians claim that the souls of those who died in a state of sin, would come back, possess people and torment them physically and mentally. There are some who think that what is recorded in the Bible as evil spirits cast out from people were really these roaming souls of the dead sinners. People possessed by the souls of those who died in sickness or with physical handicap, would show the same illness and the same physical deformity. Examples from the Bible, such as the woman who became sick by the possession of a sick soul (Lk 13, 11) and the dumb man who was possessed by a dumb spirit (Lk 11, 14) are pointed out as proof for this theory..

Superstitions and imaginary stories have created many distorted concepts about evil spirits. Some of the T.V. serials and ghost movies have helped to increase this fear about evil spirits. Even some of the incidents in the Bible are being

misinterpreted leading to superstitions. In this situation it is important to study what the Bible and the Church teaches about the evil spirits.

The Power of Evil

All people at all times would have had some negative experiences or illnesses during their lifetime. People experience mortal illness, contagious diseases, financial loss, broken relationships, increasing hostility etc. Such negative experiences are as old as humanity. All these evil experiences weaken life and finally make people surrender to death. How can we understand this?

Mischief of gods

Though the experience of suffering is universal, interpretations given to it differ. In the beginning, people believed that evil was the work of God. They projected their own behavior onto God and considered that all the negative experiences were created by God. People believed that there are many gods who enjoy making people suffer in various ways. They considered themselves as instruments in the hands of gods who did not have any sense of morality.

The ancient people saw the natural forces such as wind, sea, rain, lightning and thunder, sun, moon, stars etc. as gods and attributed to those gods the calamities caused by these forces. Almost all the ancient religions believed that these natural forces controlled lives and fate of people. . Some still nurture such a belief. People considered all evil experiences as caused by these gods and resigned themselves to their fate.

Attempt to please gods

Some people began to think that by doing what is pleasing to these gods, they could escape calamities in life. So, people

began to offer sacrifices and goods to them to avoid the misfortunes happening to them and thus succeed in life. They believed that the gods were like human beings and would be pleased with food and drinks such as alcohol, meat, grains, flowers, fruits etc. At times they sacrificed even human beings. They did this with the conviction that if the gods were pleased they would bless them and if they were displeased they would cause misfortunes. Hence, they tried to please the gods and avoid doing anything that would make them angry. In case they failed to please a god, they would do all that was needed to remedy their anger. We see this attitude in many of the ancient religious practices.

Two gods

The concept that the same god would grant good and evil slowly became illogical. It led to the belief that there are two gods, one responsible for the good and another responsible for the evil. Just as light and darkness, good and bad existed. Slowly they began to call the god of good, “God” and the god of evil, “Satan”. Almost all the ancient religions preserved such a concept. This was most evident in the Persian religions. Its influence is seen even today.

In many countries such as India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, people assumed that the gods of good and evil are two gods with equal power and they are eternal. They believed that the conflict between these two forces controlled the world. These gods took turns winning battles and humanity remained as the helpless victim. The view of evil was very powerful and wide spread among the Persians and Greeks. The influence of this concept is visible in the Bible also. As the Bible was formed in the Middle East, the epics and myths prevalent there have influenced the sacred authors who accepted some of these ideas and rejected others which were not compatible with their faith.

One Almighty God

The Bible completely rejects the idea that there are two gods as sources of good and evil. According to the Bible, God Almighty is the creator of all that is visible and invisible. The Jews repeated this faith this many times a day, made scrolls in which this basic concept was written and tied it to their arms and foreheads. The inscription in the scrolls was, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (Dt 6, 4). The first of the “Ten Commandments”, and basis for all the other commandments, was the conviction that there is only One God. It was God who liberated Israel from the land of slavery in Egypt. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20, 2-3).

How does the Bible, that firmly holds the belief in one God, see evil? There is no room for another God when the Bible claims, “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand” (Dt 32, 39). Since there cannot be another god, can we say that it is God who created evil? This is the basic problem discussed in the book of Job. How can there be negative facts in God who is all good?

This problem is discussed in the book of Genesis where the creation of man and his fall are depicted. In six days God created heaven, earth and all the creatures in it. After each day's creation God saw that it was all very good. The creation narrative ends with the statement, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Gen 1, 31).

How did evil come into the world that was all good is explained in the third chapter of the book of Genesis. Influenced by Satan, man disobeyed God and tried to become equal to God.

Through this disobedience, the evil entered the world. As man sinned and moved away from God, he began to experience hostility to and alienation from each other, sickness, famine, hard work etc. and finally death. The one who was responsible for evil coming into the world was fundamentally Satan who appeared in the form of a serpent. “God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world” (Wis 2, 23-24). This verse from the book of Wisdom proclaims this faith.

13

SYMBOLS OF EVIL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The nature of evil is revealed in the Bible gradually, through various symbols.

Serpent

The Bible uses the symbol of the Serpent to present the evil power that led the first man and woman into sin. “The serpent was craftier than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made” (Gen 3, 1). In this passage there nothing is said about Satan or evil. It is much later that the serpent is presented in the bible as the embodiment of evil (Wis 3, 24; Rev. 12, 9).

In the description of the loss of the paradise lost, the serpent is pictured as a wild animal. However, there is a hint about the presence of some unknown evil power behind it. The very fact that it questions the goodness of God, and encouragedsman to act against the plan and project of God points in that direction. Behind the wild animal called “serpent”, there is the shadow of a big, evil force. The serpent was created by God but the author does not say why it stood against God and tempted man to break the command of God. How did this force of evil come about or how did a created being of God became a force of evil?

Satan

In the course of time Satan took the form of the greatest power of evil. It appears as the force of evil 35 times in the New Testament. On the other hand, the Old Testament speaks of Satan only 13 times of which 10 are in the book of Job. In the first two chapters of the book of Job, Satan appears to be one of the angels participating in the meeting of the sons of God (Job 1, 6). The duty of Satan was to go around the world, find out the faults of man and present them to God.

The Hebrew word “Satan” means the one who accuses. Satan appears as an accuser in Zachariah 3, 1-2. These accusations need not be true because his aim was to distance man from God. Satan is presented in this sense when he encouraged King David to take the census of the people of God. “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel” (1 Chr 21, 1). He went one step further in this case, not only to find out man's fault and present them to God but he began to encourage people to do wrong and thus he took on the role of being a tempter. It is in this sense that the serpent is depicted in Gen 3, 1-7 as the tempter.

Evil Spirit - Spirit of Falsehood

The Spirit of the Lord left Saul as he continued to break the command of God. “Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him” (1 Sam 16, 14). This evil spirit in relation to Saul appears again a number of times (1 Sam 16, 15. 16. 23; 18, 10). The spirit of dishonesty that forces man to do wrong has also been sent by the Lord (1 Kgs 22, 19-23). When we say that God is one and creator of all things visible and invisible, it is possible to conclude that the good as well as bad comes from God. God is the primary cause of all being. If one claims that something came from another primary

cause, it will be a second God and that is not acceptable. That is why the sacred author writes that God sent the angel of death, evil spirit, spirit of lies etc. The conviction behind it is that all the forces of good and evil obey God and that God used even the evil spirits for the fulfillment of His plan. This view was purified and clarified in the New Testament.

Gods of Gentiles

There are some other pictures of evil spirits in the Old Testament. There is only one true God and His name is Yahweh. Those who believe this as the truth cannot think of other gods. The other side of this conviction is that the gods worshiped by the Gentiles are not really God. The people of Israel had to take extra care to preserve their belief in Yahweh when they began to live among the Canaanites who worshiped the powers of nature, animals, birds and other creatures. The religious practices of the Canaanites were a constant attraction and temptation for the people of Israel.

The Canaanites used to invite the Israelites to participate in their festivals and religious practices. Accepting the invitation they fell into the temptation to do all that the Gentiles did. There are strong warnings and prohibitions against such practices in the Old Testament. The teaching of the Bible about the gods of the Gentiles was part of this warning. “They made him jealous with strange gods, with abhorrent things they provoked him. They sacrificed to demons, not God, to deities they had never known, to new ones recently arrived, whom your ancestors had not feared” (Dt 32, 16-17). The Hebrew words, “*Ssedhim*” is translated into Greek as “*Daimonia*”. both words are usually translated as demons. “All the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Ps 96, 5). The word idols come from a Hebrew root that is translated into Greek as “*Daimonia*”

which means Satan. “They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons” (Ps 106, 37). What the Gentiles worshiped as gods is not really God. This teaching is repeated many times in the Old Testament.

The prophets spoke with great force against idol worship (Is 44, 9-20; 46, 1-7; Jer 7, 16-20; 29-32; 10, 1-6; Baruch 6). These idols made by human hands can save no one. It is foolish to carry them around and pray to them. Not only that, it is blasphemy against Yahweh.

Strange Creatures

The Gentiles often made their gods in the form of some strange creatures. These creatures had the body of a man but the head of a bird or some animal and were depicted as the gods of the gentiles in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan. The list of their gods included many wild animals. The Prophets taught that they were not gods but devils. Images of such wild creatures and violent animals are used to depict the total destruction of cities that would lie in ruin. To symbolize the cities that were burned to ashes or destroyed totally, they used the picture of these animals.

This was evident in the description of the approaching disaster of Babylon. “Wild animals will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will live, and there goat-demons will dance” (Is 13, 21). The goat-demons came from Hebrew origin and in Greek they are called *Daimonia* which means devils. While talking about the destruction of Edom, in Greek, instead of wild goats, the word *Daimonia* (demons) was used. “Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, goat-demons shall call to each other; there too Lilith shall repose, and find a place to rest” (Is 34, 14). All these wild animals were seen as gods and that is why the sacred author called them demons.

Destruction - Plague

Often it was considered that contagious diseases and disasters that kill off people were caused by the devils. People who walked in the desert at noon often died of sunstroke. In ancient times, there was a common belief that the devils walk around at night. The reflection of this fear is seen in the Psalms. “You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday” (Ps 91, 5-6). Here, what was translated as destruction came from Hebrew, and in Greek it was written *Daimonion* (demon). The Greek translation of the Bible has a tendency to name all the natural forces such as illnesses, birds and animals that cause problems for people as demonic powers or demons. The ideas about devils that existed among the Greeks has influenced this tendency.

Azazel

Besides Satan and devil, there are other names to indicate the power of evil. On the Day of Atonement all the sins of the people are put on a lamb which was then sent to the desert. The book of Leviticus says that this lamb should be given to Azazel (Lv 16, 8. 10. 26). The name Azazel appears in the Bible only in these three verses. In many of the English versions this lamb is called “Scapegoat”. The Bible does not make clear anything more about Azazel. According to the Bible Azazel is a person or force that receives the scapegoat that carries the sins of the people. In the book of Enoch, while describing the sin and punishment of the angels, Azazel appears. According to the command received from God, the Archangel Raphael locks up Azazel in a dark hole in the desert (Enoch 10, 5-7). This description about Azazel points to the belief about the origin of evil spirits.

Asmodeus

This is the name of an evil spirit that appears in the book of Tobit. This evil spirit caused the death of Sarah's seven husbands one after the other, during their wedding night. With the help of the Archangel Raphael, Tobias casts out this evil spirit (Tobit 3, 8. 17; 6, 7. 13-17; 8, 3). In the Greek version "*Asmodeus*" is described as *Daimonion Poneron*, meaning evil spirit. It was Raphael who bound and put Azazel in the dark hole and also caused the exorcism of *Asmodeus* from Sarah. In the book of Enoch, Raphael appears to be the angel who gives healing to the people. *Azazel* and *Asmodeus* are demons who cause mortal illness. Here we can see an indication to the relationship between illness and possession of evil spirits depicted in the New Testament.

Souls of the Dead

The Canaanites used to seek the help of Mediums to summon the souls of the dead to know hidden secrets. They believed that the dead were resting in the tombs or *Sheol* and they could be consulted them with the help of the Medium who would use magic and secret oaths and through them people could find out what they wanted from the souls. They believed that the souls of the dead would appear to the Mediums and reveal these secrets or the souls would possess the Mediums and speak through them.

It was this belief that prompted Saul to summon Samuel through the help of a Medium woman (1 Sam 28, 11-19). This practice of the Canaanites was a constant temptation for the Israelites and the Bible warned them not to fall into that temptation (Lv 19, 31; 20, 6-27). The same warning was repeated in Dt 18, 11; Is. 8,19; and Is 19, 3. It is not clear if the people of Canaan believed that the souls of the dead became devils, but they believed that those souls could be used for their purposes. The Bible does not say if it was possible to gather information

from ghosts, but forbids even an attempt to do so and teaches that it is a serious sin.

Lucifer

Lucifer is a synonym for Satan who is the embodiment of evil. The literal meaning of the word is “one who carries the light”. This name appears for the first time in the Latin translation of the Bible made by St. Jerome, called “*Vulgata*”. It was used while presenting the Prophecy of Isaiah regarding the fall of the King of Babylon. Isaiah wrote of the King of Babylon, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!” (Is 14, 12). When it was translated into Latin, it became “Lucifer who rose at dawn”.

Prophet Isaiah was speaking from Israel and for him Babylon was in the East. Babylon attacked and established authority over the peoples making strategic use of armed power. The King was filled with pride who challenged God and the prophet depicts him as the personification of pride (Is 14, 3-23). Babylon is seen as a symbol of pride and one that challenged the power of God from the time of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) to the fall prophesied in the book of Revelation (Rev 18, 1-2). In 587 B.C. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and burned down the Temple. That might have been the reason why Babylon is made the symbol of pride in the Bible.

Though Isaiah is talking about a kingdom and a King, there are many attributes that are beyond human power. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star (Lucifer), son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly

on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High'. But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit" (Is 14, 12-15).

"I will make myself like the Most High" is the climax of the description about babylon. The serpent said the same thing to Eve in Paradise, "You will become like God" (Gen 3, 5). In the final analysis, all the sins are caused by the rejection of God and an attempt to become equal to God. However, the resolve to become like the Most High was a desire beyond human capacity. According to the book of Revelation and many of the Apocryphal books, being thrown into the depths of Sheol is the punishment given to Satan and his companions (Rev. 12, 8; 20, 2). It was in the light of all these that the Fathers of the Church depicted the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the fall of Babylon as the fall of Lucifer, the head of devils and evil forces.

Such descriptions are also seen in the book of Ezekiel. A suiper-human power is described in this passage about the glory and fall of the King of Tyre. "Tyre, which sits at the entrance to the sea, merchant of the peoples on many coastlands, Thus says the Lord God: O Tyre, you have ,I am perfect in beauty (Ezek 27, 3). Because your heart is proud and you have said, I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas, yet you are but a mortal, and no god, though you compare your mind with the mind of a god" (Ezek 28, 2). "You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering,... With an anointed cherub as guardian I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you" (Eze 28, 13-15). Just as in the prophecy of Isaiah about Babylon, in the case of Ezekiel's prophecy about Tyre, the fall of an angel is alluded to rather than

just a king or a country. Such passages were also used to describe the origin of Satan.

Gog - Magog

Gog, of the land of Magog, described in Ezekiel (38-39) is also considered as a symbol of Satan. The Bible sees that all the Kings and Emperors who claim to be god, demanded worship, oppress the people and force them to idol worship were considered instruments and forces that work against God. It was from this point of view that Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Tyre and Rome are seen as the manifestation of evil. From these descriptions we can gather some information about the origin and development of the idea of Satan.

14

SYMBOLS OF EVIL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

To indicate the power of evil, the New Testament uses many names such as Satan, devil, evil spirits etc. Though they might all point to evil, the reality behind the names is not always the same. Here, an attempt is made to analyze the New Testament teaching about evil.

Devil - Demons

In the New Testament, to indicate the power of evil more than any other names, the word devil is used. What is translated as devil in English is derived mainly from the Greek words *daimonion* and *diabolos*. In the original texts, there is a great difference between these two words. In the New Testament the word *daimonion* occurs 63 times and it appears mostly in the Synoptic Gospels. It is used in the singular and plural forms. These evil spirits enter into persons and make them sick physically and mentally. They are spirits and have great power. The people of the New Testament times were aware of their nature and activities. Knowing about them helps us to understand many of the usages in the New Testament.

Demons - View of the Greeks

The Greek word *daimonion*, plural *Daimonia*, has to be understood against the cultural background and the world view of the people among whom this word originated. The Greeks believed that the gods decide and control every activity and function of man. In the beginning they used to call gods, *daimonion*. There were gods who loved and hated people. Some of them enjoyed troubling the people with natural disasters such as floods, storms, and manmade troubles such as wars, illness and accidents. At the same time there were gods who tried to bring blessings such as good climate, prosperity, health.

While St. Paul was preaching in the streets of Athens, the capital of Greece, some commented, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" (Acts 17, 18). What is translated here as "foreign divinities" is *daimonia* in the Greek original. Their thought was that Paul was propagating new *demons*. For them there was no difference between the gods and demons.

The word *daimon* is derived from the Greek verb *daiomai* which meant divide or share. The name might have originated from the thought that they shared a home with the dead people in the netherworld. They were something like half-gods, part human and part god. Since it was believed that they were capable of helping and hurting, people practiced magic to please and influence them.

These spiritual beings called *Daimonia* lived mostly in the atmosphere close to the earth. They would possess human beings and make them physically and mentally ill. They would cause disasters such as storms and floods and cause agitation in the sea that would bring about ship wrecks. There are various theories about their origin. Some consider that they had their origin in ancient times like the other gods. Many people believed that

they were the souls of the dead, especially those who died in accidents and those who were not buried properly. It was believed that these souls are roaming around with revenge and cause disasters.

In the Gospels

The Greek culture had great influence on the people of Palestine during the time of Jesus. The Jews who are monotheists saw the Greek gods (Daimonia) as devils, the power of evil. All the same, they too believed that these could harm people and cause problems in nature. We must understand the incidents of possession and exorcism recorded in the Gospels in the light of these convictions.

The religious beliefs of the Greeks are not accepted as such by the Gospels. Even when acknowledging the possibility that evil spirits could possess people and make them sick in body and mind, they did not attribute all illnesses to the work of the evil spirits. But the difference between the two, possessions and physical illnesses, are very thin and often difficult to understand.

Some possessed people liked to roam around burial grounds, wilderness and wastelands; this paved the way to think that they were possessed by the souls of the dead. However, the Bible never supports the concept that the souls of the dead would become devils or possess anyone. Here the view of the Bible is totally different from that of the Greeks. The Gospels do agree with the Greek idea that the devils, Daimonia, are considered unclean spirits. There was no difference between either a devil or an unclean spirit. For example, “A man who had the spirit of an unclean demon” (Lk 4, 33). Hence, what is said about them in the Gospels shall be discussed later.

Unclean Spirits - Evil Spirits

Recently even some Christians seem to believe that the souls of those who died in a state of serious sin are called unclean spirits. This belief that was common in many of the ancient religions is not accepted by the Bible. The reason why they were called unclean spirits might be to show the difference between the evil spirits and the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. The evil spirits distance themselves from God and try to pull people away from God. They are evil by nature and try to lead others to do evil. In this sense, the Bible also uses the word “evil spirit”. Since they are able to know the secrets the people do not know, they are also called spirits who prophecy the future or spirits of divination (Acts 16,16) and because they cause problems to the speech and hearing of man, they are called “deaf and dumb spirits” (Lk 11, 14).

Activities of Demons

The Gospels present the main work of the demons as possessing people and subjecting them to various illnesses and finally destroying them. At a time when there was little knowledge about mental illness and its treatment, every illness, especially epilepsy, hysteria, depression, mental disorders and other mortal illnesses were considered to be the result of possessions. As medical science and the science of mind, psychology, developed, a greater understanding of illnesses and their treatments became available to people. Many illnesses that were attributed to possessions were physical illness which could be treated by medicine. In the light of this fact, we can gain some insight about possessions from the descriptions of exorcism in the Bible.

Possession by an evil spirit creates radical changes in the character and behavior of a person. The man who was sitting calm in the Synagogue screamed at the sight of Jesus and said

things that were unknown to ordinary people. Saying things that are contradictory and pretending to have multi personalities are signs of possession (Mk 1, 23-26). It is the devil that causes man to be alienated from other people and roam around in the wilderness and cause problems in society (Mk 5, 3-5). They caused physical and mental torture (Acts 10, 38; Mt 15, 22).

The Bible presents devils as single individuals and also as a joint force. When there are many they operate under the leadership of the strong one and cause havoc in the person and in society. Their operation is depicted in the Gospels like that of a king ruling a country. Jesus brought the Kingdom of God to overcome this evil kingdom of the devil.

They knew why Jesus came into the world but that was not known to the ordinary people. “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk 1, 24). The devils knew that with the coming of Jesus their domination was ending and that was evidenced in their shouts and screams, “What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” (Mk 1, 24; Mt 8, 29).

Exorcism

The contemporaries of Jesus had certain awareness about the devils that possess people and how to have them exorcised. The exorcisms included long and complex ceremonies. In the activities of Jesus also exorcism played a major role. But, the way Jesus operated was totally different from other exorcists. Evil spirits were exorcised simply by the command of Jesus with authority. People were surprised by the way Jesus cast out devils. “They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, What is this? A new teaching— with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (Mk 1, 27).

At the beginning itself Jesus proclaimed that He came to free the people from the dominion of Satan. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4, 18-19). Jesus made the Apostles participate in this process of liberation (Mt 10, 1; Mk 6, 13) and asked them to continue it till the end of the world (Mk 16, 15-17; Acts 26, 17-18). Jesus saw that casting out demons marked the end of the dominion of evil and the beginning of the Kingdom of God. “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Mt 12, 28).

The Evangelists present exorcism as one of the important activities of Jesus and they narrate it in connection with the proclamation of the Gospel. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News” (Mk 1, 15). This was the sum total of the Gospel. Luke expanded it a little more (Lk 4, 18-19). Jesus announced in the synagogue of Nazareth that He has come to proclaim the Good News to the poor. It was a proclamation of liberation from all the evil forces that keep human beings enslaved. It could be summarized in one single word “Kingdom of God”.

The exorcism of the evil spirits was the visible sign of the establishment of the Kingdom of God. What does this exorcism mean? The liberation Jesus brought could be understood only in the light of the common vision of the Bible that the fundamental cause of all the suffering of man is sin and the subsequent domination of Satan. Exorcism of evil spirits was intrinsically related to this dominion of Satan over the human beings.

The contemporaries of Jesus attributed all the sicknesses

they could not identify or find a cause for as created to the possession of evil spirits. This belief was formed by the influence of Greek culture that became popular in Palestine since the time of Alexander. Jesus presented His teaching in the light of people's convictions and knowledge. It is not difficult to understand the simple logic that if the illness was caused by the possession of an evil spirit, the person would get well with exorcism.

One who was possessed by a blind and mute spirit would be able to see and speak only after the evil spirit was cast out of them. The people believed that the symptoms of illness which appeared in the sick person were caused by the evil spirit who possessed him, and so overcoming the illness meant casting out that evil spirit who created those symptoms. People who did not know why one was affected by epilepsy or hysteria were convinced that it was caused by the possession of evil spirits. When the evil spirits were cast out, the person was cured. In short, the people at the time of Jesus saw an essential relationship between healing and exorcism. However, behind this simple view, there lies a deep truth, namely, the relationship between Evangelization and exorcism.

The essence of the Good News Jesus preached is that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Kingdom of God signified rule of God and with that all kinds of slavery comes to an end. The most obvious forms of slavery people experience are illness, famine and marginalization. Death and sin also were part of this slavery. All these sufferings were caused by the very fact that man moved away from God and came under the dominion of Satan. As the Kingdom of God becomes a reality, the rule of Satan and the subsequent slavery ends. Jesus explained the surrender of devils as a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God (Mt 12, 28; Lk 10, 19-20). The fact that exorcisms were done through the

proclamation of the Gospel provides some other insights.

Evangelization, to become effective, the listeners have to be ready to believe and convert. Conversion is a process that renews the entire life of a person. Change takes place in the areas of conviction, action, vision, life style and decisions. The meaning and aim of conversion is to become a new person which comes about through faith. Or this is the renewal process executed by the Holy Spirit in a person who believes in the Gospel.

No devil can touch such a person who has gone through this conversion process because he has moved from the dominion of evil to the Kingdom of God. While explaining his conversion experience St. Paul makes this clear, “To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26, 18). Those who turn to God are liberated from the dominion of Satan; that means that the person is freed from the confinement imposed by Satan. This is the aim of exorcism. This means more than just healing from an illness or symptoms of illness.

Liberation takes place and it should be so, on the level of faith. False faith and superstitions should be eradicated through Evangelization. Those who believe in God do not have to fear the power of evil. Hence, the casting out of the devil should take place, first in the areas of knowledge and faith in individuals and societies. The wrong convictions and fears which have taken root in the mind and collective unconscious should be brought to the conscious level so that people are helped to understand the futility and lack of logic in them. Then, liberation can take place and this will happen through Evangelization. For those who believe, “These signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they

will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16, 17-18). Giving sight to the blind was the center of the mission statement Jesus made at Nazareth (Lk 4, 18-19). This sight signifies not only physical sight but also coming to know the truth. While talking about truth, Jesus said “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8, 31-32). By knowing the truth and believing it, one would become liberated from all kinds of slavery and that is true freedom.

Many who exorcise, without knowing the deep insights presented in the Gospels regarding casting out evil spirits, are pushing people into more superstitions and fear. Exorcisms conducted through gimmicks and black magic tend to manipulate people who have become psychologically weak through illness and financial loss. They push the poor into more poverty and the weak into more paralysis. No devil can harm one who believes in the Gospel and the words of Jesus (Mk 16, 17-18). One must be vigilant about false prophets who come to exorcise and promise health and wealth.

Teaching of the Church

Jesus authorized the Apostles to cast out demons and that authority still exists in the Church and she uses it. The Catholic Church takes the exorcism of evil spirits seriously and has given clear instructions to distinguish mental illness from real demonic possessions. This teaching is given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church No 1673, quoted below:

“The solemn exorcism, called ‘a major exorcism,’ can be performed only by a priest, with the permission of the Bishop. The priest must proceed with prudence, strictly observing the rules established by the Church. Exorcism

is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to his Church. Illness, especially psychological illness, is a very different matter; treating this is the concern of medical science. Therefore, before an exorcism is performed, it is important to ascertain that one is dealing with the presence of the Evil One, and not an illness”(CCC § 1673).

A priest may be appointed to the office of exorcist either on a stable basis or for a particular occasion by the diocesan Bishop. In either case, the exorcist should work closely with and under the direction of the Bishop.

Regarding exorcism the Latin Church has given clear laws. Canon Law of the Latin Church, No. 1172. § 1. ***“No one can perform exorcisms legitimately upon the possessed unless he has obtained special permission from the local ordinary. § 2. The local ordinary is to give this permission only to a presbyter who has piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life”***.

Canon Law for Eastern Oriental (CCEO) says nothing about exorcism. No direction is given regarding this subject in the particular directives of the Syro - Malabar Church. There are no prayers of exorcism given in the books for official prayers for Liturgy. All that it has is the question and answer to the effect of renouncing Satan, in the context of baptism, but that does not deal with the subject under discussion which is the exorcism of demons. Since the formation of the official prayers in this Rite is not yet complete, prayers of exorcism in the Latin Church are being used. Regarding exorcism being conducted in the retreat centers and prayer groups more study and reflection are needed.

15

SATAN

Bible, especially the New Testament, presents Satan as the impediment of evil and head of demons. Satan is different from the unclean spirits and demons.

Various Names

The power of evil is known by various names, reflecting the various aspects of its nature and activity.

Satan

We have seen this name when dealing with the Old Testament concept. The word Satan has its origin from the Hebrew word “Satana” which means oppose, accuse, calumniate etc. Hence the word Satan can mean “enemy”, “accuser”. In the New Testament this word appears 35 times.

Diablos - Devil

The word devil is the translation of the Greek word *diablos* which in turn derives from the Greek verb *Dia-ballein* which means “throw in between or in the middle”. The work of *diablos* is mainly creating conflict, make people fight with each other and produce chaos with growing bitterness. The words Satan and *diablos* are used only in the singular form as there is only one Satan and both words mean the same reality. Satan

came from Hebrew and *diablos* came from Greek. Although in its origin there is only one Satan and one devil, in translations often the plural form “devils” is used. The word *diablos* occurs 37 times in the New Testament; only once is it used in plural form, and that refers to the gossipers (1 Tim 3, 11) as an adjective.

Beelzebul

This name occurs in the Gospels seven times. The Canaanites worshiped a god called ***Beelzebub*** which meant “Lord of the high mountain”. The Israelites hated and despised the Gentiles' gods and to insult them, they referred to Beelzebub using the name ***Beelzebul*** which means the “*Heap of cow dung*” or “*Lord of the flies*”. The Gospels present Beelzebul as the head of demons. The Jews accused Jesus of working with the help of Beelzebul but Jesus demonstrated the foolishness of their accusation (Mt 12, 24-26). From the response of Jesus it is clear that the name Beelzebul was a synonym of Satan.

Wicked - Ho Poneros

The word “Evil” was used many times in the New Testament to indicate the power of evil. Satan, the source of all wickedness, is called “Evil” 15 times in the New Testament. “Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one” (Mt 5, 37). In the prayer taught by Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, one of the requests was to save us from the wicked, “Deliver us from the evil one” (Mt 6, 13). The words “wicked” and “evil” were used to mean the same thing. It comes from the Greek word “*poneros*” which means “gone rotten” and “evil”. When it is used in a sentence it is not clear if it is a person or adjective about a person. Also, it is not clear if it is masculine, feminine or neutral. Those who saw it as neutral used the word “evil” while those who saw it as masculine used the word

“wicked”. When considering the meaning of this word in the gospels as a whole, “save us from the evil one” appears to be the right translation. Evil is an interpretation. What is being discussed here is “Satan” the root cause of all evil.

Enemy - Ekthros

The word enemy is very rarely used to indicate Satan. This word is the translation of the Greek word *Ekthros* which means the one who hates and the one who is constantly trying to destroy. Jesus made it clear that the enemy is Satan when he said: “The enemy who sowed them is the devil” (Mt 13, 39). In the parable of the weeds to indicate “Satan” the words “enemy”, “wicked” and “Satan” were used. When Jesus was giving power to the disciples over all the poisonous creatures, the enemy was Satan. “See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you” (Lk 10, 19). The real enemy of God and His Kingdom is Satan.

Mammon

This is another synonym of Satan, used in the New Testament four times to indicate Satan who places himself in the place of God and demand honor and worship (Mt 6, 24; Lk 16, 9. 11.13). The Aramaic word “Mammon” means riches, wealth, financial gain etc. It indicates that the greed to accumulate wealth will distance people from God. When St. Paul equates greed for wealth with idol worship (Col 3, 5) he is teaching the same truth. Today wealth might be the most powerful force that keeps people away from God. Wealth that is not shared creates a huge obstacle in the journey to the Kingdom of God just like the “eye of the needle” in front of the “camel” (Mk 10, 25).

Ruler - Arkon

Besides the title Prince of the demons, used in Mt 9,34,

Satan is referred to also as the Ruler of the world or the “authority of this world”. According to St. John, Jesus called three times Satan the ruler of this world (Jn 12, 31; 14, 30; 16, 11). In all these instances Satan is depicted as the one who ruled over this world until the coming of Jesus, but lost his power as Jesus defeated him totally through His death and Resurrection.

Belial

This is another term used for Satan; it appears only once in the New Testament, “What agreement does Christ have with Belial?” (2 Cor 6, 15). In the Old Testament this Hebrew word appears many times with different shades of meanings according to the situation. Usually it refers to people who had no moral values, crooks or scoundrels (Dt 13, 13). The literal meaning of the word is “one with no value”, outlaws, immoral etc. (Jud 19, 22). The Apocryphal books that were popular during the New Testament times use this word quite often, but some times it is written with the wrong spelling “Beliar”. In all these descriptions, Belial appears as the head of the demons. Belial is Satan, the opponent of Jesus.

Man of Anarchy

Another word for Satan is “Man of Anarchy”. St. Paul warned about this one who would appear before the end of the world to lead people astray, encourage people to do evil things and lead them to total disaster (2 Thes 2, 3-12). This work is closely related to “Belial” which means one who rejects all the laws. The Greek word means the one who rejects all the laws, a man of lawlessness.

Anti-Christ

This is another name used for Satan, referring to the one who would lead the people astray and force them to do evil. The

name “Anti-Christ” appears only in the letters written by St. John (1 Jn 2, 18. 22; 4, 3; 2 Jn 7). From the way it is presented, it is not clear if it the author intends Satan or his agents. We can see indications of one who would lead people astray in the warning Jesus gave about false prophets, false Christ (Mk 13, 22). In the book of Revelation Satan appears as an opposing Christ and an enemy of Jesus. Besides these there are other names used to indicate the leader of the devils such as Liar (Jn 8, 45); Murderer (Jn 8, 44); Tempter (Mt 4, 1-11; 6, 13); Serpent (Rev. 12, 9); etc. All of these titles indicate the power of evil.

16

WORKS OF SATAN

The view of the Bible regarding the works of Satan is evident from the names listed above. According to the Bible the aim of Satan is the total destruction of man and this is accomplished by distancing people from God and from each other. He accuses and presents people as guilty ones before God and leads them into eternal death by separating them from God. His work started in Paradise by leading the first parents to sin and continues even today. Next we turn our attention to the work of Satan as presented in the Gospels. This knowledge is essential to be vigilant about the deceptions Satan would use so that one can escape from the snares laid by them.

Temptation

“Tempter” is an appropriate word to indicate all the activities of Satan. Temptation can be defined in quite simple terms as an urge to do evil. The purpose of temptation is to distance people from God who is the supreme good and source of goodness, by picturing God as an enemy, and infusing the desire into human hearts the desire to become equal to God, or another God. Hence temptation can be considered as a desire to do something forbidden or commit sin.. All these together form the essence of sin. Hence it can be called temptation to fall into sin and “tempter” is the most suitable name for Satan.

Temptations of Jesus

The very first action of Satan recorded in the New Testament is the temptation the devil planned against Jesus who was anointed to accomplish the salvation of humanity. The temptations were not limited to the forty days in the desert (Mk 1,12-13). Jesus himself has reminded the disciples that He had to face temptations of Satan throughout His public life (Lk 22,28). In the wilderness Satan came directly to tempt Jesus and later he did it through other people in various forms such as the Pharisees who came seeking a sign (Mk 8,11); the crowd who tried to make Him king (Jn 6, 14-15); Herod who ordered Him to leave Galilee (Lk 13, 31-33); Peter who tried to persuade Him to move away from the path of the Cross (Mt 16, 22-23); Judas who betrayed Him (Lk 22, 3-53); and the leaders who challenged Him to come down from the Cross (Mk 15, 28-32). All these events reveal the different faces of the Tempter.

Trick of Temptation

Though temptation is the encouragement to do evil, it does not appear as evil. Satan presents evil wrapped in virtues. Jesus was fasting for forty days and he was feeling the dire need for food when Satan appeared in front of Him with the idea of making bread from the stones. Jesus, as Son of God, could turn the stones into bread and satisfy his hunger. Why should He suffer needlessly? Satan presented it as a good thing. Satisfy not only his own hunger, but also the hunger of all the people. Save the hungry world by giving them bread. What an easy way to accomplish salvation! Jesus recognized it as a temptation to make people the slaves of bread. In all the temptations Jesus encountered, evil was presented as good.

The Pharisees, who came asking for a sign, approached Jesus

with the pretension that they were ready to accept Him. But Jesus knew that they were not ready for conversion and all they wanted was to satisfy their curiosity to see a miracle. The attempt of the disciples to dissuade Jesus from the path of the Cross was done with good intention but Peter did not realize that he was placing an obstacle in the plan of salvation. The people who challenged Jesus hanging on the Cross were not ready to believe. In all these places we can see the temptation to take the easy way for selfish motives rather than fulfill the will of God. This is evident in the prayer in Gethsemane, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mk 14, 36). Jesus overcame the temptations by submitting His will to the will of the Father. Thus, He corrected the failure of human beings that started with Adam and Eve defeating Satan.

Temptations of the Apostles

Satan who tried to turn Jesus, the Son of God, against God did not leave His disciples alone. Jesus had warned them about this, “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Lk 22, 31-32). All the Apostles faced severe temptation during the passion and death of Jesus. The final act in the drama of Jesus, the passion, started when Satan entered Judas (Lk 22, 3; Jn 13, 27-30). This is the only instance, reported in the Bible, of Satan entering a person. Only in this situation, did the Bible ever record that Satan entered a person. This was not a case that could be exorcised. Satan who entered Judas did not make him sick but made him the enemy of Jesus and paved the way for his suicide.

Jesus has warned that the Church would encounter temptation

all through her existence. The of Acts of the Apostles, Epistles and the Book of Revelation record the temptations faced by the Church, the faithful. The history of the Church has proved this. While saying farewell to the Elders of the Church in Ephesus, St. Paul emphasized one thing, “Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20, 28-29). Through symbols, the book of Revelation presents the picture of Satan who could not defeat Jesus, became furious and turned to persecute His disciples. “Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Rev. 12, 12). St. Peter has also said the same thing about Satan, “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith” (1 Peter 5, 8).

Satan tempts to people by distorting the truth and presenting evil as something good. This does not make people sick but creates wrong ideas and desires in the mind and encourages them to act accordingly. The Bible warns that he would use the communication media for this purpose, “I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” (Rev 16, 13-14). The propaganda machinery of mass communication is depicted as "frogs" who keep on making noise all the time. This is a symbolic presentation of the warning Jesus gave about false prophets (Mt 24, 23-26). The same idea

is presented also in the parable of the weeds (Mt 13, 24-30. 36-43)

The word *diablos* means one who creates conflicts and causes divisions. It is the work of Satan that causes conflicts in homes and communities. No community or society is exempt from this. It has not been long since a Bishop said in public that the Church in Kerala is being persecuted by Satan. The persecution has not stopped but only recently increased. The Christian Churches are not above temptation and persecution. The root cause of these clashes in the name of religion, caste and ideologies are instigated by Satan who is the murderer and father of lies. He brings about fights between people at all levels.

Satan is trying to prevent, at all cost, the Kingdom of God becoming a reality on earth. He creates obstacles for people to receive the Word of God. “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart” (Mt 13, 19). Creating obstacles in the way of those who proclaim the Good News Evangelists is another trick he uses. The troubles St. Paul had during his apostolic journeys are examples of this (Acts 13, 4-12). St. Paul warned his disciples about the snares of Satan (1Tim 3, 7), traps of the devil (Eph 6, 16) and Satan who appears like an angel (2 Cor 11, 14).

Defeated Enemy

The New Testament emphasizes that Satan is an enemy defeated by Jesus even when he appears to be strong. The defeat of Satan by Jesus is the subject of discussion in the story about the disarmed strong man (Lk 11, 21-22) and about the dragon who took his stand on the sand of the seashore (Rev 12,18). The words of Jesus give encouragement to his disciples: “I have

said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (Jn 16, 33).

In the temptation in the wilderness Jesus attained victory over Satan. Jesus announced, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning” (Lk 10, 18). It was because of this victory that the disciples of Jesus were given power to exorcise evil spirits and to attain victory over all the powers of evil (Lk 10, 19). Just as the riches are taken away from the disarmed strong man (Lk 11, 12), the disciples liberate people from the domain of Satan and bring them into the Kingdom of God.

It was through his death and resurrection that Jesus completed His victory over Satan. The warning, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out” (Jn 12, 31), points to the glorification of Jesus. The book of Revelation presents a vivid picture of Jesus defeating Satan. The defeated Satan is cast out from heaven (Rev 12, 7-9) imprisoned for one thousand years (Rev 20, 1-3) and finally thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev 20, 10). These are the signs of defeat Satan suffers by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

17

BE VIGILANT OF THE TEMPTER

Though defeated, Satan has not been totally disabled. All of humanity has not yet participated in the victory of Jesus. Satan has been imprisoned but he can still lead people to sin and destruction. Only at the end of the world will all evil be wiped away and all in the netherworld together with Satan will be thrown into the “lake of fire and sulfur” (Rev. 20, 10). Until that happens, Satan will continue to function on earth. Why God has allowed this is a question to which we have no complete answer. One of the reasons might be the respect for the freedom of man to choose. No matter what the reason is, Jesus and the Apostles have warned the faithful to keep vigilant not to fall into the snares of Satan.

Recognize

Recognizing the actions and temptations of Satan is the first step to gain victory over them. It is one’s personal decision and choice to fall into the dominion of Satan, through Satan worship, black magic, black mass etc. It is easy to recognize the temptation to do so. In the same way evil spirits possessing people and making them physically and mentally ill are also relatively easy to detect and cast them out through exorcism. Today it has become fashionable to deny the existence of Satan, even by some theologians. Some try to interpret everything in the light of science,

social science, and psychology claiming that there is nothing beyond our personal inclinations.

Through denial of his existence Satan does not cease to exist but gains more power. The evil one, Jesus named as murderer and father of lies, has gained a strong grip on the universal society. The attempt to establish peace and freedom seems to fail miserably and the world is tormented by war and terrorism. Violence and suicide are increasing steadily. All these cannot be explained by mere logic or natural reasons. The work of the murderer and liar can be seen behind these evil phenomena.

Satan's Groups

St. Paul has warned about Satan who appears like an angel (2 Cor 11, 14). The book of Revelation talks about people who offer worship to Satan (Rev 13, 4.8.15). St. John called those people, who conspired against the followers of Christ, “a synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2, 9). Many Gentiles used to worship Satan as part of their cult. But apart from this, some Christians worshiped Satan during the middle ages. They formed secret sects and had secret places for conducting the worshiping service. By doing so, they tried to seek the help of Satan to get what they wanted and to cause problems to their enemies. These groups have special rules for their services. All that Christians consider as sacred were desecrated by them. Black Mass, during which the Blessed Sacrament is stolen from the Church, is misused and defiled. It was and still is one of their important functions. The Catholic Church took a strong stand against witchcraft and tried to eliminate such Satanic groups and their worship.

Eventually Satan worship dwindled but then revived again in 1966 under the leadership of Anton S. Salve. The movement that started in San Francisco spread among the youth of North America. Doing all that is considered forbidden in society

appeared to be their right and duty. History shows that they would not hesitate to commit any act of violence. As part of their worship they would be involved in free sexual behavior, insulting the Blessed Sacrament and sometimes even sacrificing human beings. They became slaves to drugs, alcohol, and every kind of evil practices. Media reports show that they have increased in number and have become a threat to the society.

Youth and even children can be attracted to Satan worship without knowing its true nature and all the ramifications it would cause. They become attracted through certain programs such as music, dance and movies broadcast on certain television channels. The attraction that starts out of curiosity soon becomes an addiction and the participants get into a trap from which they cannot come out. Groups that come together under the pretension of prayer groups have trapped many young people to join this group. Desecrating the Cross and other sacred items, especially the consecrated host (Blessed Sacrament), has become part of Satan worship.

Some movies produced recently seem to encourage Satan worship. With the false notion that they can get the questions for the exams ahead of time, Satanic groups attract children to join their group. There is an increased use of magical instruments such as the “Oiji Board” that would help them to get the answers to the questions by moving coins or some other objects over letters with invisible hands. In the same way, summoning the souls of the dead, to know the future and other secrets, also have increased.

Some practices might appear to be harmless, such as wearing certain symbols on the neck, sticking certain pictures and Tattooing certain figures on the body that have become a fashion among youth. Usually, they tattoo pictures of scorpions or serpents on

their body and wear the symbols of skull and skeleton on their neck. Some wear the cross upside down on the neck or as ear rings. Most of these children, or youth, do not know that all these are instruments used by Satan worshippers to spread their influence.

Satan worshippers are leading the children into a very dangerous situation. They start with innocent curiosity such as the use of medals, tattoos, pictures and magic boards. Then, they gain strength through the abuse of drugs and alcohol and finally move into a stage of no morality to such an extent that they do not mind committing any crime including murder. Thus, they become a big threat to the society. Through this process young people destroy their minds and bodies and endanger their souls. This is an area which demands the immediate attention of parents and political leaders. Parents should be vigilant about the T.V programs children watch, the symbols they wear, the groups with whom they associate, etc. Children must be informed about Satan worship and the dangers of getting involved with it. There are many companies and institutions that propagate Satan worship. Using pictures with tail and horns is one example.

“Oppose all that is good and accept all that is considered as evil and wicked”, that is the mode of behavior for Satan worshippers. They accomplish their undisclosed goals by manipulating the natural attraction of the youth to anything new. Music with rapid beats screams and cultic dances are some of the things the Satan worshipers use to attract the youth.

Subtle Points of Breaking the Commandments

It is rather easy to recognize the temptations against directly breaking the Commandments such as do not kill, do not steal or do not commit adultery. But it becomes difficult to discern the temptation Satan hides in certain actions such as cruelty during

the lawful fight in the war, violent protest against foreign rule, mass murder in the name of blind religious faith.

The warning Jesus gave is significant here. “Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God” (Jn 16, 2). It is not easy to understand that the distorted zeal for one's faith is caused by the temptation of Satan. Once Saul, later Paul, thought that it was his duty to eliminate the followers of Jesus and acted with zeal for that end. Only when he encountered Jesus on the way to Damascus did he realize that his zeal was misplaced. There are thousands of religious fanatics in all religions and they are convinced that killing people of other faiths will be pleasing to their god. They do not know that they are serving Satan, not God.

The commandment not to kill entrusts us with the responsibility to respect the life of all people in every stage of their being. Some think that it is not breaking this commandment when they deny the right to life for the fetus in the womb and the bedridden elderly. The political laws and agencies that promote mercy killing are not aware of the fact that they are acting as instruments of Satan. When the neighbor is starving, spending money for banquets and other luxuries is breaking the commandment, do not kill. Satan presents temptations in a way that it is difficult to detect and that is the snare to catch the souls.

It is easy to recognize stealing as a temptation against the commandment, do not steal. But, many do not consider that making a profit through unjust ways such as bribery, black trade, making duplicate stuff, and tax evasions, are temptations against this commandment in a more subtle way. In the same way trying to take a job, money or position that should go to another person also is a temptation.

Indifference

Another temptation that is difficult to detect is an attitude of indifference toward everything. People lose interest in prayer and other religious practices and slowly stop going to church. Having no interest in anything they slowly move to atheism and become totally cut off from their relationship with God. This is a great temptation faced by many faithful. When a small minority of the people fall into the hands of Satan through religious fanaticism a great many people fall into the temptation of indifference. It is significant to note the warning of Jesus, “You have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev 2, 4).

Not only in the area of faith, but in all areas of community life, can one experience the temptation to remain indifferent. They do not care what happens to others as long as their situation is safe and secure. This is a temptation. When large numbers of people live in utter poverty and some live in luxury with no concern for the poor, this is also part of this attitude of indifference.

The lack of interest in personal relationships is another face of indifference. For very little reason they distance and slowly break the relationship to a point that it could never be repaired. This appears in a strong and dangerous way among family members. Satan uses certain people to sow the seeds of disunity through accusations and misunderstandings and cause a break in their relationships. The aim of the tempter is to scatter.

Martha's Syndrome

So far we have seen the direct and indirect temptations to do evil things. Here, the point of focus is the temptation hidden in the desire to do good. The experience of Martha depicted in the Gospels is an example of this.

Jesus was a friend of the family and Martha and Mary

received Him at home with great joy. Martha was busy preparing the dinner and she felt disturbed about Mary who did no work but sat at the feet of Jesus. She complained to Jesus who responded, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Lk 10, 41-42). Martha was preoccupied with serving Jesus but forgot the fundamental aim of that service. Many pious and zealous religious people can fall into this danger called the Martha Syndrome. Religious and pious people, while working hard day and night, might not find time to pray, communicate to the real Good News, Jesus; like the Apostles who were too busy even to find time to eat (Mk 6, 31).

Education, health care, nursing the sick, social work etc. have been started for the purpose of Evangelization but after a while people seem to get too busy in building up the institution and to keep up the high standard demanded by professional excellence. They forget their real aim of starting the institutions. They may spend much time, pleasing officials to secure recognition and to keep the recognition they got. Sometimes they may be forced to give bribe to get what they need. Those who have taken up great financial obligations might forget to practice charity and to go on the path of mercy by proclaiming the Gospel to the poor.

Increasing the number of institutions and projects has become a huge temptation for the Catholic Church. Institutions are started with dedication and good intention to help people and to proclaim the Gospel creatively, but eventually they become huge obligations and in a way become a counter witness. When priests and religious become preoccupied with the fortification and development of such institutions, Satan might win while Jesus and His message

fail to take root. Unfortunately the projects started with dedication and selfless motivation often become a profit-making endeavor that would lead to the snare of the devil. If and when that happens those responsible for it should try to discern and make proper decisions.

Rationalizing and justifying Sinful Actions

Many things that are against Christian morality seem to have become a matter of human right for many. Homosexuality has become a matter of personal freedom. The new tendencies in sexuality have blurred the distinction between right and wrong. Many things that were considered to be sin until recently, have now become a matter of personal right and so considered permissible. It is difficult to say who motivates people to look at everything with a business mentality. Temptation takes on a new face when morality is decided by the opinion of the majority. Certain things are done by all and so many consider that they are permitted.

False Prophets

Prophets are chosen to communicate the will of God to the people. But all those who claim to be prophets are not real prophets sent by God. In the Old as well as New Testament, there are false prophets who present their imaginations as the revelation of God. Jesus warned us to remain vigilant about such prophets. “False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything” (Mk 13, 22-23).

False prophets present half-truths and superstitions as truths revealed by God. They might not be doing all these things to lead the people astray purposely since they present things that they

are convinced to be the truth. They might confirm it through signs and miracles. Then how do we detect the false prophets? The Bible has discussed this issue in detail, for example, Dt 13, 1-5; 18, 21-22; Jer 28, 7-9. Various norms were given to discern the true prophets. Once, the fulfillment of the prophecies and signs were considered as a proof for true prophets. But time has proven that even false prophets can predict events (Dt. 13, 1-5). Jesus also supported this point. “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.’” (Mt 7, 22-23). If signs and miracles and even the fulfillment of the prophecy are not helpful to detect false prophets, how can one recognize them?

The norms presented in the Bible should be followed to discover true prophets. First of all they should remain faithful to the traditional teachings of the people of God (Dt 13, 1-5). Secondly, they must be leading a just and truthful life (Mt 7, 23). From the fruit of their preaching, they can be detected (Mt 7, 15-20). Those who teach against the faith, rooted in the authentic tradition of the Church, should be seen only as false prophets. The Holy Spirit gives the gift of tongues “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, . . . We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness” (Rom 12, 3-8). What St. Paul said to the Church in Ephesus is especially significant today, “Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them” (Acts 20, 30). More warnings

are given in various letters: Gal 1, 8; 1 Jn 4, 1; 2 Jn 7, 10; Jude 1, 4.

Those who give erroneous interpretations to verses taken out of context in the Bible and those who believe them must listen carefully to the warning about the false prophets. Injecting erroneous teaching into the heart of people and leading them astray, these false teachings have led to the most painful split in the Catholic Church. Mainly, the false prophets were responsible for these divisions. Even today many false prophets emerge and seek followers for their teachings. The faithful must be able to discern them and reject them. The official teaching of the Church should be made the norm of our faith.

Jesus warned the disciples that there will be temptations and so they should remain vigilant and pray to gain strength to overcome them. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus added, "Lead us not into temptation" (Mt 6, 13; Lk 11, 4). "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life. . . , praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things. . . and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk 21, 34-36. 22, 40-46). Jesus was the prime example of ardent prayer to withstand temptations (Mt 26, 39).

It is important that we take temptations seriously and remain vigilant about them but avoid being over anxious as Jesus has attained victory over evil. No force can overpower a person remaining with Jesus. The faithful are not to live in fear of the power of Satan but remain alert of his crafty ways.

Being aware of the influence of evil operating in the world is essential to overcome it. We should be aware of the generally accepted attitude of the world and lack of positive values and convictions. The good and bad done by a person do not remain in that person alone. Like a stone thrown into the water makes

ripples that spread, the effects of the good as well as evil will spread into the whole society. Each person's every action influences the society and eventually they will be transformed into attitudes and values.

There are some who think that only the rich will be respected in society and so they would use any evil method to accumulate wealth. This would give rise to an attitude or value that would consider wealth as a blessing and poverty as a curse. No particular person might be responsible for the formation of this attitude but it has evolved over the years.

Leading others into evil ways has become part of human nature. Some would prefer to remain idle rather than work hard. There is a natural tendency to receive more than to give; to avenge rather than to forgive. These tendencies appear in various ways. It is not proper to accuse any one person or incident(s) for creating this and a tendency to do so would be the result of attempting to escape one's responsibility.

What St. James said about temptations is significant here. "No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death" (Jas 1, 13-16). The wheel of "greed-sin-death" is turned neither by God nor by Satan but by the erroneous convictions, tendencies and desires of man. Though we can see Satan as the root cause of all evil, no one can escape the responsibility of one's own greed, misconceptions, selfishness and other sinful tendencies. Hence our ultimate responsibility is to depend on God and resist our own sinful tendencies rather than fear the devil.

The Word of God helps us to recognize temptations and

overcome them. “How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word, with my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments” (Ps 119, 9-10). Satan approached Jesus quoting the Word of God and Jesus faced and defeated him, quoting the Word of God (Mt 4, 4. 7.10). When we look at our lives in the light of the Word, we will be able to distinguish the temptations of Satan and the inspirations from God. The most powerful weapon to defeat Satan is faith in Jesus Christ who defeated Satan. “Take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph 6, 16). St. Peter also suggested using faith to resist the devil, “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering” (1 Pt 5, 8-9).

Those who resist temptations should be ready to accept losses, persecutions and even death. Jesus, who died on the Cross, promised the same thing to those who follow Him (Lk 14, 25-27). The world will hate the Disciples of Christ because they live in the world but they are not of the world (Jn 15, 18-25). It was for them that Jesus offered his final prayer (Jn 17, 14-19). There is no other way for the followers of the One who died on the Cross (1 Pt 4, 12-19). The persecutions the Church encountered over the centuries can be seen as the war waged by Satan against the Kingdom of God. Here, the followers of Christ should not ally with evil or be indifferent. Only through the “narrow path” one can enter the Kingdom of God.

Those tempted are not alone. The book of Revelation compared the Church under persecution to the woman who is persecuted by the serpent in the desert (Rev. 12, 14). The Blessed

Mother, the Mother of the one who crushed the head of the serpent is the first human being who won total victory over Satan. At the same time, she is the first fruit of the Salvation attained by Jesus Christ. As Mother of the Church, the Blessed Mother helps every person of faith to recognize temptations and to overcome the evil in his/her life. In this struggle, Mary is our model and helper. The faithful gain strength to resist temptation through prayer, community and Sacramental life. “We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God; let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4, 14-16).

PART III

LAMPSTAND AND FOOD OFFERED TO DEITY

There is a general feeling that by eating food brought from the temple, one would become the slave of Satan. This idea has become stronger among certain Christian communities. Christians are forbidden to eat food offered to any deity in the temple or at home. They are also forbidden to put the spot (bindi) on their foreheads, light the incense sticks and lamp stand, etc. that are practiced by the Hindus. But, some people ignore all these directives and encourage others to do so. They are not aware of the fact that they are opening the way for Satan by doing all these. Some claim that all the misfortunes Christians suffer are caused by their participation directly, or through their ancestors, in these practices. By consuming the food offered to a deity, they believe that they have come into the grip of Satan. To support this theory, they use some Bible passages such as 1Cor 10, 20-21. In this last part of the study an attempt is made, in the light of the Bible and the official teaching of the Church, to respond to this problem that is causing confusion and misunderstanding for many.

18

ENCULTURATION

The subject under discussion is related to enculturation, a relevant and at the same time a vast subject. The approach of the Bible and of the Church toward the religious practices of the Gentiles is a subject of detailed study. We can see the official stand of the Catholic Church from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as *Ad Gentes* (The missionary activities of the Church); *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the modern world); *Nostra Aetate* (Non Christian religions) and certain encyclicals and apostolic letters published after Council such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization), *Redemptoris Missio* (The mission of the Savior); and *Ecclesia in Asia* (The Church in Asia). Rather than going into a detailed study, we limit ourselves to pointing out certain relevant issues.

Enculturation in the Bible

Bible is the record of divine revelation concerning God and His plan of salvation. In writing this record various literary forms that were prevalent at the time has been used. God spoke to people in their language and in a way that they could understand. The Vatican II document, *Dei Verbum*, has given clear directions regarding how to interpret the Biblical texts correctly.

"However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

"To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to "literary forms." For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

"But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may

mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God." DV 12).

While communicating the revelations the sacred authors received from God, they used the practices and beliefs that existed in the society of their time. When doing so, they have taken only what was helpful to explain the new experience. Certain things were adopted for didactic purposes and those that did not go along with the new revelation were rejected. This could be demonstrated through certain examples.

Let us take the first creation narrative in chapter of the Book of Genesis. There it is said that in the beginning God divided the primeval waters into two by creating a firmament. What is above the firmament He called heaven and what is below He called earth (Gen 1,6-8). We can see in this account a great similarity with the creation myth called *Enuma Elish*, that was known in Mesopotamia from the third millennium BC. According to this myth Marduk, the head of gods, split the Primeval chaotic Waters, into two and created the sky with the upper part and the earth with the lower part of the slain goddess. There is an undeniable similarity between these two accounts, but there are also very important differences. The sacred author is using images that are familiar to the readers in order to communicate that God created the world with His Word, but at the same time makes it clear to the readers that the creation of the world took place in a totally different way from that narrated in the myth.

Such similarities and differences are visible in the narration of Paradise, woman, forbidden fruit and serpent. There is a hint of dialogue with the Canaanites who worshiped the serpent as

god, in presenting the same serpent as the agent that led man to sin and death. In this picture of temptation and fall, we can see signs of a dialogue or rather dispute with the Canaanite religion that worship the snake as the god of life. The sacred author teaches that the serpent is not the God of life but the source of death

To define the relationship between man and God, the Bible uses the image of “Covenant”. This could be understood in the light of a practice that was prevalent among the Hittites, namely the covenant between the emperor and the vassal kings. Circumcision was seen as a sign of covenant between God and man. The practice of circumcision, however, existed for social and hygienic reasons before it was given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant with God. The Bible gave a new meaning to a practice that already existed in the society. In the same way, the practice of eating the roasted lamb and sprinkling the blood of the lamb on the door post existed among the nomadic shepherds. The practice of using unleavened bread existed among the farmers of Canaan and almost all the ancient religions had the practice of deciding a feast according to the lunar phase.

In the Tradition of the Church

All the Christians in the world celebrate December 25th as the birthday of Jesus. But, there is no proof that Jesus was born on 25 December. The Church does not teach it either. It was a custom that existed among the Persians. For the people who live north of the equator, the longest night comes on December 21st. After that the nights become shorter and the days would become longer. This led to a religious interpretation. The Sun, in his fight against the powers of darkness died and fell into the underworld but rose from the dead gaining victory over darkness. In order to commemorate this victory Dec.25 was celebrated as the rebirth of Sun This custom reached Rome through the soldiers who

ncelebrated it with title *Sol Invictus* (Sun unconquered). . When Christianity became the official religion of Rome, this practice was revised. December 25th became the birthday of Jesus, the Light of the world.

In the Church's hierarchical structure and canon laws we can see the influence of Roman rule and code of law. The Roman influence is also visible in the dress code and titles of the Church's leaders. The vestments used for Liturgical purposes were adapted from the Roman palaces. The religious habits of the Sisters were fashioned on the model of dress used by the Europeans in the middle ages. All these were accepted by the Church with necessary modifications and corrections.

The Christmas tree has become popular in Kerala (in India) also. It was originally a pagan custom which existed in Scandinavia. Many European countries have the practice of "May Tree". On May 1st a tree will be planted and decorated in the middle of the village. This was a pagan custom related to agricultural practices and today it is considered a sign of prosperity granted by God. Baptism, the practice of immersing one in the water or pouring water on the head, was a practice which existed among the Canaanites and later among the Essenes in Israel.

Thus, there are many customs in the Bible and in the Church adapted from other religions. While adapting, the needed corrections are made and explanations are given. The discussions and decisions made by the Apostles regarding personal and societal regulations to be implemented upon their conversion to Christianity will shed more light on this subject.

Avoid unnecessary burdens

Following the religious persecution in Jerusalem, the Apostles began move out and to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles.

As Paul came on the scene, it became a powerful movement. Thousands of Gentiles became Christians. As the Evangelization extended to the ends of the earth, a big problem developed. What should one do to become a Christian? “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16, 31). This was the essence of Paul's proclamation. But, the Apostles in Jerusalem argued that one must be circumcised as God instructed Abraham and follow the precepts of the covenant God made with Moses at Mount Sinai. This was a great problem the early Church encountered (Acts 15; Gal 2, 1-10).

In the first ecumenical council at Jerusalem, this problem was discussed in detail. The decision taken was simple and had far reaching effect. “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well” (Acts 15, 28-29). With the coming of Jesus, the old customs and practices are made null and void and they are not to be imposed on one in order to become Christian. This decision made Evangelization among the Gentiles easier.

The second and third things forbidden here were part of a particular culture. Blood was considered to be the source of life for the Jews. Only God has authority over life and so eating blood was seen as rejecting the supremacy of God. But, this was not imposed after some years. The fourth condition was part of the Ten Commandments and was applicable at all times. Regarding the food offered to the idols- this shall be discussed later.

In order to be saved it is enough that one believes in Jesus and follow the commandments. One did not have to observe the

customs and practices of another culture. This decision was observed in all the missionary activities of the Church until the middle ages.

In the Church in India

The decision of the Council in Jerusalem affected Evangelization all over the world. The Apostles preached the Gospel taking into consideration the local culture and lifestyle. The same process happened in India also. The Christians have adapted to the Indian culture and customs. They continued to practice many of the customs they followed before becoming Christians. The customs related to birth, marriage and death are still followed by the Christians in India. This enculturation is visible in the dress, structure of the houses and church buildings. The missionaries who came to India in the 16th century found it difficult to differentiate between Christians and Hindus from their lifestyle and accused the Christians of living like Hindus. This shows the depth of enculturation that was followed by the Christians.

Lamp Stand and Spot on the Forehead

Against this background we can see that using the lamp-stand and spot on the forehead are not against the Christian faith. Accepting the symbols of Hinduism in the same sense could be against Christian faith. The Hindus see the lamp-stand as a symbol of God the creator and source of life. The genital organ of Siva (*Siva Linga*) is a symbol of creation. By placing the Cross in the place of the genital organ of Siva provides a new meaning to the lamp-stand. This helps to symbolize the Divine life we receive through the Cross. Thus the lampstand becomes the symbol of Jesus Christ, the Light and Life of the World.

Putting a mixture of sandal wood dust and rose water on the

forehead is part of Indian culture. This is considered as a symbol of purification and protection. For some it might be part of their faith but it has some health benefits. It gives a cool feeling to the head and protects the person from sun stroke. During the festival times it is placed as a symbol of welcoming the guest to the function. There is no need of giving a religious significance to it. Many of the religious practices today were begun for health reasons. Eventually, the health reason was forgotten and were only as religious practices. Therefore, discovering the original intention behind a religious practice helps us to find its meaning and apply them in a meaningful way.

The book of Revelation has spoken about placing a seal on the forehead. There are seals of protection (Rev 7, 1-8) and the seal of the beast (Rev. 13, 16-17). The latter is forbidden to the Christians because it is a sign of rejecting Christ and worshipping Satan. Hence one must understand the meaning of the spot on the forehead before deciding to accept or reject.

19

FOOD OFFERED TO THE DEITY

There are many Christians who believe that eating food offered to idols is the same as worshipping the idols and so it is forbidden for Christians. This belief is based on certain passages in the Bible. Hence, we have to examine those Bible verses and see what they are teaching.

It was St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, who discussed this subject in detail and gave the necessary directions in the letter to Corinthians (1 Cor 8-10) and the epistle to the Romans (ch 14). The book of Revelation, Chapters 2-3 also deals with this subject. Since the author of Revelation did not go into the details about the problem, attention shall be focused to the teaching of St. Paul. To understand St. Paul's teaching in 1Cor8-10, it is important to know the circumstances for the writing of this letter and the problems discussed in it.

The Problems in the Church of Corinth

Corinth was an important harbor city in Greece. There were many temples dedicated to the Greek gods such as Apollo, Asclepius, Hermes, Athena, Artemis. The most popular among them was a fertility goddess named Aphrodite or Venus. There were 1000 priestesses to offer service to her. Idol worship and prostitution were widely practiced in Corinth.

St. Paul stayed in Corinth for about one and a half years and proclaimed the Gospel and founded the Church in Corinth. After St. Paul left the city, there arose many problems. There were many questions that needed answers. One of the most important and urgent problems was the question whether Christians were allowed to eat the food offered to idols. There were two sides to this problem.

Since there were so many temples, most of the meat sold in the shops was offered to one of the idols. Part of the meat went to the priest who performed the sacrifice and the rest was given to the one who offered the sacrifice. Both parties gave meat to be sold in the shops. Are the Christians allowed to buy and eat this meat? The Jews also encountered the same problem but there were many Jews and so they killed the animals according to their religious law and took care of their needs. But the Christians were few in number and not so well off to manage their own butcher shops. Meat was generally expensive and the Christians did not know what to do.

The second problem was related to the banquets. If Gentile friends invite them, could they go for the dinner? Could the Christians eat the food they served? The banquets might be held at a home or in the temples. Archeologists even found such a letter of invitation in Corinth. “*Kairamon* invites you for the banquet conducted in the Temple of *Serappeum* at the table of *Serapius*, tomorrow, on the 15th at 9:00”

As we can see from the letter, banquets were conducted in honor of one of the gods. At home as well as in the temple, there will be prayers and songs before the dinner. The meat of the animal offered in sacrifice will be served at the table. Those who participate in the dinner will be naturally forced to take part in the

prayers and sacrifice. The whole situation raised a serious problem for the Christian. What was Paul's response?

Idols are nothing

St. Paul answered these questions taking into consideration the basic faith of the Christians and a logical conclusion. The first response was about the meat sold in the market. The basic reason for the response was the faith that "We know no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one... for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8, 4-6). The idols are created by people and they have only the power that people attribute to them and so the food offered to them has no particular value. Hence, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for 'the earth and its fullness are the Lord's'" (1 Cor 10, 25-26).

This response is relevant at all times. The Apostle gave this response to the Church in Corinth after the decision made in the Council of Jerusalem that "you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15, 28). For a Christian who is aware of the powerlessness of idols and the futility of idol worship, could eat any food that is served to them.

The Apostle followed the approach Jesus took regarding the laws about the kind of food allowed to be eaten by the Jews. Jesus said to the disciples, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mk 7, 18-19). In the light of this basic teaching, the Christians could eat any food as it does not make one holy or unholy. "Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those

who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God” (Rom 14, 6).

This is the attitude the Catholic Church is following. The Church does not see anything wrong with sharing meals with people of other faiths in the name of fellowship and good relationships with the neighbors. Even when it was offered to a deity, the Christians who believe in One God accept the food given to them in the name of friendship. Rejecting food offered by one’s neighbors out of love and fellowship would hurt them and it would be going against the principle that all are children of God. But, that is not all that the Apostle said about the food offered to idols. He added certain warnings to the seemingly harmless permission to eat anything served.

In Case of Doubt Abstain

Not all accept the truth that the idols are nothing. This is even more true upon considering the background of the faithful in Corinth. They were all new converts to christianity. Until recently they they had considered the idols as gods and worshipped them with fear. Just because they have chosen to believe in Christ, those lifelong convictions would not disappear overnight. To a certain extent their old faith would continue to influence them.

In this situation, eating the meat offered to idols could cause problems. The Apostle called the Christians who lived, fearing and worshipping idols until recently, “weak in conscience” (Rom 14, 2; 1 Cor 8, 10). “It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled” (1 Cor 8,7). If this is their condition, they must not partake of food offered to

idols. This suggestion is relevant even today. Hence, each one must decide according to one's conviction and understanding, if to eat or abstain from meat offered to idols. The Apostle emphasized the importance of respecting each one's decision, "Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them" (Rom 14, 3).

Do not Cause Scandal

The Apostle reminded the faithful of their responsibility to those who have not become deeply rooted in their faith. Even when one acts according to one's conscience, if that causes scandal to another person, it should be avoided. St. Paul allowed full freedom in buying meat from the market and participating in the banquet, but suggested that if that would become the cause of scandal for a person, it should be avoided (1 Cor 10, 25-28). The Apostle was repeating the teaching of Jesus in this case: "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Mt 18, 6).

The Apostle's instruction was that one's personal freedom must not cause another person to sin. "If someone says to you, This has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience - I mean the other's conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else's conscience?" (1 Cor 10, 28-29). The Apostle made this suggestion for one sitting for a banquet. It points to the fact that for the one who believes that there is something special about that food, the Christian should respect his faith and therefore not eat it. To the question why should one be concerned about another's

conscience, the response of the Apostle is that one should not cause scandal to another.

The most important thing is, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10, 31). Those who have deep faith and knowledge must operate in a way that would deepen the faith and conviction of others with weak faith. Based on this teaching, if one is convinced that eating the food offered to idols would not cause any confusion or scandal to others, the Christians may eat anything given to them.

No Idol Worship

While giving full freedom in eating, the Apostle strongly warned against idol worship. “Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols” (1 Cor 10, 14). This warning was against participating in the sacrifice of the Gentiles. Though idols are nothing, the Gentiles are offering sacrifice to Satan. This also shows that Satan is a reality (1 Cor 10, 16-22). The Greek word “Daimonia” is used to refer to Satan. St. Paul asserted that participating in the sacrifice of the Gentiles is the same as participating in their faith.

Satan worship existed in Canaan where the Israelites settled and also in Corinth, where St. Paul established the Church, and in various parts of the Roman Empire where religious persecution existed (Rev 9, 20). This was repeated many times in the Old Testament (Lev 17, 7; Dt 32, 17; Ps 106, 37). The statement was formed at a time when they worshipped animals, birds, reptiles and the powers of nature.

Such worship and sacrifices do still exist. When we worship something that is not God, it becomes idol worship. Offering sacrifice to them becomes the sacrifice offered to Satan. The religious fanatics who refuse to tolerate people who belong to

other religions, persecute and try to eliminate them by violence are offering worship to Satan, not to God. The ones who inject personal animosity, hatred and revenge are not sincere in their piety. They are not true religious people. Besides these, there are people who worship Satan. All the same we cannot say that all the non-Christians are worshipping the devil. The Church does not support such an attitude. This is clearly stated in the documents of Vatican II regarding non-Christian religions.

The Church's approach to other religions

“In Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world.... The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn. 1:6). In him, God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life. The Church therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians also their social life and culture.” (Nostra Aetate, Vatican II on-Christian Religions §2)

The Church has taken an understanding attitude towards other religions, approving them as the path to salvation (Vat. II, Missionary Activities §7) “Those who fail to know the Good News for no fault of their own, God would redeem them and lead them to faith through a path known only to Him. They would be led to a faith that is pleasing to God ”(Heb 11, 6). This was repeated again in the Synod of the Bishops in Asia and in particular in the Apostolic Writing of the Pope (§ 6, 20-23). The Church expresses great respect for the religious traditions of Asian countries and expressed a sincere desire to enter into dialogue with those traditions (§6 of Church in Asia.) Hence the Church does not reject all the non-Christian religions but accept from these faiths what is agreeable to and reject what is against Christian faith.

Even when the Church approves of cooperation and dialogue with other religions, we cannot ignore the warning St. Paul issued against participating in the customs and practices that are not in line with the fundamental issues of faith and morality. Though we may share with people of other faiths the bread we make for the Passover meal on Holy Thursday (a custom among the Catholics in Kerala) and food items offered in the Church, we are not to share with them the eucharistic bread that has become the Body of Christ. Participating in worship services of non-Christians is still forbidden for Catholics. What is being forbidden is not the participation in a festal celebration as a social event or even consuming the food they share with us but participating in their worship, disregarding the basic differences (1 Cor 10, 8-22).

The negative statement made in the book of Revelation regarding the food offered to idols also refers to the same issue. There is a basic difference in participating in worship and associating with non-Christians on a social level. Those who

participate in their sacrifices and sacrificial meals participate in their faith knowingly or unknowingly. It gives the message to others that there is nothing wrong with participating in their worship. According to the book of Revelation, eating the food offered to idols is considered to be a rejection of one's faith.

Summary

The problem the Christians face while associating with other religions and the solutions offered by the official teachings of the Catholic Church may be summarized as follows.

The good relationship that exists between various religious groups in our society should be nurtured and promoted without compromising the fundamentals of our faith. These inter-religious relationships are promoted through various kinds of associations and mutual sharing.

Evangelization progressed by adapting and accepting the positive elements from the local cultures. A humanitarian approach is suggested for Christians. The Church has always been open to accepting what is good and acceptable from other religions. At the same time, through giving them the Good News, their culture will be enriched and become rooted in Christian values. A give and take process takes place in this mutual sharing.

The Church does not hesitate to accept and practice customs and traditions that are not against our faith and morality. This was the stance the Church in India practiced since the first century A.D. Hence the Church does not forbid anyone from using the spot on the forehead, Lamp Stand, and other customs related to birth, marriage and death. There is still a long way for the Church to go in the process of enculturation. The Church in India could go deeper in dialogue with the Indian culture. For example applying Christian values to festivals such as Onam, Deepavali, Vishu can be examples.

In the name of socialization and friendship, sharing food offered in the temple is not forbidden for Catholics as long as the sharing of the food does not become a sharing in their faith. The Church does not permit active participation in the sacrifices and worship of other religions as it could lead to a rejection of one's faith and acceptance of another faith. For example, making pilgrimages to holy shrines of other religions, observing their religious customs, making offerings in the Temples for receiving favours etc. are forbidden for Catholics.

While dealing with the customs and practices of other religious groups, we must accept only that which is suitable to our faith. Understanding the differences in faith, steps may be taken to know each other and to establish a deep relationship. At the same time, participating in their customs without knowing their meaning and significance could lead to misunderstanding and sometimes to a renunciation of one's faith. In this situation one must take into consideration the official teaching of the Church.

CONCLUSION

Certain important themes that have great significance for some of the current complex spiritual situations faced by the faithful today were discussed in the light of the teaching of the Church and the Bible. Their relevance and urgent need of clarification is unincreasing by the day.

We see a phenomenon of religiosity and materialism growing parallel to each other in our society. All the religions are taking interest in constructing centers of prayer, promoting pilgrimages, celebrating festivals and observing pious activities. But parallel to these religious activities corruption and injustice, terrorism and murder are increasing. We see also at times religious fanatics unleash violence.

There is a great drive to accumulate as much wealth as possible and to enjoy life. At the same time when they fail to achieve their goals, they fall into deep despair. All this shows that in proportion to prayer and religious activities, there is no growth in the sense of justice, mutual love and care.

When religious practices are limited only to external exercises, they do not succeed in developing compassion and a sense of justice that is rooted in the love of God and fellow human beings. The piety that fails to produce the fruits of spirituality demonstrates that it is not inspired by the love of God and neighbours but by selfish motives and the fulfillment of personal needs.

In such a situation superstitions and malpractices can flourish. Such people would do anything to get what they want. There will be plenty of preachers and masters who will give acceptable responses to those who come for religious practices as to a business, with only the intention of obtaining favours. The impact of their advice and suggested activities would become evident only slowly.

Though such practices exist in all religions, such malpractices seem to be present more among the Christians, especially Catholics, and they are spreading fast. This book has been prepared to explain the folly of some of the erroneous teachings and practices in the light of the Bible and the official teaching of the Catholic Church. Given below is a brief summary of the matters discussed:

1. The Catholic Church has taught in simple and clear terms about death and life after death. There is no change in that basic teaching.
2. At the moment of death, the soul leaves the body and according to his/her life the particular judgment will be passed. It will be eternal happiness with God, or eternal punishment in hell or a time of purification to attain perfection before entering heaven. There will be no change in this judgment.
3. The end of the world is the time when this judgment is confirmed and proclaimed in public. Then the bodies will resurrect and human personality will attain its fulfillment. With that, Purgatory will cease to exist but heaven and hell would continue to exist forever.
4. The souls of the dead do not roam around, possess anyone or torment anyone. The vision of saints claimed by certain individuals should be seen as personal experiences.

5. Conversion is impossible after death. Proclaiming the Gospel to the dead serves only to create misunderstanding and fatal mistakes. The Bible passages quoted in support of the possibility of converting the dead have an entirely different meaning.
6. The good and bad done by one's ancestors can influence the coming generations. People must do reparation for the injustice committed by their ancestors. The wealth accumulated through unjust means should be returned to the rightful heirs. If they have hurt anyone, do penance as much as possible. However, the souls of the ancestors do not roam around, possess anyone or persecute the descendants.
7. We must pray for the dead and cry to the Lord to show mercy to them. Acts of charity, atonement of sins and prayers are helpful for the souls in Purgatory. One must be careful not to be cheated. God showers His mercy not according to the money given for prayer and other functions.
8. Those who donate great amounts to the Churches and pilgrim centers to receive favors must know that the belief that God will give them favors according to the amount given is a fallacy and it shows a business mentality in the matter of prayer. It is good to donate money to the prayer centers but should not think that favours of God can be bought by paying money. avoid the idea that we can buy favors from God. Almost all the religions have centers that promote such a feeling in order to collect money.
9. Conversion is possible only when we are living in this world with our body and soul. It cannot happen after death. Emphasis should be given to living a just and compassionate life. Living in luxury with the feeling that one will be saved by the prayers of others is a dangerous attitude. In the

same way, setting aside large amounts of money for prayers after death might not help one to attain the goal.

10. The Church believes in the existence of angels. The Bible presents them as the servants of God and helpers of the people. They help people to experience the presence of God and the help He gives them. We must love and respect the angels but worship only God. We do not have any certain knowledge about the number of angels, their legions and their functions but our center of attention should not be angels but God.
11. There is an evil force in this world and it is active in many areas. To indicate this force, the Bible uses the term, Satan. He tries to abort the plan of God and lead man to sin and destruction. This evil force has been visible since the sin of the first parents. Jesus attained decisive victory over this evil force. It will be totally eliminated at the end of the world.
12. The evil forces that make people weak and sick the Bible calls demons or evil spirits. They should be seen as different from Satan. The influence of other cultures is evident in the concept of evil spirits possessing people and making them mentally and physically sick. It does not mean that there is no Satan or evil spirits. Not all cases of possessions can be attributed to evil spirits since symptoms similar to possession may be the result of mental disorders.
13. We must distinguish possession by evil spirits from mental illness separately. In these matters we must make use of the knowledge provided by modern psychology and medical science. Before administering exorcism one must make sure that the person is possessed by an evil spirit and not affected by any mental or physical illness.

14. Regarding exorcism and the evil spirits that possess human beings, the Catholic Church has special laws and directives. Only the priest employed by the Bishop can do the function of an exorcism after deciding if the case was due to possession and not mental illness. The malpractices existing in this area need to be eliminated.
15. The Catholic Church believes that Satan exists. Based on certain passages of the Bible, the Church teaches that Satan and evil spirits were angels who were punished by God. At the same time, the Church does not teach that the souls of the dead become demons evil spirits.
16. Even while teaching about Satan and evil spirits, the Church gives great importance to avoiding the influence of evil through faith, prayer, charity and a life lived according to the moral teachings of Christianity. The Church has formed this teaching taking into consideration the warning Jesus gave about the temptations.
17. The faithful of the Catholic Church must accept the norms set by the written Word of God and the official teaching of the Church in all matters concerning life and faith. They must remain vigilant about those who interpret Bible according to their own personal needs and imagination. While interpreting the Bible, the directions given in the official documents of the Church should be followed.
18. Giving undue importance to personal visions and revelations may lead to malpractices and false convictions. We must be enlightened by logic and intelligence supported by faith. If not, faith would become superstition and the intellectual pursuit would turn into atheistic rationalism.
19. The Bible, as well as the Church, teaches that even when we are advised to remain vigilant about the temptation of the

evil spirits, we must avoid undue fear. The tendency to see the devil everywhere and to believe that every negative experience happens because of them would lead to unhealthy attitudes and conclusions. Those who believe in God and lead a just life need not fear any devil or Satan.

20. Avoid the curiosity to know the things God has kept hidden. Do not try to get privileges one does not deserve and resist the temptation to earn wealth without working. Wealth, health and positions need not be the signs of God's blessing.
21. Do not think that we can understand everything by our intellect. There are many things in the universe that are beyond our comprehension. Science has not been able to penetrate into the mystery of even the material world. Hence, we have to accept the mysteries of the world of the Spirits that are beyond our understanding. The same principle may be applied in the case of interpreting the Bible. All that is needed for our salvation has been revealed in clear and simple language. There are certain things that are beyond the capacity of the human intellect to understand. Even after extensive research and exploration certain things remain hidden from the understanding of Biblical scholars. Approaching such things in a shallow way and interpreting them according to one's imagination and then teaching them as direct revelation from God would be presumptuous.
22. We are living in an atmosphere where numerous religious groups live together and so it is important that we keep an open and friendly approach to all. Respect should be given to all religions. Each one has the right to live according to their faith and share it with others. But no one has a right to impose one's faith on another person. Neither should we insult another person's faith and customs.

23. Enculturation is approved by the Catholic Church and it does not hesitate to accept practices that are not against the fundamental principles of its faith. Dialogue with other religions is part of the Evangelization of the Catholic Church.

This book is an attempt to deal with certain important issues in the light of the teaching of the Catholic Church and the Bible. Not all subjects have been dealt with in full detail. There are still questions for which we do not have definitive answers. Anchoring our faith in the unlimited mercy of God, we are to continue our pilgrimage with the little light we have on our path. In our journey we will be helped by the Word of God and the Sacramental life. Surrender totally into the hands of the Lord and gain strength to resist the temptations and snares of Satan.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. ...Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Lk 21, 34-36).

