

## The Parables- Ground Reality Today

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines how the Religious beliefs have a strong influence on the culture of a community. Indeed, for many people around the world, religious beliefs are central to their culture and provide the moral codes by which they live. These Cultural changes have promoted linkages and interactions among castes, tribes, religious groups and cultural regions. We notice significant magnitude of the spread effect of these cultural changes across regions and ethnic boundaries. These developments have, however, also reinforced people's self-consciousness and narrow cultural identities organised on principles of ethnicity, religion, caste, language and region. The intensity of media exposure, political participation and competitive outlooks towards social mobility has added strength to these processes. Politicization of religion is reflected in conscious distortions of meaning and uses of religious symbols, artefacts and rituals. In the context of overall social change, it is essential to examine the importance of Human dignity, respect, integrity with the Parables for a better way of life and for cultural integration.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural changes, narrow cultural identities, Politicization of religion, Parables, cultural integration.*

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### I. Introduction

Today, major occupational and techno-cultural changes have taken place in our Contemporary society due to political, social, technological, mental, moral, aesthetic, economic and spiritual developments. Culture, therefore, enters into the processes of social change in many forms and at various levels. What is Culture? Culture (Latin: cultura, "Cultivation")(Harper Douglas (2001) Online Etymology Dictionary) is a modern concept based on a term first used in classical antiquity by the Roman orator, Cicero: "*cultura animi*". The term "*culture*" appeared first in its current sense in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, to connote a process of cultivation or improvement, as in agriculture or horticulture. In the 19th century, the term developed to refer first to the betterment or refinement of the individual, especially through education, and then to the fulfilment of national aspirations or ideals. In the mid-19th century, some scientists used the term "culture" to refer to a universal human capacity. For the German non-positivist sociologist George Simmel, culture referred to "the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history". (Georg Simmel 1955: p 47)

The etymology of the modern term "culture" has a classical origin. In English, the word "culture" is based on a term used by Cicero where he wrote of a cultivation of the soul or "*cultura animi*", thereby using an agricultural metaphor to describe the development of a philosophical soul, which was understood teleological as the one natural highest possible ideal for human development. Samuel Pufendorf took over this metaphor in a modern context, meaning something similar, but no longer assuming that philosophy is man's natural perfection. His use and that of many writers after him "refers to all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism, and through artifice, become fully human". (Velkley Richard 2002: pp. 11) As described by Velkley: The term "culture," which originally meant the cultivation of the soul or mind, acquires most of its later modern meanings in the writings of the 18th-century German thinkers, who on various levels developing Rousseau's criticism of modern liberalism and Enlightenment. Thus a contrast between "culture" and "civilization" is usually implied in these authors, even when not expressed as such. Two primary meanings of culture emerge from this period: culture as the folk-spirit having a unique identity, and culture as cultivation of inwardness or free individuality. The first meaning is predominant in our current use of the term "culture," although the second still plays a large role in what we think culture should achieve, namely the full "expression" of the unique of "authentic" self. The term culture refers to a state of intellectual development or manners. The social and political forces that influence the growth of a human being are defined as culture. Indian culture is rich and diverse and as a result unique in its very own way. Our manners, way of communicating with one another, etc. are one of the important components of our culture. Even though we have accepted modern means of living, improved our lifestyle, our values and beliefs still remain unchanged. A person can change his way of clothing, way of eating and living but the rich values in a person always remains unchanged because they are deeply rooted within our hearts, mind, body and soul which we receive from our culture. Culture shapes the way we see the world. It therefore has the capacity to bring about the change of attitudes needed to ensure peace and

sustainable development which, we know, form the only possible way forward for life on planet Earth. Today, that goal is still a long way off. A global crisis faces humanity at the dawn of the 21st century, marked by increasing poverty in our asymmetrical world, environmental degradation and short-sightedness in policy-making. Culture is a crucial key to solving this crisis. Our cultural values, which often include particular religious beliefs, shape our way of living and encourage a spirit of harmony between people, their natural environments and their spiritual identities in the world. The principles for living sustainably that flow from these and other cultural and religious beliefs vary between groups and countries. They have also changed over time as circumstances demand. Despite this diversity, many principles for living sustainably are shared, not only among indigenous peoples, but also between different religious traditions. Developing cultural values that support these people-to-people and people-to-nature values has traditionally been the role of religion in most societies.

Religion is a major influence in the world today. It seems that people in all cultures have a set of beliefs that go beyond both the self and the natural world. We use these beliefs to help explain reasons for human existence and to guide personal relationships and behaviour. Part of the great diversity of humankind is the many different religions and belief systems we have developed – Animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Taoism, and many more.

## **II. Why did Jesus teach in parables?**

It has been said that a parable is story with deeper meaning. The word parable is a transliteration of the Greek word “parabole” παραβολή (para-bow-lay), and comes from two Greek words, “para” translated as “beside” and “ballein” translated as “to throw”. Literally, the word parable means “to throw beside” or “to place beside”, to place together for the purpose of comparing, or making a comparison.”(H.W. Fowler, *Modern English Usage*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1958)

A parable is a short tale that illustrates universal truth, one of the simplest of narratives. It sketches a setting, describes an action, and shows the results. It often involves a character facing a moral dilemma, or making a questionable decision and then suffering the consequences. Though the meaning of a parable is often not explicitly stated, the meaning is not usually intended to be hidden or secret but on the contrary quite straightforward and obvious. The word “parabole” παραβολή appears seventeen times in Matthew, thirteen times in Mark, and eighteen times in Luke. In the rest of the New Testament it appears only in Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19. (Brad H. Young 1989:5) The number of parables is not as easily identified as the simple counting of the use of the word παραβολή might indicate. In fact, scholars are not agreed on the exact number of parables because not all agree on what form constitutes a parable. (Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight 1992: appendix 1) The Greek word “parabole” παραβολή- it is a compound Greek word meaning “to set alongside.” In biblical usage, a parable offers a comparison or contrast between an earthly reality and a spiritual truth. When we read the Gospels in the Bible, we sometimes see Jesus saying such things as, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...” (Matthew 13:24) or “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?” (Luke 13:18) These are phrases Jesus used to begin some of his parables, which seems to confirm the idea that parables may be used to compare or contrast an earthly reality and a spiritual truth.

These stories are easily remembered, the characters bold, and the symbolism rich in meaning. Jesus had employed many graphic analogies using common things that would be familiar to everyone such as salt, bread, sheep, etc., and their meaning was fairly clear in the context of His teaching. The Parables do not require more explanation, and at one point in His ministry, He began to teach using parables exclusively. With the help of the present study, the Parables may be researched, characterised and established as a concept in relation with various cultural changes in modern society. While this research on the parables will be of great value to the entire society, it will have a greater importance and significance in Indian context. Our society at large we find it is more of multi-cultural rather than a single culture. As a result we have enough and more ethnic groups. Each group claims superior over the other. Is it not true with our lives too? Everybody needs ways, whether it is socially, ethically either morally right or wrong that does not matter, by which they can display / show off themselves and bring out their culture. Times have changed even our families are torn by cultural clashes because of mixed marriages. We all have an obligation to respond. Egoistic Attitude – in our homes, our schools, colleges and streets, our nation and world- is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers. Fear of clashes is paralyzing and polarizing our communities. The celebration of Cultural Values in much of our media, music, mobiles and even internet is poisoning our sibling ones. Hostility, hatred, despair and indifference are at the heart of a growing culture. Verbal indifference in our families, institutions, communications and talk shows contribute to this individualistic culture. A nation born in a commitment to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is haunted by death, imprisoned by fear and caught up in the elusive pursuit of protection rather than happiness. Cultural violence is usually fed by multiple forces- the disintegration of family life, media influences, the availability of so many weapons, and the rise of gangs and increasing youth violence. We are tragically turning to cultural violence in the search for quick and easy answers to complex

human problems. A society which destroys its younger generation, abandons its traditional values and respect for other cultures relies on vengeance fails fundamental moral tests. Cultural clashes or violence is not the solution; it is the clear sign of our failures. Hardly a month passes without a communal incident in one part of the country or the other. It leaves behind a sense of bitterness and terrible memories. It weakens the spirit of friendship, brotherhood and national consolidation. It is a high time we need to understand the real values of Human life. There is a vast scope, dimensions and challenges in this subject, which may be taken up here or for further research. The Parables have significant application in the field of social, political, economic, ethical, moral and spiritual. A further research can be taken up on the relevance of the parables for our daily life. Also an analytical study can be done on the significance of the biblical parables in the light of downtrodden, poor, less privileged ones.

### **III. Jesus' New World Order**

It is believed that there are three kinds of cultures today, each with its own "bottom line": political cultures based on the manipulation of power, economic cultures based on the manipulation of money, and religious cultures based on the manipulation of some theory about God. These are the directions that human culture takes whenever it is left to its own devices. All three are based on some form of violence. Jesus announced, lived and inaugurated from history a new social order, which He called it the Reign or Kingdom of God. Jesus' new alternative is not just another religious culture, however. This is pivotal to understanding the unique character of his new world order. As opposed to a religious culture, which is always using God for cultural purposes of control and manipulating people through religious imagery, the Reign of God disallows both possibilities. This is the difference between True Transcendence and its disguises, between the True Sacred and what we might call the false sacred. The false sacred can be spotted because it is always self-serving and other-destroying. Anthropologist Rene Girard calls it "the old sacrificial system, for it uses and misuses God to sacralise the creation of victims." (Rene Girard 1979:11) It might be old, but as we know, we continue this universal pattern to our own day, and in ever more sophisticated ways. One will not, of course, turn away from what seems like the only game in town (political, economic or religious) unless one has glimpsed a more attractive alternative.

Jesus is a living parable, an audio-visual icon of that more attractive alternative. We cannot even imagine it; much less imitate it, unless we see one human being do it first. Today most of us only speak but we fail to practice. Here lies the problem. We are inextricably enmeshed in its web of cultural relationships. It is our society and we cannot have any kind of good life except in this present world. Over the centuries the human ego has been an extraordinarily powerful driving force toward human achievements of all kinds, the Enlightenment, and the beginnings of science, Revolutions. It has often been said that selfishness is natural, and is a sense that is true. But nature is not static; it is evolutionary.

Our society at large we find it is more of multi-cultural rather than a single culture. As a result we have enough and more ethnic groups. Each group claims superior over the other. Is it not true with our lives too? Everybody needs ways, whether it is socially, ethically either morally right or wrong that does not matter, by which they can display / show off themselves and bring out their culture. Times have changed even our families are torn by cultural clashes because of mixed marriages. We all have an obligation to respond. Egoistic Attitude – in our homes, our schools, colleges and streets, our nation and world- is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers. Fear of clashes is paralyzing and polarizing our communities. The celebration of Cultural Values in much of our media, music, mobiles and even internet is poisoning our sibling ones. Hostility, hatred, despair and indifference are at the heart of a growing culture. Verbal indifference in our families, institutions, communications and talk shows contribute to this individualistic culture. A nation born in a commitment to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is haunted by death, imprisoned by fear and caught up in the elusive pursuit of protection rather than happiness. Cultural violence is usually fed by multiple forces- the disintegration of family life, media influences, the availability of so many weapons, and the rise of gangs and increasing youth violence. We are tragically turning to cultural violence in the search for quick and easy answers to complex human problems. A society which destroys its younger generation, abandons its traditional values and respect for other cultures relies on vengeance fails fundamental moral tests. Cultural clashes or violence is not the solution; it is the clear sign of our failures. Hardly a month passes without a communal incident in one part of the country or the other. It leaves behind a sense of bitterness and terrible memories. It weakens the spirit of friendship, brotherhood and national consolidation. It is a high time we need to understand the real values of Human life. There is a vast scope, dimensions and challenges in this subject, which may be taken up here or for further research. The Parables have significant application in the field of social, political, economic, ethical, moral and spiritual. A further research can be taken up on the relevance of the parables for our daily life. Also an analytical study can be done on the significance of the biblical parables in the light of downtrodden, poor, less privileged ones.

#### **IV. Historicity of the Parables**

The parables of Jesus have long been revered as stories with deeper meanings. They have been viewed in this way because Jesus was thought to be a teacher of spiritual truth and wisdom. However, this view of Jesus stands in some tension with the account of his final trial and execution. "If Jesus was a teacher truths dispensed through literary gems called parables, it is difficult to understand how he could have been executed as a political subversive and crucified between two social bandits. It appears that Jerusalem elites collaborating with their Roman overlords executed Jesus because he was a threat to their economic and political interests." (William R. Herzog II 1994: 9)

#### **V. The Parables of Jesus and the Historical Jesus**

The comparison of the quest for the parables of Jesus with the quest for the historical Jesus raises a fundamental question. Any study of Jesus' parables will be predicted on some larger understanding of what Jesus' public work was all about. It is not possible to analyse the pieces without some view of the whole. Interpreters vary in the degree to which their paradigms are visible. Jeremias envisions Jesus as a cross between a rabbi and a Christian theologian; Kenneth Bailey believes him to have been a poet and a peasant; John Dominic Crossan, a master of metaphor and poet of the interior apocalypse; Dan Via, a purveyor of existential philosophy through comic and tragic stories; Robert Funk, a poetic philosopher who inaugurated a new language tradition that undermined its ossified predecessor. By turns, Jesus is a poet, philosopher, ethicist, theologian, and storyteller in the tradition of Franz Kafka or Jorge Luis Borges, "Christian" rabbi, Jewish rabbi, Lutheran theologian, preacher, and Christian minister in disguise. Modern exegesis tends to divide the history of the interpretation of the parables into two periods. (Warren S. Kissinger 1979: 8) The first starts with the preaching of Jesus and terminates at the end of the nineteenth century. The second period begins with the publication of Adolf Jülicher's work and the subsequent discussion that this work provoked division. Early Christian writers, following the example of Jesus and influenced by Greek philosophy and Hellenistic culture, frequently used the allegorical interpretation to explain the parables. ((Mark 4:13-20, Matthew 13:36-43) Thus, they endeavoured to go beyond the literal meaning of the text. This procedure was particularly compelling in cases where the characters' actions seemed to be morally questionable. (Craig L. Blomberg 1990: 30) In antiquity the most prominent centre for this kind of interpretation was the Catechetical School of Alexandria. A selection of the most significant works, both in the East and the West, will illustrate this approach and highlight the problems the authors addressed in their inquiry.

#### **VI. The Application of the Parables to Contemporary Time**

In the parables, the relationship of a person with neighbours is presented as love and forgiveness. First of all, it is obvious that the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37) teaches us to love our neighbour, and that this love is to be unconditional and unqualified, emphasizing that we must put love of neighbour into action. Regardless of ethnic or social ties, the people of God must show mercy to all, even one's enemies. None of us must limit boundaries of care and obligation. The parable firmly rejects all prejudice and discrimination, namely, racial, intellectual, financial, religious and nationalistic prejudice, or anything else that would restrict doing acts of love. The teaching of the parable harmonizes well not only with Jesus' concern of the outcasts of the society, but also with Jesus' emphasis on loving one's enemies. The parable reminds us of the sermon on the plain where the love command is so central (6:27-36). In this respect, the Samaritan is indeed a practical example of the teaching of Jesus just as Jesus sees and has compassion on the widow at Nain (Luke 7:13)

##### **6.1 The Relationship with Material Possessions**

The relationship of the Christians with material possessions is the right use of wealth. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) not only teaches us about attitudes towards wealth and possessions, but the right use of one's wealth for others. The parable betrays the planning of the rich and his attitude towards wealth and possessions, by means of the narrative device of soliloquy. That is to say, the rich denotes that one's life consists in the abundance of his possessions through his plan to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, and his monologue, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry" (v. 19). But the plan of the rich man is shattered by the abrupt intrusion of God in v. 20. God calls him a fool because he believed that he controlled his own destiny. In conclusion, the main instruction of the parable is that one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, but rather in God. In this context, what does it mean to be rich towards God? It is reminiscent of the Jewish heritage where the Torah requires that gleanings from a harvest be left for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant (Lev 19:9-10, 23:22, Deut 24:21). As a result, his wealth became an idol which blinded him. It is difficult to discard the wrong attitude towards wealth, like the rich in our modern acquisitive society that tempts us to believe that one's security and pleasure are found in possessions. The parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1-13) is a crisis parable, and a "how much more" parable. The audience is faced with the radical demands of the kingdom that is begun by Jesus' preaching and ministry.

The concerns between a proper attitude to wealth and eschatological crisis should not be separated, since the eschatological awareness influences how one sees material possessions. Just as the steward acted in the worldly crisis for his safety, how much more in eschatological crisis should Jesus' followers act for their safety? Prudence means both preparedness for one's safe future, with right awareness of a crisis and the proper use of wealth in view of the presence of the kingdom and of coming judgment, just as the steward did in his crisis. Despite listening, engaging, debating and complaining about Jesus, the Pharisees, like the rich man in the next parable do not realize that the eschatological crisis has arisen from Jesus' preaching and ministry. In addition, the correct use of worldly wealth focuses in particular on almsgiving, which is also a main teaching in the next parable that exposes mammon's powerful force which can enslave people. "You cannot serve both God and Mammon" (v. 13). The closing saying may be a warning against being unfaithful in God's service and a warning against being enslaved by mammon. Jesus here seems to personify mammon as an evil, powerful, cosmic force diametrically opposed to God's plan to set at liberty those who are oppressed. The pursuit of wealth and wholehearted allegiance to God are mutually exclusive. V. 13 make it clear that unfaithfulness in the use of worldly wealth reveals ultimate loyalties and heart attitudes. If the disciples use their worldly wealth faithfully, it is to express that they serve God with wholehearted love. Whereas, if the disciples use their worldly wealth unfaithfully, it is to express that they do not serve God. In conclusion, the disciples' use of wealth is tied to their future in heaven. Given this, the disciples must manifest their own position in the eschatological perspective without hesitation. On the whole, the parable not only functions as a challenge to evaluate correctly the nature of present time and take necessary action, but also teaches the proper use and attitude towards material possessions. The Rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) is the converse of the preceding parable that for one's safe future the steward uses wealth as prudence under right awareness of his crisis.

It is addressed to the Pharisee, whose love of money hinders them from their duty under God's law to give to the poor. According to the description of the parable, the rich man, in contrast to the misery of Lazarus in front of his gate, dresses himself with the most expensive garment to signify royalty or wealth, as well as throwing a splendid feast every day that is reminiscent of guests participating in a celebration. To put it another way, the rich man has spent excessive resources on his own desires rather than redistributed it to those in need, by almsgiving. In this respect, the parable serves to warn the rich who use wealth only for themselves, while neglecting the needs of the poor. The parable also addresses private charity in its modern form, in that it teaches the correct use of one's own wealth in responsibility to God and other people. Of course, the parable conveys the theme of repentance that is represented as the proper use of possessions, and concern for the poor as one aspect of it, and also the idea of the sufficiency of the Scripture, thereby demonstrating the fact that Moses and the prophets have permanency and abiding validity (vv. 16-18). Even so, it is self-evident that the proper use of possessions is one of the main themes of the parable. The parable gives the audience a lesson in generous almsgiving and to caring for one's neighbour in need. In this world, one should properly use their own material possessions that are entrusted to them for service of God and the poor. The rich fool in 12:13-21 and the rich man in 16:19-31 show a negative example in the use of their wealth only for their complacency, whereas the steward in 16:1-13 indicates a positive example of the proper use of possessions with a right awareness of his crisis.

## 6.2 The Relationship with God: Faith and Repentance

According to the instruction of the Lucan parables, it is faith and repentance that Christians in relationship with God must bear in mind. The Lucan parables below disclose either explicitly or implicitly how Christians should live in relationship with God. The parables of prayer in the Lucan parables are properly related to faith in God. In the first place, the Friend at Midnight (11:5-8) teaches in effect the certainty of a prayer response on the basis of the character of God. If a man will get up at midnight and grant the request of a rude friend, how much more will your heavenly Father grant the requests of his children? All prayer should approach God boldly, by throwing away all the rising disturbances in relation to one's prayer, such as time, place, content of prayer, or doubting the response to prayer and so on. This is stressed in 11:1-4 (in terms of "our Father") and 11:9-13 (in a certainty of a prayer response). Here is a parable contrasting God who is not like the sleeper. The parable thus encourages the believer to be confident of their prayer on grounds of the character of God. The parable ends with the sleeper's standpoint, which is compared to God willingly granting the request, beginning with the petitioner's viewpoint, with the emphasis on boldness of the petitioner, and having no hesitation and discouragement in the face of opposition. In other words, the point of view of the parable shifts naturally from the attitude of prayer towards the character of God. The Judge and the Widow (18:1-8) not only makes two main points from one of the characters in the story, that is, the certainty of God's hearing prayer and persistence in prayer, but also tightly interweaves the two points in the application (v. 1 and vv. 6-8). The first point drawn from the character of the judge, after telling the parable, appears in a *a fortiori* argument, that if an unjust judge will finally grant the request of a widow, how much more will God vindicate his people who cry to him day and night? There is at the same time a contrast between the judge and God: The contrast is that God,

as opposed to the judge, is mercifully patient with the requests of the people, but also will vindicate quickly, unlike the judge's delay. The second point, persistence in prayer, is derived from the widow who kept coming to the judge saying; "vindicate me against my adversary" (v. 3, 5b, 7a and 1). It is entirely based on the confidence of being vindicated by God (vv. 7-8a), and goes further to have the faith (v. 8b) to always pray and not lose heart, until the coming the Son of the Man. The evidence of faithfulness and alertness is seen in prayer itself, which reveals constant fellowship with God. The matter of how we remain faithful until the coming of the Son of the Man is certainly persistence in prayer. As a result, it seems safe to say that confident faith in God is what the prayer is all about. Two prayer parables teach that prayer itself is an expression of faith of the Christians towards God. Indeed, the evidence of faithfulness must be seen in prayer that presents constant fellowship with God. With regards to repentance, we can enumerate the following parables: The Barren Fig Tree, The Parable of the Prodigal Son and The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, including implicitly The Rich Man and Lazarus, the Great Feast (14:15-24) and the parable of the Unjust Steward. Chiefly, in The Barren Fig Tree, there are three main points: the figs that the farmer expects, cutting the tree without fruit down according to commandment of the farmer, and a potential additional year by suggestion of the vinedresser, namely the fruit as God's people, judgment and mercy. "Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?" It is a warning of judgment on Israel as the Israelite community because of their lack of productivity. The delay here becomes a call for repentance like Rom 2:4 where the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience lead to repentance. The parable is clearly a warning of imminent judgment and a merciful call for the repentance of Israel offered for a short while. In The Parable of the Prodigal Son, the younger son who lost all his property is confronted with the bigger problem, a severe famine, which he could not have anticipated. As he recognizes his desperate need, he begins to seek employment among the citizens of that country, and gets a job from a Gentile, feeding pigs. After all, he is personally as well as financially spent. Therefore the scene focuses on his low and miserable life, more than on the abandonment of his religious customs. "But when he came to himself he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.' and he arose and came to his father" (15:17-20). Here, a question arises as to whether the younger son's confession and return are sincere acts of repentance. Concerning this question, there is, as seen in the preceding part, an argument that rather than being a euphemism for repentance, the expression simply reveals his desire to get himself out of his horrible situation. (Warren S. Kissinger, 1979: 8) Even though there is certainly no mention of repentance in his monologue, it must be recognized that his confession and change are at least sincere. The expression is nonetheless something of a prelude, leading him to repentance. What is more, it is even more likely to be a prelude to repentance, given the fact that such situations as real-life boundary situations not only can grow true religion, but also can allow him to let God in. Even though the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector (18:9-14) directly instructs on both the manner and content of prayer which occur in comparing the Pharisee's and the tax collector's prayer, the parable still has sub-themes. The Tax collector in the parable plays a role as models of prayer, repentance, conversion and belief in Jesus, through the contrasting between tax collectors and Pharisees. The Pharisee may insist that his many good deeds, often exceeding even the demands of the Law, should bring him justification. Yet justification before God is pertinently expressed by a repentant heart of straightforward confession, entrusting himself to the mercy and grace of God, not by external piety as the confession of the Pharisee that "I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, the unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get (vv. 11-12)." Repentance, therefore, means honestly acknowledging that one has broken the relationship between oneself and God, and fervently desiring the restoration of that relationship. In addition, in the second part of the parable of the Rich and Lazarus (16:19-31) in v. 30, the theme of repentance is explicit to some extent. It is here presented as the proper use of possessions, and concern for the poor. We can also view the Great Feast (14:15-24) and the parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1-13) as parables of repentance which implicitly carry images of repentance in the sense that they respectively convey the need of human response and for urgent decision in the face of eschatological crisis. Taken together, it is faith and repentance that the Christians should pursue in relationship with God. Christians restore their relationship with God in repentance, and maintain the relationship with God in faith which is particularly expressed in prayer. Luke appears keen to foster, in particular, a strong sense of the life of faith that Jesus requires of his followers in the context of the Journey with the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem. In this relationship perspective, the life of faith can be divided into three categories. In the first place, the relationship of the Christians with neighbours is presented as love and forgiveness. Luke has a prominent emphasis on the need to love and forgive all people. Christians should love and forgive their neighbours, including enemies and sinners. It is the appropriate attitude that all the Christians should have towards their neighbours. One after the other, it is emphasized that Christians should properly use their own material possessions which are entrusted to them for service of God and the poor. The Lucan Jesus repeatedly warns of the danger of attachment to riches as an obstacle to discipleship, and calls for the positive use of wealth, especially in the form of giving alms to the poor. After all, it is the right use of wealth

that Christians should pursue in relationship with material possessions. Lastly, it is especially faith and repentance that the Christians in relationship with God must bear in mind. Two prayer parables convey that prayer itself is an expression of faith towards God. Indeed, the evidence of faithfulness must be seen in prayer which presents itself as constant fellowship with God. As regards repentance, the parables related to repentance call for urgent repentance with a warning of imminent judgment, and still more describe that repentance means honestly acknowledging that one has broken the relationship between oneself and God, and fervently desiring the restoration of that relationship. All things considered, what Christians should pursue in relationship with God is faith and repentance. Moreover, in view of the fact that the Lucan parables are placed in the travel narrative which includes the Christian life as one of the two pivotal themes, it is further evident that the Lucan parables function as parables of the Christian life.

### **VII. The Violence of Religion**

Is there, then, some intrinsic relationship between religion and violence? This question has been addressed by René Girard, Walter Burkert, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Georges Bataille, who developed their analyses in parallel during the 1960s. In essence, they took up the longstanding debates among structuralist, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic theories of religion that address the puzzle of sacrifice -- the ritualized taking of animal and human life. (Kelly Hamerton, Robert G., ed. 1987) These debates connect back to (Emile Durkheim, 1995) more general theory that religion involves the practice of a community of believers who affirm both their idealized vision of society and their own social relations through ritual action in relation to positive and negative cults of the sacred. As subsequent analysts have noted, in Durkheim's model, the sacralisation of society delineates cultural boundaries of deviance and Otherness that continue to operate in more secularized social formations (Jeffrey Alexander. C., 1992) Keeping to the sphere of religion, the sacralisation process described by Durkheim is open as to its contents, and thus, war and martyrdom potentially can become sacred duties. For instance, in Japanese samurai culture, the Zen Buddhist monk was idealized as a model for warrior asceticism and indifference to death (Robert Bellah. N. 1970: 182). Durkheim's model of ritual offers a more general template for theorizing the fundamental embedded of violence in religion. René Girard's (1977) analysis has been particularly influential, for it can be applied both to sacrifice within a social group, and to a group's violence toward external opponents (Rene Girard, 1977). Girard theorizes sacrifice as a resolution of the cycle of violence that stems from mimesis -- an imitative rivalry cantered on desire for the objects that the other values. A "surrogate victim" who stands in for wider ills, crimes, or malfeasance becomes the object of collective murder. Because the victim lacks effective defenders, the ritual killing requires no further retribution, and the cycle is brought to an end, while simultaneously achieving a goal of sanctification -- establishing the purity of the sacred in its positive aspects, and separating it from sacred evil, and from the profane. The ritual cleansing so widespread in religious ceremony originally takes the form of sacrifice that destroys a representative bearer of evil. In essence, the core ritual practice of religion is a process of scapegoating (Rene Girard, 1977). Although Girard's model of sacrifice concerns mimetic competition within a shared domain, the scapegoating thesis broadens its applicability to individuals or groups that become stand-ins for both wider sins within a culture, as well as external threats. The former instance -- within a culture -- is exemplified in the ritualized mass-media scapegoating of Jim Jones in the wake of the murders and mass suicide that he and his Peoples Temple followers committed at Jonestown in 1978; Jones bore much sin of his own making, but the scapegoating loaded onto him blame for practices (forexample, in politics, public relations, and social control) that were much more widely shared. As for the second possibility, of intercultural conflict, Girard's theory has been invoked in studies of nationalist struggles, ethno religious violence (Appleby 2000) and religious terrorism. Girard meant his theory to apply to archaic religion. In turn, he argued, the crucifixion of Jesus exposed the mythic process of scapegoating, and thus transformed human history by making it possible to reflexively critique the violence of scapegoating (Girard 1986: 205; cf. Williams 1975). The hope of Christocentric theories is that subsequent incidents of religious violence amount to historical remnants or resurgences of archaic religion. Yet this quasi-teleological view fails to square with recent critiques of modernization theories. As these critiques point out, there have been limits to the processes by which modern universalistic social institutions have displaced ones based on status honour. Thus, the salience of Girard's theory exceeds his theological frame. A theory of ritual offers a powerful basis for interpreting religiously charged violence -- from the highly symbolic but nonetheless physical violence of desecrating religious objects and shrines sometimes rebuilding on top of them.

### **VIII. Religion, the Social Order, and the State**

It was Max Weber who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, most energetically mapped out an alternative to functionalist and essentialist accounts of religion -- by cantering his analysis on how religion traffics in the ultimate meaning of life. Yet he did not take ultimate meaning as a constant; to the contrary, Weber famously remarked, "'from what' and 'for what' one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, 'could

be' redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world" (Max Weber, 1946: 267). And despite his emphasis on meaning, Weber rejected idealist reductionism. For meanings to become salient to social action on a wide basis, they would have to become institutionally elaborated by religious virtuosi and other practitioners who operate within particular structures of social organization, and in social relationships with their audiences, typically drawn from some social strata more than others. In turn, relatively bounded social strata take on the character of "status groups" that share a sense of honour and solidarity centered on a distinctive style of life -- nobilities that justify their positions in relation to lineage and tradition, workers who affirm the dignity of labour, and so on. Religious meaning thus can refine, consolidate, and sacralise status honour, thereby sharpening status group alliances and boundaries (Max Weber, 1946: 267). In order to theorize violence, it is important to consider relationships between a typical religious community and other religious communities, as well as with any secular or military power that claims political jurisdiction in the territory where the religious community exists. Interestingly, charisma blurs the relationships between religious community and political community. As Guenther Roth has noted, Weber "transferred the concept of the congregation or community from the religious to the political sphere and came to define it as the typical charismatic association" (Guenther Roth, 1975: 148). This conceptual affinity extends to the military organization of patriarchal violence in the "men's house," for which Weber commented, "The communistic warrior is the perfect counterpart to the monk" Weber analysed relationships between religion and the political by identifying two kinds of domination: political domination by means of authority and "hierocratic coercion" -- a form of "psychic coercion" implemented by "distributing or denying religious benefits" (Max Weber, 1946: 267). Thus, at the centre of Weber's sociology of domination there is (1) recognition of continuities between religious and political organization, and (2) a specification of different sources of (and potential conflicts between) religious and political authority. Various possible relations thus obtain between secular powers and religion. When a hierocratic organization affirms a monopoly over religious practice within a given territory (approximating the "church" as an ideal type), it typically seeks to define the limits of political authority, either by subsuming it completely in theocracy. At the other extreme, the state asserts legitimacy in nonreligious terms, and on this basis, claims to exercise authority over the exercise of religion. Paradoxically, each of these resolutions yields a structurally similar situation in which the legitimacy of state power is cloaked in religion, and struggles against the state tend to become framed in sacred terms. Over the course of modern Western development, there has been a general decline in church monopolies, coupled with development of religious pluralism and the rise of secular public culture. With secularization (however incomplete), the state has inherited the Durkheimian religious community's function -- policing the boundaries that define legitimate religions -- while leaving room for pluralism within those boundaries. However, the consolidation of modern religious pluralism within nation-states is precarious, as recent ethno religious conflicts, theocratic-national movements, and regulations of religion attest. Moreover, any social order advantages certain social strata and subordinates others, and today, this occurs both within states and in the global spread of the world economy and modernity. The latter are often culturally marked by their Western provenance, and sometimes opposed by actors within alternative civilizational complexes, in particular, Islam (Samuel Huntington. P.1996). Historically and today, religious movements that challenge a given social order sometimes arise on the basis of a shared commitment to ultimate values that links participants across social cleavages in a déclassé alliance. More typically, movements originate in social strata that are negatively privileged politically and economically, or socially ascendant but blocked from power. For either negatively privileged or excluded groups, religion represents a special case of status honour that, as Weber comments, is "nourished most easily on the belief that a special 'mission' is entrusted to them.... Their value is thus moved into something beyond themselves, into a 'task' placed before them by God" (Max Weber, 1946: 267). Religion under Western monotheism, in Weber's account, develops a possibility of "holy war, i.e., a war in the name of god, for the special purpose of avenging a sacrilege." Weber argued that the connection of the holy war to salvation religion is "in general only a formal relation" and "even the formal orthodoxy of all these warrior religionists was often of dubious genuineness" (Max Weber, 1946: 267). Not surprisingly, the idea of the holy war that Weber sketched has received considerable scholarly attention. One of the most significant theoretical refinements is James Aho's distinction between "immanent-cosmological" versus "transcendent-historical" myths of holy war. In the first, warfare itself is a glorious ritualized exemplary activity that ought to symbolize the divine order; the latter myth underwrites a utilitarian pursuit of war as a means to fulfil a covenant with a deity. (James Aho. A. 1981)

### **IX. Conflicts with Counter cultural Religious Movements**

Warring sects range from small groups engaged in largely symbolic conflict, to violent but ineffectual ones, and on to highly organized armed militaristic cadre that operate effectively on a national or international scale, surviving with support from background sponsoring groups or extensive secondary networks. Sometimes, a strategy of repression is undertaken toward countercultural groups even in the absence of any violence, when such groups are defined by moral entrepreneurs of the established order as outside the boundaries of societal

moral legitimacy. In other cases -- rare, but paramount now -- the call to war is heeded on both sides of the apocalyptic divide. In either case, when opponents act to counter an apocalyptic sect, this response is invoked by the sectarians to legitimate their apocalyptic ideology among a broader countercultural audience. Two subtypes mark a continuum of responses to countercultural sects. First, private individuals and groups may take repressive actions against religious movements into their own hands, without state or religious sanction, but as moral entrepreneurs for the established cultural order. Second, there are full-scale public campaigns of religious repression, persecution, or even war, organized either by a hegemonic religion against what is defined as heresy, or, in cases where states have assumed de facto authority for legitimation of religion or where a movement threatens state power, by one or more states themselves. At the ad hoc end of the continuum, distraught family members sometimes forcibly seek to prevent relatives from associating with a particular religion, or they may use violent non-legitimate force to retrieve a relative from a religious organization. On occasion, internal family conflicts have led to violence, as when the husband of a nineteenth-century Bishop Hill woman murdered the sect's leader, Eric Janson (John Hall 1988). In other cases, ad hoc action becomes more organized. In the "anti-cult" movements that developed in the United States and Europe in the wake of the countercultural religious ferment that began in the 1960s, family opponents often formed loose alliances, sometimes aided by a broader coalition of "cultural opponents." These anti-cult counter-movements operated within varying national cultural traditions concerning religious freedom, and some groups eschewed violence in favour of conflict mediation. However, the most militant anti-cult activists facilitated the kidnapping of sect members and forcible "deprogramming," in which sect members were subjected to re-education until they recanted their sectarian beliefs (David Bromley, G., and James T. Richardson, eds. 1983). At the extreme, cultural opponents engage in direct campaigns of intimidation and violence against religious movements. An iconic case concerns the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints in the United States during the nineteenth century: not only were Mormons forcibly driven from certain states; in June of 1844, an angry mob broke into a jail in Carthage, Illinois, and lynched their leader, Joseph Smith. To only mention another example, Jehovah's Witnesses found themselves subject to similar albeit less extreme intimidations when their patriotism was questioned during World War II (Shawn Francis Peters, 2000). At the opposite end of the continuum, public campaigns by established religions and states against religions deemed non-legitimate are diverse. They range from subjugation of Jews and repression of Christianity in the Roman Empire, to the Church of Rome's campaigns against sectarian heresy and witchcraft in the middle ages (and French King Philip the Fair's pogrom against the Knights Templar), Soviet suppression of religion, and the contemporary campaign of the People's Republic of China against the Falun Gong sect (for one review of contemporary international issues, see Rosalind Hackett, I.J., Mark Silk, and Dennis Hoover, eds. 2000). Most recently, in the initial days after September 11, U.S. President George W. Bush -- in a telling but quickly recanted choice of words -- called for a "crusade" against Osama bin Laden's al Qaida movement and terrorism in general (in a similar vein, the military operation was initially named "Infinite Justice"). The comparative research on such developments remains spotty. One line of inquiry traces how deviants or scapegoats become framed as the other. An important historical study, Norman Cohn's *Inner Demons* (Norman Cohn, 1970) traces the diffusion of speculations about secret practices of cannibalistic infanticide -- anxieties that fuelled institutionally sanctioned campaigns of persecution from the Roman Empire through the seventeenth century. Researchers similarly have explored community accusations of witchcraft raised against individuals (e.g., Thomas 1971; Erikson 1966). Such campaigns of repression are subject to Durkheimian functionalist analysis of how social control contains anxiety and enhances dominant group solidarity (Joseph Klaitz 1985). Explanatory attention also has been directed to explaining the conditions under which repressive campaigns become unleashed; Behringer (1997), for example, argues that in Bavaria during the late sixteenth century, witchcraft purges came to a head during agricultural crises. In such circumstances, repression might occur even against a powerless religious movement or person, in order to reinforce general norms of cultural conformity. But other counter cultural religious movements are harbingers of broad sociocultural change, and as Michael Adas argues, efforts at repression can badly backfire, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of a countercultural movement, channelling secondary mobilization of resources and followers to its cause, and undermining the capacity of an established order's organization to sustain their institutional dominance. This is the substantial risk of the current "war against terrorism": that the coalition's strategy will do nothing to change the conditions that spawn terrorism, and to the contrary, will further alienate and embolden Muslims already of a fundamentalist bent, inspiring further jihad against the West. The result could be a destabilization of states -- from the Philippines and Indonesia to Nigeria, and thus, an even further erosion of the established world order.

## **X. Conclusion**

It is clear that religion is something which can be manipulated either for the good or for the bad. Religions, however, also provide a wealth of values and motivations for violence against groups and individuals perceived to pose a threat to one's religious beliefs or the survival of one's religious community. India is no exception to this. Communal violence has a multitude of explanations and both the primordial, which emphasise

the importance of primordial religious identities, and the instrumentalists, who focus on the way politicians manipulate these identities for their own political gain, contribute something towards the understanding of the causes of violence. What each of us wants and can and will pursue will change in time. Corresponding social adjustments must thereby be made with others. And unavoidably, some necessary adjustments will be dammed up by conflicts over vital interests and antagonistic views of truth, morality, and justice. Violence is then the inevitable recourse, the ultimate means, of conflict resolution and social adaptation. This does not mean that a particular type of violence is certain. Nor is widely destructive, collective violence necessary. And especially, war between or within states is not inevitable. Rather, the violence that is used and its intensity is a matter of society's structure and culture. Particularly, minimizing the intensity of violence and eliminating war requires promoting and protecting a free society--an exchange society--at the national and international levels. For a lasting and just peace, restrict and limit government. In total, some violence is inevitable; extreme violence and war are not. To eliminate war, to restrain violence, to nurture universal peace and justice, is to foster freedom. "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you." None of us would like to be hated or despised; rather, we would like to be loved by everybody. We want others to love us, accept us, forgive us and behave well with us. So our responsibility is to first love others. If we love others, we can expect that others too will love us. He pointed out that the word, 'religion' is derived from the root word *religio*, which means 'to bind together' and religion actually does this. Religion has exercised the most profound influence over man's thoughts since time immemorial. Even today, when the human person has made tremendous progress, especially in the fields of science and technology, he is utterly restless in his quest for some unseen powers which may give him some inspiration and solace. Every human person by nature has a quest to go beyond his existence. This quest is for the supreme knowledge. Every human heart has a thirst for love and peace. And how do we get it? 'Love for all and hatred for none' is or should be the teaching of all religions. So, let us love and be loved. Through the centuries, groups, communities or nations have been caught in the web of conflicts, often waging wars, on the basis of ethnic, racial, religious and cultural differences frequently perceived as threats to particular social existence. The people of diverse cultural origins and different religious persuasions need to, and can establish lasting bonds of peaceful relations through sincere inter-religious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue provides new elements of unity and harmony among peoples for a new era of peace in the world. Peace begets peace. A peaceful person brings peace in the society through words, actions and exemplary life. Let us be peace-makers. Religion is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values. The teachings and practices of major world religions reveal spiritual and moral formulations that support peace, social justice, reconciliation, and harmony within and between humanity and divinity. For all their differences, there is much that people of faith have in common, not the least of which, of course, is spirituality itself. Therefore, one can argue that "the recognition of a shared concern to develop 'honest, loving, and holistic relationships with God and neighbour' can form the basis for the rebuilding of constructive relationships.

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