The Christ who Embraces:
An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India

By

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Abstract

This thesis develops a Christological response to Orthodox Christian mission in the context of caste dynamics among St. Thomas/Syrian Orthodox Christians in India. The world’s Orthodox community recognises as axiomatic Ion Bria’s description of mission as the ‘liturgy after the liturgy.’ The liturgy inhabits an all-encompassing space, one without any room for exclusion, as is proper for the God of all creation. To justify this argument, Ion Bria develops his dictum in terms of the cosmic missional fulfilment of ‘the liturgy:’ the imperative to witness in the public and political realms, identifying with the struggles of politically marginalized communities in order to embody the gospel in hostile contexts.

This thesis considers the implications of this Orthodox model of mission in the Indian social context; in particular, how an emphasis on transcendence and liturgy might take political form in relation to Dalit social and theological concerns. It explores theological resources within miaphysite Christology, especially as developed by early teachers of the church in their treatment of a transcendental and immanent Christology. This theological perspective is then engaged in a contextual debate on the theology of margins in India, namely Dalit Christology, and the importance it places on meaningful engagement in the formation of an Orthodox theology of margins in India.

Finally, I propose an all-encompassing praxis of the liturgical embrace (kiss of peace), a Christological metaphor for the Syrian Orthodox liturgy, which extends from the liturgical to the social milieu. This proposal aims to define touch or embrace in the context of ‘untouchability,’ where people identify as equal, without discrimination, reflecting the inseparable unity or embrace of the transcendental (divine) and immanent (human) nature of Christ. In following these threads, this thesis intends to offer a casteless Orthodox theology of mission that envisions a reconciling mission through a Christological embrace.
Declaration

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution, and affirm that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due references is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed _________________

Jacob Joseph

Date:
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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ACR</td>
<td>Asian Christian Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
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<td>ANF</td>
<td>Ante-Nicene Fathers</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATC</td>
<td>Asian Trading Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTF</td>
<td>Bangalore Theological Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTESSC</td>
<td>The Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College</td>
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<tr>
<td>BVP</td>
<td>Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBAA</td>
<td>Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLS</td>
<td>The Christian Literature Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>CISRS</td>
<td>Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Mission Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSCO</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSS</td>
<td>Christava Sahitya Smithy</td>
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<tr>
<td>DJVP</td>
<td>Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth</td>
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<tr>
<td>EATWOT</td>
<td>Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>Eastern Churches Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>The Ecumenical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOIM</td>
<td>Fellowship of Indian Missiologists</td>
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<tr>
<td>IIS</td>
<td>Indian Institute of Spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRM</td>
<td>International Journal of Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISPCK</td>
<td>Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOC</td>
<td>Malankara Orthodox Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCI</td>
<td>National Council of Churches in India</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPNF</td>
<td>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIRSI</td>
<td>Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India</td>
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<tr>
<td>SATHRI</td>
<td>South Asia Theological Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEERI</td>
<td>St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPCK</td>
<td>Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVTQ</td>
<td>St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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<td>WJK</td>
<td>Westminster John Knox Press</td>
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1. Introduction

How can we possibly call ourselves a liturgical community if churches continue to discriminate against people on the bases of caste, race, gender and so on, even within their worship life?

Mor Geevarghese Coorilos

What then is exclusion? In a preliminary and rather schematic way one can point to two interrelated aspects of exclusion, the one that transgresses against “binding” and the other that transgresses against “separating.”

Miroslav Volf

1.1 A Problem of Liturgy

The following argument details a Christological response to the Orthodox Christian mission statement which commonly defines mission as “the liturgy after the liturgy.” Basic to this response is a focus on the transcendent (divine) and immanent (human) nature of Christ and its social implication among the Orthodox and Dalit communities in India. It is shaped in the

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1 Mor Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, “Mission as Liturgy Before Liturgy and as Contestation,” in Orthodox Perspective on Mission, ed. Petros Vassiliadis (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), 175-76.


3 Daniel D.-I. Coibotea explains the complex nature of Orthodox Christian traditions. According to him, the autocephalous and autonomous churches that make up Orthodoxy today have been established on the basis of the five ancient patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), but down the centuries the Jerusalem Patriarchate has diminished its glory. See footnote 1 of Daniel Coibotea, D.-I., “Unity and Mission, an Orthodox Perspective,” International Review of Mission 78, no. 309 (1989): 30. Though there were many divisions took place in the Orthodox tradition, the heritage and the commonalities of an undivided Orthodoxy remained identical with its faith, sacraments and spiritual life. The two major categories of Orthodox churches are: the Oriental and the Eastern traditions. The Eastern Orthodox includes all Orthodox churches that affirm the Byzantine tradition whereas the Oriental Orthodox (also known as the non-Chalcedonian, anti-Chalcedonian, Monophysite, Miaphysite, Ancient Oriental, Lesser Eastern Tradition) consists of Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, and Ethiopian traditions. The Oriental Orthodox Churches have been contributing towards the missionary expansion of Christianity from Alexandria down to Africa and from Antioch to the remote regions of the far East (including India), though the political and religious situations enforced them to continue the evangelism in a great deal from outreach to in-reach through preaching, teaching, monasticism, spirituality, diakonia, liturgy, theological education and intellectual creation. See Aram Keshishian, “The Oriental Orthodox Churches,” The Ecumenical Review 46, no. 1 (1994): 105-6.

4 Ion Bria, The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996). Bria uses liturgy as the primary tool to understand the Orthodox mission and popularised the Orthodox mission dictum “the liturgy after the liturgy.”

5 The Sanskrit word Dal means broken or oppressed, similar to the Hebrew root word ‘dal’ – meaning weak or frail. The Dalits are the people who were commonly understood as the people at the lowest ladder in the caste hierarchy (Varna) or people outside the four varnas. James Massey, Roots of Dalit History, Christianity, Theology and Spirituality (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 23. The Dalits consider themselves as the Adi-people, original inhabitants of the land where as “hindu interpretation of the divinely ordered human community stem from the ‘Purusha Hymn’ in the Rig Veda that legitimises the graded inequality a four-fold social system.” Sathianathan Clarke, “Dalit Theology: An Introductory Interpretive Theological Exposition,” in Dalit Theology in the
context of caste\(^6\) dynamics among the Indian Christian community particularly among the St. Thomas/Syrian or Orthodox Christian tradition.\(^7\) Through this conversation, this thesis develops an Orthodox theology of mission within the image of a reconciling Christological embrace or touch, an image at the heart of Orthodox liturgy, as a path to eradicate the existing contradiction between the cosmic vision of Orthodox theology and the caste practice of untouchability.

The Orthodox liturgy (Eucharist) upholds two interrelated concerns of cosmos and its connection to God. First, the cosmos is metaphorically miniaturized with ‘people’ in the liturgy. To Orthodoxy, cosmos is not an attempt of making all ‘one’ but of celebrating the plural within the time and space of a Eucharistic location. Mose Bar Kepho, a ninth century liturgical commentator of the Oriental Orthodox Church, understands the liturgy (the holy *Qurbono\(^8\)*) as the “assembly,” “communion,” “oblation,” and “mysteries.” It is a gathering of people representing the entire cosmos.\(^9\) According to the Syrian tradition, a priest cannot

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\(^{6}\) The origin of ‘caste’ is found in *Vedic* sources since the early mention of these terms comes from the *Vedic Texts*. The hierarchical function of four *Varnas* – *brahmana, ksatriya, vaisya* and *sudra* are mentioned and described in detail in *Vedas*. Romila Thapar, “The First Millennium B.C. in Northern India (Up to the end of Mauryan Period),” in *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian Society*, ed. Romila Thapar (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995), 98. In India, this term is used to denote a peculiar endogamous social group with supposed peculiarities, like exclusiveness, hierarchy, fixed order of things, greater regard to the ancestry of a person than to his individual merits, pretension of the purity of blood, feeling of superiority and inferiority or customary manifestations thereof.

\(^{7}\) It is a hazardous task for pinpointing the historical development of Orthodox traditions in India due to the complex nature of the history of Indian Christianity. Arguably, the ancient Christians groups who follow the lineage to the mission of St. Thomas, the apostle are generally known as St. Thomas Christians. Many descendants of this tradition who cherish their theological and liturgical heritage within the ancient East Syriac/Assyrian Christian tradition or the Oriental/Syrian traditions adopted the word “Syriac” as a prefix or suffix for denoting their churches today. Since the Middle Eastern ancient theologies are predominantly named as “Orthodox theology,” some churches keep the word “Orthodox” to show their theological roots. Therefore, the ancient Indian Christianity is known with several names such as St. Thomas Christians, Orthodox Christians, Syrian Christians or Early Christian community along with their present-day affiliated denominations such as Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox. In this research, I focus to those churches that are following the St. James Eucharistic liturgy, partly or fully, and also share the traditions of St. Thomas, the Syrian and Orthodox with its theological attachment to the non-Chalcedon or Oriental Christology. Even though there are many churches that share the ecclesial lineage of both St. Thomas and Syriac theological traditions of Oriental Orthodox school, predominantly the Orthodox tradition in India is shared between the Syrian Orthodox and the Indian Orthodox. Susan Visvanathan, *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13-15. See also George Woodcock, *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 113. Hereafter, to denote the Orthodox community, I will interchangeably use the names such as St. Thomas Christians, Orthodox Christians, Syrian Christians or Early Christian community.

\(^{8}\) *Qurbona* or *qurban* means the sacrifice. According to the West Syriac liturgy, *Qurobo* is the holy liturgy.

\(^{9}\) In particular, the term “access” in context of the liturgy of *Qurbono*, according to Bar Kepho, brings people who are “far off” and “near,” “they of heaven and they of earth,” “the People and the Peoples,” and “heavenly and earthly beings” near to each other. Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy, By George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bar Kepha: Together with the Syriac Anaphora of St James and a Document Entitled the Book of Life, trans. R. H. Connolly and H. W. Codrington (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), 24-25.
celebrate Holy Eucharist unless there is at least one layperson present.\textsuperscript{10} The presence of the people becomes central to the cosmic mission of the Orthodox church.

Second, the liturgy serves as the bridge between God and the cosmos. As Emmanuel Clapsis puts it: “eucharist is the unique liturgical act that brings together vertical and horizontal dimensions of Christian mission and living in a creative but disturbing unity.”\textsuperscript{11} From a Eucharistic point of view, Orthodoxy considers the vertical to be God’s relation to human, and the horizontal to be the human relation to one another. The Eucharist becomes the key agent to establish this unity between God and cosmos. A unity is thereby initiated between the people outside and inside the church. For the Orthodox liturgy, the movement of inside-outside is very important. According to Clapsis, if this movement is limited only to one side alone, there is a danger of reducing the liturgy “to ritualism and (that) leads to introversion” and mission as a Christian “religious ideology.”\textsuperscript{12} Clapsis, therefore, envisages an integral relationship between Eucharist and people within God’s saving act in the cosmos. This relationship challenges the Orthodox community of faith to offer the Eucharist to the world outside as the aim of its mission. For Clapsis, “commitment to Christ in the Eucharist carries with it a commitment to the poor in this world…and the creation of a better world.”\textsuperscript{13} The liturgy is a form of action that brings people of various kinds together with God. In short, the liturgy forms a community that experiences the transcendental (vertical) and immanent (horizontal) without interruption.

However, in spite of the cosmic vision, Orthodox liturgical theology is susceptible to nominalism. For Alexander Schmemann, this can dilute the cosmic vision of Orthodox liturgical theology, meaning that, “if the Orthodox Church seems unable to discern the radically new situation in which she lives, if she is unaware of the new world surrounding and challenging her, it is because she herself continues to live in a “world” which, although it no longer exists, still shapes and determines the Orthodox consciousness.”\textsuperscript{14} If the church is unaware of the challenges of the new world, people or participants in the liturgy become indifferent to the cosmic mission of the Church.

\textsuperscript{12} Clapsis, \textit{Orthodoxy in Conversation}, 194.
\textsuperscript{13} Clapsis, \textit{Orthodoxy in Conversation}, 193. This concept of inclusive world constantly transforms towards a better world of justice-oriented humanity. Clapsis calls this process as God’s “all-embracing” (cosmic) purpose for humanity. Clapsis, \textit{Orthodoxy in Conversation}, 194. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, has drawn some connections between Eucharist and cosmos. For Ciobotea, the “eucharistic liturgy proves to be the eucharistic consciousness of the whole cosmos.” Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, “The Role of the Liturgy in Orthodox Theological Education,” \textit{St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly} 31, no. 2 (1987): 110-11.
\textsuperscript{14} Alexander Schmemann, \textit{Church, World, Mission} (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979) 14.
To reappropriate the Orthodox liturgy as a missional resource, it is necessary to problematize the ‘cosmos’ or the ‘world’. Ion Bria, a Romanian Orthodox theologian takes the concept of the liturgy seriously and makes it a vibrant theological source for Orthodoxy to speak about its mission and its world commitment. According to him, the “liturgy is our thanksgiving for – and on behalf of – the created world, and the restoration in Christ of the fallen world. It is the image of Kingdom; it is the cosmos becoming ecclesia.”15 There is a double movement in the liturgy. On the one hand, through the celebration of the liturgy, the Church (ecclesia) aims to transform the cosmos into the real form of the Kingdom of God. In liturgy, the cosmos forms and becomes an ecclesia and through liturgy everyone becomes the participant of the Kingdom of God. Bria writes that “the mission of the Church rests upon the radiating and transforming power of the Liturgy. It is a stimulus in sending out the people of God to the world to confess the Gospel and to be involved in man’s [sic] liberation”16 In this sense, for the Orthodox missional life, liturgy becomes an inseparable theological component.

Generally speaking, for Orthodox theology to understand mission one must first understand the liturgy. The two are not synonymous, but there is an interconnection. As seen above from Bria’s attempt, this approach found formal expression in the ecumenical deliberations during the mid-1970s.17 This may be the reason why Schmemann later explains the connection of liturgy and mission with a concrete foundational expression of Orthodox theology. The missionary dimension of the term “liturgy” resides in its “holistic and comprehensive” scope, one derived from its focus on the Trinity and the incarnation of God in Christ.18 More precisely, the term “liturgy” is interchangeable with that of the Eucharist, which stands at the heart of Orthodox theology. This basic logic establishes the Eucharist as the hermeneutical key for understanding the theology of mission within the Orthodox Church.

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16 Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy,” 68.

17 The basic insights derived from the consultation of the Orthodox member churches of the WCC in Bucharest in June 1974, were used to prepare a working paper on “Confessing Christ Today” which was presented at the WCC’s 5th Assembly at Nairobi in 1975. From the report of the consultation published in *International Review of Mission*, 64 (1975): 79.

18 For Orthodox churches, the liturgy is “not an ‘object’ for theological inquiry and definition, but rather a comprehensive living source for a holistic life. See also Thomas Fisch, ed., *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 12.
1.2 Orthodox Mission, Culture and Caste

In 1973, Ion Bria drew out the various aspects of liturgy/Eucharist and mission in a manner which remains authoritative. For Bria, Orthodox mission is the “liturgy after the liturgy.” In his discussion on “mission,” Bria deliberates on the liturgical practice of the church in general and the Liturgy as the Holy Eucharist in particular. In both cases the Liturgy sets the rhythm of the mission: in terms of the gathering and the sending forth. More precisely, the Eucharist becomes the source and motivating factor of Church life and Mission. Therefore, the mission outcome is aptly called the “Liturgy after the Liturgy.” See Ion Bria, ed., Martyria Mission: The Witness of the Orthodox Church Today (Geneva: WCC Publication, 1980), 7-11. For the first time, Archbishop Anastasios proposed the term “the Liturgy after the Liturgy” in his presentation titled “Confessing Christ through the Liturgical Life of the Church.” Originally the idea of “the liturgy after the liturgy” was interpreted in his liturgical sermon to a group of the Union of the Christian Scientists in 1963 in Athens. The main emphasis of this presentation was on the topic of “The Liturgy” and its relation to “Koinonia and Diaconia,” where he has very subtly used the term “Mission” and “Liturgy” in the original interpretation. See Archbishop Anastasios, Mission in Christ Way: An Orthodox Understanding on Mission (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 94-96.

Bria, “The Liturgy After the Liturgy,” 70.
Bria, Go Forth in Peace: Go Forth in Peace, 3.
Bria, Go Forth in Peace: Go Forth in Peace, 19.
Bria, “The Liturgy After the Liturgy,” 70.
Bria, Go Forth in Peace: Go Forth in Peace, 17.

Bria builds his argument by drawing attention to the liturgy’s foundational meaning of “public” and “collective action.” Liturgy embodies a continued action among the public similar to the public action functioned in Christ’s mission. Bria argues that the mission of the church is based on Christ’s mission, which is the communion of humanity and the entire creation with the very life of God. Potentially, the liturgy and the mission affirms the God-human communion as true for all without being determined by caste, colour or class. In this view, the liturgy carries the most perfect access to the economy of salvation, forming as “the goal – and also the spring-board of mission, rather than the means of mission.” Through, the liturgy after the liturgy, the church witnesses “to the cosmic dimension of the salvation event, puts into practice, daily and existentially, its missionary vocation.” For Bria, in the Eucharistic liturgy the faithful participate in their salvific experience and mediate the same experience to the entire cosmos. By holding this characteristic of the liturgy among the faith community or public, the Eucharistic liturgy surpasses all divisions and offers cosmic salvation. In this view, Bria posits four imperatives of such Orthodox mission: developing Christian identity through Eucharistic communion; maintaining Orthodox witness in the new Christian social milieu; promoting Christian life in the political realm; and creating a community of people with the socially marginalised. For him, the liturgy builds up the one Body of Christ within the economy of salvation to all people of all ages including the non-Christians and strangers.

The significance of Bria’s point is twofold. First, engagement with the political, social, cultural, and economic margins is a direct expression of the Orthodox liturgy. This aspect is
well summarised in Clapsis’ proposal for mission imperatives. Clapsis treats the dynamics of liturgy as a movement “from death to life, from injustice to justice, from violence to peace, from hatred to love, from vengeance to forgiveness, from selfishness to sharing and from division to unity.”

A close observation of the dichotomy between the idea and practice in the context of the Orthodox churches in India highlights that the local expression of mission is much debated. This dichotomy is the main question of this thesis. The thesis, therefore, also examines the question of how Bria's imperatives have been overlooked in the religious, political, social, and cultural context of Orthodoxy in India.

Bria’s four imperatives of the liturgy – Christian identity, social expression, political commitment and embrace with the socially marginalised – are essential to Orthodox mission. Petros Vassiliadis offers practical ways of fulfilling the Orthodox mission albeit it in a slightly different manner while keeping Bria's appropriation of mission intact. According to Vassiliadis, liturgy lies at the very centre of the ontological identity of the Orthodox church, and through which the living expressions of unity, communion, equality, fellowship, sharing and self-sacrifice can be made. All these proposals stand as a practical excursus in the mission. He proposes the need for Orthodox mission going beyond the ecclesial to a social approach. Such an approach makes the mission an expression of the kingdom of God. For him:

…the eucharistic perspective of mission points far beyond denominational boundaries, beyond Christian limitations, even beyond the religious sphere in the conventional sense, and towards the manifestation of the kingdom of God, the restoration the “household” (oikos) of God, in its majestic eschatological splendour.

Second, insofar as these imperatives have not found a continued lived economy with the margins of society in India, there is a reduction of the cosmic outlook of the liturgy itself. After all these liturgical concerns are based on the Christological faith affirmation, which cannot diminish the ‘lived economy’ or humanity of Christ at any point of time in the missional life of the church. This is the cosmic outlook of the Orthodox liturgy and its Christological function which accomplishes its fullness through the Eucharist. Thomas Kollampampil, a Syrian Catholic theologian, draws attention to the cosmic expression of the Syrian Eucharist with a Christological view. According to him, “the Eucharist is the paramount acting out of the mystery of Incarnation that aims at redemption and salvation that are affected by the Eucharistic Lord in the history, both forward and backward.” Divine

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incarnation was “the deeper most divine-human reciprocity.”29 This points to the significance of Orthodox Christology as an expression of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God as the establishment of the Christian mission. The Eucharist – Christology – Kingdom of God relation takes sufficient theological merit to inform the cosmic – transcendent and immanent – expression of Christian mission in India.

Bria’s “imperatives” of mission are also grounded in the concern for cosmic redemption.30 For him, the cosmic dimension encompasses both those inside and outside the church in the expectation of salvation.31 One can extend Bria’s point by reference to the Eucharistic and other liturgical prayers in the daily life of the church.32 The expression of cosmic redemption keeping the fullness of God’s will to the economy of salvation is shown in the Eucharistic liturgy. For example, “[t]he one Holy Father with us who formed the world by His compassion, the one Holy Son with us who redeemed the world by His Person’s precious sufferings, the one Holy Spirit with us Who is the Perfecter and the Fulfiller of all that has been and all that which will be (in the cosmos),”33 affirms the cosmic nature of Triune God and God’s encompassing activity in the cosmos. The God-World-Human relationship is well drafted in this liturgical prayer. This is not to deny the different interpretations of this cosmic vision within Orthodoxy theology. It is to forward the basic assumption that cosmic salvation demands a balance between vertical and horizontal, between the human and divine dimensions.34 Differently stated, it is the transcendental and immanent expression of the nature of God that is the foundation of Orthodox liturgical theology.

31 Bria, ed., Martyria Mission, 68.
32 In the daily Syriac prayers of the Syriac Orthodox liturgy, most of the prayers reflect on the nature of cosmic vision of the church. The prayer on Monday emphasises for God’s mercy to the entire creation. Bede Griffiths, trans., The Book of Common Prayers of the Syrian Church (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2005), 66. On Tuesday, the main emphasis is given to the peace and tranquillity of the entire creation. It reads, “Make your peace and tranquillity dwell in the four quarters of the creation… Jesus is the true light, which enlightens the whole creation.” See Griffiths, The Book of Common Prayers of the Syrian Church, 83-84. On Wednesday the focus is on how God dwells in the world by offering His redemption to the entire creation. “God makes His peace and calm to dwell in the entire world and make to pass the scourge of wrath from the entire world in His mercy.” See Griffiths, The Book of Common Prayers, 121. The love of God to all the creation and the reconciling scope of the creation are dealt with on Thursday. The prayer goes as “by prayers and the Orthodox faith, O God, make your peace and tranquillity to rest upon the four quarters of the creation.” See Griffiths, The Book of Common Prayers, 202. On Saturday, the prayers affirm the saviour of the world. See Griffiths, The Book of Common Prayers, 245. See also Samuel Yeshu Mar Athanasius, Konatt Mathen, Kuriakose Corepiscopa, eds., Trilingual Eucharist Service Book of Syriac Orthodox Church (Cheeranchira, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2008), 154.
However, in the context of Orthodoxy in India, while the basic framework of God as both transcendent-immanent is maintained, the emphasis falls on the transcendent dimension of cosmic vision alone. In this view, Bria’s Orthodox mission imperatives remain an ideal that has not touched ground in many local contexts like in India. There is a tendency to remain practically disconnected from the social responsibility of the church. For example, in his seminal work from 1994, *The Silent Roots: Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, K. M. George, an Indian Orthodox theologian, affirms the fundamental Orthodox theological position of cosmic renewal as God’s activity. According to him “renewing the creation is the ‘project’ of the Holy Spirit and not of any human, social or ecclesiastical agency.”\(^{35}\) It is true that God fulfils everything, but the argument is developed with no reference to the horizontal (immanent) dimension of the human responsibility. On the one hand, the experience is of the local parishes inhabiting the cosmic horizon of God's redemption through the Divine Liturgy, while, on the other, God’s possibility of immanent involvement is reduced to this same local church. This dichotomy is not an abstraction but a practical experience.

To exacerbate matters, the theological claims attached to this vertical or transcendent aspect buffer more immediate concerns that attach to the horizontal or immanent expression of God’s activity. The emphasis falls on the vertical concerns based on the contextual exercise of the church. For instance, according to K. M. George, who writes in agreement with several other scholars, “Indian Christianity maintained naturally the uniqueness of its Orthodox faith while in social and cultural matters it was fully inculturated in the indigenous Indian context.”\(^{36}\) The language of the “indigenous Indian context” indicates a comprehensive account of the people of the land. However, in practice, “indigenous” refers to the profound philosophical-spiritual-ethic context of Hindus, Buddhists (philosophical Buddhists) and Jains. This “philosophical–indigenous” group provides support for the spiritual – ethical ethos of Orthodox Christianity in India.\(^{37}\) Even though the Orthodox church retained its Eastern character in faith, worship, spirituality and church organisation, in social and cultural matters it followed the prevailing patterns in the largely Hindu context.\(^{38}\)

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these traditions, in other words, follow some common ground of spiritual (theological) and ethical practices, and these present as the dominant model within the Indian spiritual and ethical contexts. These practices are themselves shaped by the caste structures of the society.\textsuperscript{39}

One might make the case that the Orthodox community maintains a position of privilege within the social and cultural system and that an uneven emphasis on the transcendental has isolated the account of the immanent from necessary theological criticisms. K.M. George makes his argument for the cultural philosophical synthesis with Christian faith by following a Christian tradition with a positive note on the need for of absorbing the cultural privileges of any context. For him, the “Cappadocians sought to adopt secular philosophy to the Christian Gospel rather than adopting Christian faith to secular culture.”\textsuperscript{40} The Christian community endorses such philosophy to propagate the conviction on the distinction of the people who confess the “truth revelation” and the “redemptive act” in the life of Christ and the people who are outside such faith. George further explores how the Cappadocian theologians shaped their theological context. For him, the factors projected in their theologising constituted a spiritual experience, a critical perspective of learning of culture from the ‘outside’ world.\textsuperscript{41}

While offering social and cultural sensitivity in theology, George believes that it can change the entire texture of ecclesial life including the liturgical functions. George writes:

\begin{quote}
the participating theologian, the Gospel does not appear in any pure form which can be picked up and planted elsewhere but comes along with certain liturgical form which are (and which should be) culturally conditioned and with some hermeneutical orientation inherited from the historical continuity of the believing community. It is not the liturgical form, which varies according to different cultural contexts, that is important here, but the community’s witness to the unbroken faith tradition which actualizes the Christ event in every age and place.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

George’s analysis reconciles the Orthodox church’s embodiment of ecclesial life with the dominant Indian philosophical culture and various caste expressions. Here, the parameters of culture for Orthodoxy fall only within the cultural norms of the dominant caste, but not within the life and experience of the people at the bottom of the caste ladder. In an Indian context, George’s argument creates problems. The culturally conditioned liturgy for the

\textsuperscript{39} George, “Canons of Culture in Orthodox-Protestant Relations,” 378.
\textsuperscript{41} George, “Gospel, Culture and Theological Education,” 462.
\textsuperscript{42} George, “Gospel, Culture and Theological Education,” 462.
Indian Orthodoxy is the *Brahmanical* culture ignoring all other cultural traditions. Varied cultural forms of the people in the bottom category not only remain unincorporated but continue to be rejected.

Insofar as this Indian Christianity is integrated into the same social system, it reflects the same ‘caste’ divisions of Indian society. K. M. George accepts the fact that caste exists in the Orthodox churches in India. For him, the church had “to accommodate itself to the stringent caste structure of Indian society for sheer survival, though it did not practice caste within its own fold.” How this distinction plays out is less than clear. George’s denial that the caste system is practised within the local Orthodox tradition contradicts the statements of the few bishops who attempted to integrate the members of the Dalits into Orthodoxy during the latter part of nineteenth Century.

1.3 Orthodoxy in India, Dalit Embrace, Confusions

Orthodox Christianity identified itself with the upper caste *Brahmins* of the caste system in India for its sheer survival. At the opposite end, some propagated the necessity of interacting with the Dalit community as they found the social obligation to combat the caste system. The Indian Bishops who came forward first to deal with this issue were Mor Gregorios of *Parumala* (1848-1902) and later Mor Osthatheos Pathrose (1886-1968).

With much resistance from the local communities, these Bishops made some positive moves in the area of Dalit engagements. Predominantly, they followed a model of Western mission among the Dalit community in Kerala, India. For Mor Gregorios, it was a precarious job to convince the traditional Christians of the Christian identity of the newly converted Dalits in spite of the positive attitude of Peter III, the Patriarch of Antioch towards the embrace of the Dalits into the Orthodox community. The Orthodox Christians continued with an indifference to the newly converted Dalits and constructed separate church buildings. However, most of those

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43 George, “Canons of Culture in Orthodox-Protestant Relations,” 378.
44 With the paternal instruction of Peter III, the Patriarch of Antioch, the later part of nineteenth century witnessed a mission movement of Geevarghese Mor Gregorious otherwise known as Parumala Thirumeni. Later, as a result of the interaction with Western missionary movement, Pathros Mor Osthatheos, began his missionary activities among the Dalit community. Both the bishops evangelized and converted more than 30000 Dalits. However, a large majority of Dalits who joined with Orthodox Church have discontinued their church affiliation due to the caste practice within the church. See Mathews Mor Severios, *Eastern Theological Visions* (Malayalam) (Kottayam, Kerala: M.O.C. Publication, 2000), 144-147; P.P. Varkey and K.V. Mammen, *Pathros Mor Osthatheos: A Prophet Like Revolutionary*, trans. Punnoose U. Panoor (Kottayam: Kerala, Kottackal Publishers, 2012). 28-41.
45 A detailed discussion on the mission activities of Mor Gregorios of *Parumala* and Mor Osthatheos Pathrose is given in chapter 3.
46 Through an Apostolic bull, the Patriarch, Peter III advised the church in Kerala to interact more with the Dalit community. See the published version of the bull in: “Pulasabhakal (Pulaya Churches),” *Malankara Edavaka Pathrika* 6, no. 7 (1897), 121-140.
worshipping centres originally meant that the Dalit community had been taken over by the ‘upper caste’ people.47

Similar to Mor Gregorios, Mor Osthatheos Pathrose, a missionary Bishop of the Orthodox church, initiated a mission in the early twentieth century. But due again to the resistance of the dominant community, he was prohibited from fruitfully executing his vision. Such a failure is recorded by Mor Osthatheos Geevarghese, an Orthodox theologian saying: Bishop Pathrose “had to face the combined opposition of hierarchy and laity.”48 The reason for such setbacks from hierarchy and laity, as he observes, is the “superiority complex of the ancient Church,” which he believes could do “more harm than good.”49 According to Bishop Geevarghese, Orthodoxy disfavoured the Dalit conversion to an Orthodoxy that “claimed to be the descendants of high-caste Brahmin converts and did not want the low-caste Christians among them.”50

The Orthodox church embraced the Vedic culture as part of their liturgical life. Paulose Mor Gregorius believes that the Orthodox church in India essentially followed the dominant Vedic tradition, which also adopted within its nature and practice of the Orthodox liturgical or theological traditions.51 This brought in a caste consciousness within Orthodoxy and Orthodoxy was shaped by an exclusive Brahmanic identity in the Indian society, and so existed within a caste binary. The Dalits who converted to Orthodox Christianity neither transcended their caste identity nor were they offered social acceptance among the Orthodox community.

When C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas observed this phenomenon, they understood the Dalit identity crisis within the exclusive Syrian community. According to them “the conversion of the scheduled caste did not lead immediately to a fellowship transcending social barriers, even at worship; the place of worship for the new converts were largely separate from those of the Syrians… religious fellowship co-existed with almost total mutual

47 This information is collected through several people who are still part of the mission directly or indirectly. In my conversation with D. Mathews, who after his retirement as a professor in English literature currently lives at Thrivannanthapuram, Kerala narrated his stories to me about the converted members of the ‘Servant of Cross’. Such stories include the forceful return of the converted members to their original caste despite their repeated request to have equal considerations in the social opportunities available in the church and society. Though some of the converts were well educated, due to their ‘lower caste’ status, they were denied of securing proper social standing like getting jobs in the schools or colleges that are managed by the church or positions in the religious administrative bodies. According to Mathews, their life after the conversion, both within and outside was very difficult.

49 Mar Osthatheos, “Indian Orthodox Church,” 200.
50 Mar Osthatheos, “Indian Orthodox Church,” 200.
social exclusiveness.”52 The Dalit community lost their old identity as Dalit and where denied their new identity as Orthodox. Though there are recent Orthodox claims concerning the missionary orientation of their life,53 religiously and socially the Dalits remain distanced from the Orthodox life.

For Mar Osthatheos Geevarghese, this reflects an ambiguity in the Orthodox church’s social practice. In his book The Sin of Being Rich in a Poor World, Bishop Geevarghese raises this paradox of the church. According to him, “the greatest tragedy of our existence is the inner contradiction between our sacramental theology and practical life.”54 Though Mar Osthatheos makes this comment in the context of ‘class’ struggle, sociologically, in India society, the root causes of class struggle must be understood against the backdrop of the caste issue.55 However, in using the word “contradiction,” Mar Osthatheos exposes the dichotomy present in the theologising of Orthodoxy in India. This results in a clear disconnection developed between the dominant and the social margins within the society.

1.4 A Problem and Future Ahead

One must say that the inadequacy of the theological hermeneutics created a long historical void in exercising a hostile approach to the ‘social margins’ in India. In this regard, it is also advisable to have a primary understanding of the issue of the ‘inadequacy of the hermeneutical perspective’ of the Syrian Orthodox theology. A theological revisitation is required. This, on the one hand, helps to gain a self-realisation within the Syrian Christian community and, on the other, encourages them to critique and to engage the problem with a fresh perspective. So far, on the basis of the concerns that exist between the community of margins and the Syrian Christians, the Church has taken less interest in addressing the problem from an Orthodox theological perspective. Social theorists locate these problems within the existing social and cultural perspectives alone and the theological endeavours from within the Orthodox community remain in their infancy. In this context, it is imperative to

53 In a later piece of research, Mor Athanasios Paulose, a Syrian Bishop observed that “the Syrian Orthodox community are (more) getting missionary minded every year. They are trying to keep pace with other Christian denominations in these matters and feel the great challenge to evangelise the whole of India and give the light which they received from the Apostles to their non-Christian brethren.” Mor Paulose Athanasius, The Syrian Orthodox Church: Its Religion and Philosophy (Changanaserry, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2005), 188.
55 Indian society is a combination of a number of social categories where caste and class are operationally effective. See Nandu Ram, ed., Dalits in Contemporary India: Vol. 1 Discrimination and Discontent (New Delhi: Siddhant Publications, 2008), 49.
address the ‘problem of distance’ from a theological point of view, against Orthodoxy’s cosmic theological vision. As discussed above, the cosmic vision of Orthodox theology cannot reduce itself to only as a religious or transcendental approach.

Mor Coorilos Geevarghese, a Syrian Orthodox ecumenical theologian raises similar questions concerning the disconnection between the liturgical worship and its social practices. In the practice of caste, can liturgy, the heart of Orthodox theology, take also a social form? Mor Coorilos challenges us to engage the liturgical theology in the social life and thereby eliminate the division between theology and social status. His fundamental question is: what is holy communion without social communion? He laments a dichotomy in the claims of Orthodox community: on the one hand, it considers itself to be a liturgical community of worshippers, while, on the other, it categorises people on the bases of caste, race, gender, and so on.\(^5^6\) He argues elsewhere that the Church keeps a “convenient distance with the Dalit struggles.”\(^5^7\) Ignoring this human struggle discredits the liturgical origins of the Orthodox mission. Mor Coorilos suggests that the church meets the triune God among the margins, where the victims of oppressive and life-denying forces threaten the agency of God’s life-affirming mission.\(^5^8\) For him, the liturgy becomes an activity, which meets the social needs of the margins in the society.

Similarly, K. P. Aliaz, explains his position on this matter that mission starts with the people in pain. Failure to be involved with Christ where people are in pain leads to a lopsided theology and involvement, not to incarnational theology.\(^5^9\) To find solutions to resolve the situation, he provides very practical proposals from within the liturgical life of the Orthodox church. However, though he occasionally attempts to draw attention through the doctrine of the Trinity, Mor Coorilos fails to engage with the doctrines of the Orthodox liturgical theology. In like fashion, Aliaz could not find a relevant theology other than one shaped by Hindu philosophy. While the ecumenical world accepts the moves similar to those made by Mor Coorilos, Aliaz has been subject to heavy criticism by the Dalit theologians.

Bringing back Ion Bria’s perspective in the above context, even though one might affirm Bria’s theological framework, in the practice of caste, the theology is not applied. Unless it is redefined based on the contextual realities and the divine-human Christological affirmation of

\(^{5^6}\) Mor Coorilos, “Mission as Liturgy before Liturgy and as Contestation,” 176.
\(^{5^8}\) Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos, “Mission Towards Fullness of Life,” International Review of Mission 103, no. 1 (2013): 46. Dalits are the most vulnerable social and religious community in India. They are denied public access to knowledge, resources, free speech, free movement, economic stability, and many other social and religious rights. Dionysius Rasquinah, Towards Wholeness from Brokenness: The Dalit Quest, A Historical Analysis and Theological Response (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 10-47.
Orthodox liturgical theology, Bria's theology cannot be meaningful in the Indian context. The nature of the transcendental God in the liturgy and the connection between that God and the afflicted world through the immanent nature are key to the discussion in the Orthodox mission. It includes the question of how the treatment of divine ontology in incarnation takes form in a liturgical setting. This dichotomy between the liturgy and the mission underlies the issue of the Church’s understanding of the world – the context of social fragmentations.

This work opens new vistas of theological expression that refuse the dichotomy which often accompanies the liturgical model of mission. Bria's argument for liturgy's external movement with ‘the Other’ is significant in the Orthodox mission. This problem arises when the Orthodoxy understands its mission in the upward or transcendent level alone. In accepting the caste system, which offers the Brahman, the transcendent relationship rejecting the transcendence to the Dalit body, inherently alienate the Dalits from the communion of liturgy. The external movement that restricts the church in view of 'othering' creates a dichotomy between the liturgical and practical life. This problematises the entire liturgical-missional approach of the Church.

1.5 Liturgy, Body and Politics

The criticism on the external movement of the liturgy is defended by showing the Church's accommodating attitude of the cultural and religious symbols, images and practices in the Orthodox tradition. Arguably, the journey of the Orthodox Christians in India was shaped within the dominant caste system of the Brahminic or Vedic religion. K.M. George demonstrates how those practices were more attached to the Indian philosophical tradition. The community lived and exercised their socio-political and religious life in the multi-faith community with salient influence of Vedic or in modern terms Hindu religion. The dominant nature of the Vedic religious and social practices helped shaped the identity of the Orthodox Christian community.

To know the relation between liturgy, the body and its politics one must first understand how the Brahmanic religion perceives the relation between God and the human body. In the context of caste discrimination, the Brahmanic cultural accommodation defines a direct

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60 It is true that the Orthodox Christians have largely adopted the Brahmanic cultural and religious symbols in their social and religious life. As Placid J Podipara and Menachery explain, the areas of adoption that shaped the Syrian Christians similar to the Brahmanic and dominant social structure. According to him the dress code, architecture, ornaments, childbirth ceremonies, religious rituals like temple procession, liturgical lamps, sacramental ceremonies like marriage, their acceptance of religious and cultural life is evident. Podipara, “The Thomas-Christians and ‘Adaptation’,” 174. See also George Menachery, “Aspects of Ideas of Clean and Unclean Among the Brahmins, the Jews, and St. Thomas Christians of Kerala,” in Early Christianity in India: With Parallel Development in Other Parts of Asia, ed. John Samuel, J.B Santiago, and P Thiagarajan (Chennai, India: Institute of Asian Studies, 2007), 172-81.
rejection of the Dalit identity and life. As discussed above, the adoption of Brahmanic tradition into the Christian identity expresses similar rejection to the Dalits. For instance, Jacob Parapally argues that “the Hindus (Aryans) who accepted the Christian faith did not change their inherited world view. In this world-view the caste system, or for that matter, untouchability, was perfectly acceptable just as slavery was justified in the West until the last century in spite of the enlightened Christian civilisation.”

To recognise Parappally’s claim, it is important to understand the Brahmanic notion of God. Brahmanism projects an exclusive religious or liturgical account that highlights the transcendental nature of God. Based on the theory of caste, a denial of the immanent nature of God has taken shape in the religious and social expression of life. It has created a definite theological binary and subsequently reflected in the social and religious life. James Massey, a Dalit theologian argues that the Brahmanic God becomes the entity of the transcendental view of God. For James Massey, this view created a binary in society against the people who lived in the country opposite to the pure, transcendental and Brahmanic God. Because the identity of the transcendental God in the Orthodox theology and the Vedic upper caste theology has similar natures, it was easy for the system to identify itself with the upper caste religious systems. Therefore, we see a tendency to place emphasis on the transcendental other over the immanent other that is expressed in every aspect of liturgical life.

Y.T. Vinayraj, another Dalit theologian, affirms that the conversation between the transcendental and immanent expression of God shapes the social realities of the Dalit’s life. He makes a clear distinction that the Vedic philosophical tradition based on the transcendent epistemology denies the sacredness of the Dalit body, whereas Christian sacramental theology offered transcendence to the Dalit body. For Vinayraj, in both cases, the Dalit body is treated as an antagonised body.

As Vinayraj noted, on a sacramental theological level, even though the church failed to see the issue epistemologically, Orthodox liturgy underscores the transcendent-immanent scheme. According to Orthodox liturgical theology, the body of the margins, particularly the Dalit body overturns the existing interpretation of “Hindu-Orthodox tradition that affirms the absence of divine presence in Dalit body.” This turning is mandatory for the cosmic nature of Orthodox theology. In the actual practice of liturgy, minimising or overemphasising any category of the Orthodox scheme does not fulfil the missional characteristics of the liturgy

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61 Parapally identifies the reflection of Brahmanism in the Christian social space. In almost identical fashion, there is an internal theological adoption taking place, reflecting the similarities of Christian identity. Jacob Parapally, The Emerging Trends in Indian Christology (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1995), 3.
62 Massey, Roots of Dalit History, 5-11.
64 Vinayraj, Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy, 7-8.
itself. In this context, there were Orthodox voices raised for a serious inclusion of the subjective interactions with the “Dalits and the margins” among the Indian Christians. The task addresses this practical gap in a critical engagement of the immanent nature of Christ that can be emphasised only with the transcendent or divine nature.

The theology of Syrian Orthodox ‘Eucharistic liturgy’ is not limited to an event of ‘Eucharistic constitution alone’. Rather, it cyclically enacts the birth of Jesus, his life, ministry, crucifixion, death, resurrection and the eschaton in the celebration of each Eucharistic liturgy. This combines both ‘transcendental or divine and immanent or human’ categories of Christological expression. Eliminating either side of these elements would risk the wholeness of the ‘Christ event’ in the Syrian Orthodox Christological premise. The economy of Triune God in the Orthodox liturgy and its uniqueness falls on the celebration of such ‘Christ event’, combining the divine and human natures inseparably into one. However, the context of the epistemological dilemma demands a critical examination on the relation between the divine and human nature of Christology and the way it embodies in the practical life of the Orthodox community in India. Differently stated, while finding insufficiency in the expression of Orthodox mission built upon Bria’s account, the pressing question concerns how the miaphysite Christology of Syrian Orthodox theology might prove to be a transforming agent in the life and subjectivity of people at the margins of society. How might we understand Christology as connecting people’s subjective life in an all-encompassing way? The task is to examine the Syrian Orthodox Christology and the Dalit Christology to be able to propose a practical solution in the context of the gap between the Orthodox and Dalit voices.

1.6 Dalit Theology, Christology, and Embrace

Against the backdrop of these concerns, the existence of a gap between Orthodox theology and liturgy and Dalit life in India demands attention. An Orthodox theology that claims to be cosmic but remains silent in the Dalit struggles and in the context of the atrocities in the Indian socio-political and religious milieu reduces the liturgy at its heart. Interrogating the dichotomy between the liturgy and the social practices generates an important move in the liturgical theology in India. It is an issue of not following the claims made, and a solution

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65 Fr. K.V. Saji, a Jacobite Syrian Orthodox priest expressed the above views in the pro-oriente regional symposium held in 1993 at Kottayam, Kerala. See Krikorian, Mesrob K. Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Christology in the Tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2010), 183-84.

66 ‘Eucharistic constitution’: The constituting words of blessings of the bread and wine while celebrating the Eucharistic liturgy commemorating the event that Jesus had initiated at the upper room (St. Matthew 26:26-28).

resides in opening up the theology and liturgy themselves to the margins. In response to the above analysed disconnect, this thesis develops a ‘Christology of embrace,’ one conceived in terms of both the transcendental and immanent nature of God, based on a conversation between Syrian Orthodox Christology and Christological developments within Dalit theology. A corresponding reading of the theology of early teachers is essential because this is a work of Orthodox theology. But the key conversation partner is Dalit theology. What follows is a Christology which seeks the mutual interests of these two approaches.

Dalit theology emerged as a significant school of “Indian contextual thinking,” reflecting the Christian vocation of resisting oppression and advancing liberation.68 This new thinking was in response to the dominant voices (Brahmanic) of the Indian Christian theology, voices which problematise the life and experience of the people at the weaker sections in society. For about four decades, Dalit theology travelled in different hermeneutical trajectories before coming to an understanding of its own self–identity and subjectivity.69 During this period, one enforcing factor of theologising from the Dalit context was its genuine ‘experiences’ of life among Dalit communities. The postmodern theologians refer to it as “little narratives” or the “small voice” against the “meta-narrative” (Hindu–Brahmanic epistemology) of modernity.70 These “little narratives” or the experience of the Dalit community found the impetus to make Dalit theology contextual. Differently stated, in the words of A.P. Nirmal, the focus of Dalit theology is on the basis of “struggle for justice or Dalit Pathos – Collective Life” initiated by the Dalit community,71 corresponding to the ‘suffering’ on the Cross.

A host of Dalit theologians such as Arvind P. Nirmal, M.E. Prabhakar, V. Devasahayam, James Massey, K. Wilson, and Franklyn J. Balasundaram, deserve to be mentioned as pioneers of this new venture.72 George Oommen, an Indian Church historian believes that the Dalit theological movement began to take shape in the early 1980s when A.P. Nirmal who was a faculty member at the United Theological College, Bangalore floated the idea of "Shudra Theology." This has grown as an independent theology in Asia.73 It is true that all these theologians unanimously positioned themselves as departing from the yoke of the Indian Christian (Brahmanical) theological tradition with its heavy focus on the

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68 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 19.
transcendental and constructed a new paradigm of theological expression that affirmed God’s immanent nature. This was also to be seen as a strong contest to the casteism experienced within the Christian traditions. In doing so, Dalit theology successfully promoted a non-casteist epistemology in Indian Christian thinking.

This kind of new ‘thinking,’ in a general sense, brought a natural grounding for developing a theology of margins that emphasises the necessity of theologizing not only within the experience of “pathos,” but also the ‘Dalit life’ in totality as a “symbolic representation” towards a social victory.\textsuperscript{74} The pluriformity of life experiences is celebrated. Dalit body, space, culture, songs, and symbols have become a point of theological emergence.\textsuperscript{75} As it has moved, Dalit theology furthered its theological imagination including the “material base” reflecting upon “Dalit communities’ connections with land, water and forest in meeting their sustenance and subsistence need.”\textsuperscript{76} All these expressions show the longing of the Dalit theologians to locate God’s immanent experience in their daily life.

The Cross and the suffering provided the basis of the new epistemology in Dalit Theology. Dalit theologians received the initial momentum from the contextual theologies like liberation theology, black theology and feminist theology. Nirmal clarifies it in one of his early articles. By quoting Leonardo Boff, the liberation theologian, Nirmal believes that “the participation of God in human pain through the passion of Jesus symbolized in his crucifixion” is necessary to understand the context of all “theological knowing.” Further, to think of the motif of such a theology, one must see the connecting relation of Christology and soteriology to the exodus motif in the liberation theologies.\textsuperscript{77} Their interest in drawing a lead from liberation theology does not mean that they identified the entire process of Dalit theologizing with the other disciplines. As a new phase of Indian contextual theology, Nirmal sought to follow “an exclusive methodology” in Dalit Theology so as to maintain its identity at an experiential level.\textsuperscript{78}

Sathianathan Clark, J. Jayakiran Sebastian and many others have continued the task of contextual thinking but with specific attention to the Dalit experience and identity. These second-generation theologians extensively produced Dalit theological literature with grass-root research. These theologians raised Dalit theology from a branch of Indian theology to a most dynamic and inspired corrective to the dominant methodology of interpreting “history,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} M.E. Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” in \textit{Frontiers of Dalit Theology}, ed. M.E. Prabhakar, (Madras: Gurukul, 1996), 419.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Vinayraj, “Envisioning a Postmodern Method of Doing Dalit Theology,” 99-102.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Arvind P. Nirmal, “Towards A Christian Dalit Theology,” \textit{A Reader in Dalit Theology} ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 62.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 58-59.
\end{itemize}
understanding of economics, probing sociology, studying culture, investigating globalisation, exposing racism, unlocking accepted anthropological ‘truths’ and indeed reconfiguring the whole gamut of social sciences.”79 The emergence of this methodological lens has taken a leading role in making the theology of the margins in India.

Beginning with Peniel Rajkumar, Y.T. Vinayraj and many others, a third-generation of Dalit theologians slightly contested the thinking and theologising of the old methods of doing Dalit theology. For Rajkumar, the Dalit theology in the past suffered in two-fold way. First, Dalit theology intensifies the experience of ‘pathos’ and ‘sufferings’ and, thereby forms a lethargic Dalit community of slaves. Second, by concealings its exclusive views on the Dalit theology it impedes the scope of interactions with communities of similar social, political and religious experiences. Slowly, a shift in the new approaches of Dalit movements and its political necessities where discussed is accepted. Moreover, the standpoint of methodological exclusivism is challenged by many of the recent Dalit theologians due to this “bipolar conversation” between Dalits and non-Dalits. 80

The third stage theologians recognised the danger of adopting all third world theologies uncritically. For instance, they acknowledge the limitations of liberation theology for doing Dalit theology. Liberation theology, Rajkumar argues, is “unhelpful” in the caste-based context. What is needed is a model where “both the oppressed and the oppressors are critically challenged to work in an integrative and dialogical manner for a non-exclusive and non-dehumanizing society.”81 Dalit theologians felt the need to move beyond the model of economic analysis, which the liberation theology received from the Marxist toolkit of social analysis. Drawing only from this singular perspective, many liberation theologians in the Indian Christian theology could not foresee the struggles and social fragmentation caused by the caste issues in India. Caste is more than economic deprivation. This denied the humanhood of the Dalits. The Indian Christian theologians could not problematise caste as a serious methodological concern in India.

Towards the end of the second stage of Dalit theological thinking, Godwin Shiri, analysed the possibilities of a political move as an essential turn for the Dalit theology.82 The third generation Dalit theologians take the theological discussion further, finding solutions within the theology of materialism and political activism. When caste became the root problem, it

80 Peniel Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 64-65. Y.T. Vinayraj expresses the same opinion. For Vinayraj, the linguistic, regional, and cultural pluriformity is to be reckoned, if there is provision for the possibility for dialogical/deconstructive social engagements. Y.T. Vinayraj, “Envisioning a Postmodern Method of Doing Dalit theology,” 101.
81 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 64-65.
was manifested in the political realm of the society. The argument, therefore, in this stage was to find political solutions to the issues of the caste system. A political responsibility was added in Dalit theology with a Dalit political worldview. As this perspective progresses, we see the postmodern hermeneutical principles that have helped inform the direction of Dalit theology. First, it included some political theological hermeneutics based on Dalit body\textsuperscript{83} and second turned towards the subjectivity of Dalits through the Indian material philosophy.\textsuperscript{84}

A general move from transcendence to immanence or to material philosophy is a common characteristic of the Dalit theology. Denial or weakening the nature of transcendence based on historic atrocities can jeopardise the Christological plans in the present and eschatological aspect of God’s involvement among the poor. For instance, Vinayraj accuses the Dalit theologians for identifying marginality as the site of transcendence where the God of the poor intervenes in history and reveals God’s preferential option for the poor.\textsuperscript{85} If Vinayraj is true in his claim, he should also explain how the Christological scheme of both divine and human exist together. One cannot overlook the ‘continuity’ of God’s ‘embrace’ or ‘touch’ only from the perspective of ‘praxis alone’ in the history. The continuity of God’s ‘healing touch’ is also an eschatology of God through his resurrection from the historic point of his crucifixion and death. Christ’s touch cannot be concluded with the narratives of crucifixion and death alone (suffering) but also with his resurrection (transcendence). This is very significant for Syrian Orthodox Christology.

To understand this contextual dynamic, the first methodological impetus is taken from Miroslav Volf’s image of embrace. He speaks about the resolutive nature of embrace although contrasting the images of exclusion and embrace. Volf’s \textit{Exclusion and Embrace} and his use of “embrace” as a metaphor for welcoming in the context of ethnic and religious divisions that emerged in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In this situation, Volf proposes three theological appropriations of the concept of embrace: in the doctrine of God, of Christ, and of salvation.\textsuperscript{86} In particular, he considers the outstretched arms of Christ on the Cross as a metaphor of Christ’s embrace of the ‘godless’, and this becomes foundational for Volf’s Christology. These themes echo Volf’s argument that on the Cross, Jesus embodies, in the posture of opened arm this attitude of embrace.\textsuperscript{87} For Volf, such embrace emerges out of the notion of peace through God’s identification with the victims.\textsuperscript{88} Interpretatively, Volf speaks about God’s choice of being in the immanent nature without any reduction of the

\textsuperscript{83} Vinayraj, “Envisioning a Postmodern Method of Doing Dalit Theology,” 93-103.
\textsuperscript{85} Vinayraj, “God and the Other,” 105.
\textsuperscript{86} Volf, \textit{Exclusion & Embrace}, 29.
\textsuperscript{87} Volf, \textit{Exclusion & Embrace}, 29.
transcendental one. Jesus’ stretched arms on the cross invite the Dalit, the Other, for an embrace. Here begins the significance of the Dalit theology and the Orthodox theology that aims to find some converging experience of God.

1.7 Dalit Theology, Exclusivism and Methodology

To validate this thesis’ expectation for engaging Orthodox Christology with Dalit Christology, it is important here to examine Dalit theology’s position on methodological exclusivism. When Dalit theology began its journey, the early teachers of Dalit theology emphasised a methodological exclusivism. According to Nirmal “a methodological exclusivism is necessary” to be observed while doing the Dalit theology.\(^8^9\) Indian Christian theology as he thinks, continues to hold the dominant theological traditions by accommodating, including, assimilating and finally conquering other theologies. Dalit theology, therefore should keep a new trajectory of ‘counter agenda’ to any dominant theologies. To fulfil this agenda, he proposes to have Dalit theology as counter theology exclusively from the Dalit experience alone. It means, methodologically, the Dalit theology must take a shift from philosophical to sociological or from “proposition to peoples” centred form of theology.\(^9^0\)

However, in the Dalit theological conversation, the foundation of the Dalit ‘suffering’ was a key point to be engaged with, even though it should not be valorised. Nirmal’s voice is very significant in this regard: Dalit theology must be the outcome of the Dalit sufferings and anguish of the Dalit community. According to him, the springboard of doing Dalit theology is the core Dalit experience of pain and pathos. Knowing the pain and pathos is essential before one begins the endeavour for Dalit theology. The knowledge and experience of pain and pathos should exist even before one thinks about it.\(^9^1\) The suffering takes a new model of participating in the suffering of God. Such suffering of God becomes the main characteristic of Dalit theology, like in black theology, Minjung theology etc. Dalit theology, therefore, becomes an exclusive enterprise of doing theology out of the experience of the suffering people. All these imperatives make Dalit theology authentic.

The significant question raised in the methodological exclusivism is what is the role of the non-Dalits in Dalit theology? Nirmal directly answers this question. According to him, “if Dalit theology has to play the role of counter theology then it must adopt an exclusivist

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\(^8^9\) Arvind P. Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” in A Reader in Dalit Theology, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal and V. Devasahayam (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1990), 143.

\(^9^0\) Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 140-43.

\(^9^1\) Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
stance and shut off the encroaching influence of the dominant theologies." He clarifies this point in the epistemological discussion of Dalit Theology. He says:

it must be made clear once that such a methodological exclusivism does not imply a community exclusivism. As a community Dalits must be open to other communities and other people. They must also receive help from all possible sources. They must also promote all horizontal community relationships. But methodological exclusivism is a different matter...it is a counter theology in relation to other dominant theologies. The tendency of all dominant theological traditions is to accommodate include, assimilate and finally conquer other theologies... (therefore a) methodological exclusivism is necessary for maintain the distinctive identity of a dalit theology.

Nirmal articulates a methodological exclusivism in response to the dominant attitude of Indian Christian theology. However, he does seek to close the doors of Dalit theology to others. According to him, the quest for Dalit methodological exclusivism does not challenge the scope of interacting with other theological traditions in India. He continues to acknowledge three different modes of knowing, “the pathetic knowing,” “the empathetic knowing,” and “the sympathetic knowing.” In this explanation of ‘knowing’, Nirmal opens a route for the non-Dalits to engage with the Dalit theology. According to him, only the first-hand Dalit experience of their suffering that leads to pathetic knowing whereas sympathetic knowing can be taken up by those who though not Dalits but want to identify themselves with the Dalit cause for removing the suffering. Very strictly he continues to say that through an “empathetic knowing” the non-Dalits can be part of the Dalit cause. An empathetic knowing connects the universal approach to the Christian theology, which fundamentally rejects any kind of oppression and subjugation of any community. Devasahayam, another early Dalit theologian contradicts this universal approach. Devasahayam argues:

...traditionally theologies have claimed to reflect on universal experience. We discover that universal experience is a myth and what is experienced is in terms of historical experience. But in the name of universal experience, theologians were elevating particular historical experiences into the category of sacred and eternal experience.

Though Devasahayam distinguishes ‘universalism approach’ with ‘historical approach’, Nirmal’s universal approach is Christian ‘knowing’ without rejecting the historical experience.

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92 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 143.
93 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 142-43.
94 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141-42.
95 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 142.
Nirmal elaborates what is his historical approach and refer to the methodological exclusivism in Dalit theology. For instance, while developing a Dalit Christology, undoubtedly Nirmal’s theology invites us to understand it through the experience of the exclusive Dalit community. Nirmal’s Christ is a liberative Christ whose agenda is to liberate the Dalits as an exclusive project of the Dalit community. Nirmal believes that the Dalits’ experience and Christianity have a direct Christological connection. He makes this point clear saying the liberation “is meant for the dalits and not for non-dalits.”

Having known the fact of the exclusive functioning of Dalit Christology, he opens the vistas for ‘empathetic knowing’ of the Dalit experience as a total of the universal Christological approach. In his Christological approach, Nirmal goes beyond what he has said earlier. J. Jayakiran Sebastian clarifies this point in his article “Creative Exploration: Arvind P. Nirmal’s Ongoing Contribution to Christian Theology.” Adopting the words like ‘methodological exclusivism’ should not limit in understanding the scope of Dalit theology Jayakiran Sebastian asserts. He continues that Nirmal’s proposal for a counter theology should not be understood as hostile to any community or theologies. For Sebastian, what Nirmal is trying to explain to us is “to simultaneously hold together the reality of interdependence” and at the same time a plea for a “theological exclusivism,” alerting the danger of “theological hijacking” by “dominant communities or dominating theologies.”

However, by representing Nirmal’s voice for the commencement of the Dalit Christology, we must understand that in a strict sense it was neither advocacy theology nor a hostile voice but it was a responsible move towards the unheard voices. Differently stated, for Sebastian, Nirmal’s theology takes an inclusive shape in Indian Christian theology.

Because it was an alerting voice too, Nirmal had to envision a Dalit Christology that explains who is and is not Christ for Dalits. This distinction was made completely within the backdrop of and the space of responsible Christian theology of a God who embraces all. This is what Sathianathan Clarke affirms: as a counter theology to the dominant discourses, Dalit theology’s exclusivism in methodology is significant. At the same time, it has a theological inclusiveness in character considering the universality of God and the inclusiveness of all human beings in the purpose of one creator. Clarke writes that “the methodology of Dalit theology has exhibited [an] unresolved ambiguity even as it purports to be dialectically both exclusive and theologically inclusive.” Clarke’s explanation shows how it works in both

100 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 21-22.
the exclusive and inclusive natures of Dalit theology. The pain and pathos in the Dalit experience are what is to be understood as the exclusive mode of Dalit theology as he suggests that “it is the most circuitous form of knowing where pain–pathos is the crux of experiential knowing.” Dalit theology should also serve the purpose of bringing an “inclusiveness” or “interrelatedness” among Christian communities to overcome the sufferings of the Dalit. According to Clarke, by doing so, “their communities can participate in doing Dalit theology but must recognise their respective distance and respectful relatedness to the distinctiveness of Dalit pain-pathos.”

Dalit theology aspires for a new dimension of similarities in the theological thinking by setting possibilities for dialoguing in the contexts of injustice perpetuated upon the people at the margins of the society. In this context, Orthodox theology can draw opportunity for a dialogical ground of non–exclusive and non–dehumanizing space from the scope of an Orthodox liturgical theology. Even though Dalit theology emphasises a Christo–centric perspective, one must also see how it is able to enter into dialogue with the Trinitarian–Christocentric approach of Orthodox theology. This is a suggestive of an embrace between the Orthodox reflection and Dalit reflection of Christological affirmation to end a long-standing ‘distance’ created between the Orthodox life and Dalits in India. A Christology of embrace offers a meeting point between Dalit life and Orthodox life in the Christian confession on mission. The liturgy gives the motivation to draw through the ritual of embrace (kiss of peace) as an active agent to experience the life of the crushed and broken on the margins while celebrating the nature of Christ – the one who embraces all differences.

The following argument observes that the ‘embrace/kiss of peace’ is a central or mandatory act the Eucharistic experience in the Church. According to the Eucharistic liturgy, the anaphora, the enactment of the actual salvific event of Christ starts with a kiss of peace (b-nooshakto) flowing from the Eucharistic table. The divine love (d-hoobo qadeesho) and the divine peace (slomo or shalom) exalt to ‘embrace’ (n-aafeq) the person next to oneself, ‘the Other.’ Therefore, the act of ‘embrace’ becomes the activity of Christ himself, breaking all barriers with the 'other' (Christ as the Other). With the presence of Christ's 'embrace' one obliterates the social and religious binaries created by the 'dominant' and the 'weaker' or the 'centre' and the 'margins'. Arguments have been made to support the dispensability of this act in the completion of the salvific scheme in the liturgy. It includes the theological and cultural gaps that have been created from centuries. The thesis expects an inclusive embrace that brings the mission imperatives of ‘the liturgy in the liturgy’ practical and true in the Indian context.
Taking Sebastian’s observation seriously, this thesis follows a method of understanding the Asian context by reading the ancient Christian teachers. By “listening to some thoughts of early teachers of the church,” this conversation identifies the significance of reading the early Asian teachers of the church.\textsuperscript{104} It also recognises the contextual debate on the theology of margins in India and its meaningful engagement in the development of a contextual Orthodox mission theology. For the initial methodological stimulus, connections are formed between the ancient tradition and contemporary political issues.

While this methodology resembles the Byzantine Orthodox theological movement of “neo-patristic synthesis”\textsuperscript{105} or “post-patristic synthesis,”\textsuperscript{106} this thesis moves further, envisioning a ‘patristic symbiosis’ as its methodological tool. By utilising the neo-patristic reading as a process of appraising what has been said, the ‘patristic symbiosis’ partners with patristic voices today. Patristic teachers are not dead; they speak today. This approach enables conversations with the voices of the past with the current voices. Differently stated, the methodology of ‘patristic symbiosis’ explores beyond what has been strictly said in the neo or post patristic synthesis. With this, the ‘patristic symbiosis’ allows the early teachers to speak today and partner with us contextually. This lens will help to bring the voices of historic particularity to the voice of universal plurality within the image of Christ’s embrace.

1.8 Chapter-by-chapter Outline
The second chapter examines the question raised concerning the ‘practical distance’ or the ‘othering’ among the St. Thomas community due to the theological view of duality. The chapter presumes the influence of Vedic thinking, which overemphasises the transcendental God based on the theory of ‘purity’ and which escalates the distance with the people who are identified as the ‘polluted’. The third chapter explains how Indian Christian theology in general and Orthodox theology in particular failed in combating this ‘othering’ since it also followed Western or Hindu philosophical thoughts. This chapter concludes with a positive note on the emergence of Dalit theology, a counter theological movement for addressing the


\textsuperscript{106} Pantelis Kalaitzidis, a (Greek) Eastern Orthodox Political theologian (Greek) and the director of Volos Academy for Theological Studies, speaks about the post-patristic synthesis. This is almost similar to the modern contextual theology. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, \textit{Orthodoxy and Political Theology} (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012).
Dalit concerns emphasising the immanence of God. From a general note on the significance of Dalit theology, the fourth chapter focuses on how the Dalit Christology perceived Christ’s humanity as a liberating vision of God in Christ without eluding the significance of the divinity of Christ. The fifth chapter explores Oriental Orthodox Christology (miaphysite Christology) with a special emphasis on the Christology of Severus of Antioch envisioning the centrality of the humanity of Christ inseparably understood in the divinity of Christ. The sixth chapter constructs a Christology based on a reconciling ‘embrace’ of Christ using the miaphysite metaphor of liturgical embrace or kiss of peace. The seventh and the concluding chapter summarises the thesis with its practical implications.
2. The Problem of ‘the Other’: A Historical and Theological Query among the St. Thomas Christians in India.

According to the conception of the followers of Christianity all are equal and devoid of any difference in social status. This fact is observed more in its violation than in its observance.

L.K. Anantakrisna Ayyar

For a large section of Dalits, Caste and the principle of purity and pollution are a reality offered by God from which one cannot escape. A change in this belief system of the Dalits, which is modelled on the Brahmanical ideology, holds the key to a major social transformation bringing about social equality.

S. Selvam

2.1 Introduction

As observed in the introductory chapter, despite the relationship between the Christian tradition and many philosophical religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, predominantly the early Christian community in India followed an unarticulated closeness with the Hindu philosophical thought. This influence of particularly the Brahmanic version (Vedic) of dominant culture and theology changed the church into a Hindu oriented Christian tradition. The Brahmanic philosophical influence obligated the Christian tradition, at least in many sites of the social life, to mimic the Brahmins. Such practices created a social binary based on the claim of the social and religious ‘purity’ of the upper caste Brahmins. Remarkably, this claim is rooted in the fundamental idea of the binary created between the nature of transcendent God (pure) and such God’s exclusive interaction with the Brahmins.

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3 Various Hindu religious texts establish the importance of Brahmanic theory of caste stratification. One of the Hindu texts that elaborately discusses the Brahma and Shudra relationship is Manusmriti. 1.93: As the Brahmana sprang from (Brahman’s) mouth, as he [sic] was first-born and as he [sic] possesses the Veda, he [sic] is by right the lord of this whole creation, 9.334: but to serve Brahmanas who are learned in the Vedas, householders, and famous for virtue is the highest duty of a Shudra, which leads to beatitude, 11.85: By his [sic] origin along a Brahmana is a deity even for the gods, and his [sic] teaching is authoritative for men [sic], because the Veda is the foundation for that. F. Max Muller, ed. The Law of Manu: With Extracts from Seven Commentaries (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 24-25, 401, 448. The Law of Manu authenticates that Brahm is pure and Shudra is polluting (2.107, 238) Muller, The Law of Manu, 107, 238. Shudras are not allowed even to hear the Vedas. (2.172, 4.99) Muller, The Law of Manu, 61,144.
caste alone. This philosophy results in a particular construal of ‘the Other’ as one which forms opposite to the transcendental or the idea of purity. This phenomenon of ‘the Other’ has precisely accessed a large space within the life of Indian Christianity in general and Orthodoxy in particular.

Although the term ‘the Other’ in the perspective of Christian mission is used as those who belong outside the Christian religion, in India this expression has been popularised in the context of caste system. With the traditional language of Western mission movements nouns like heathens, gentiles, pagans, uncivilized etc., are denoted as synonyms for ‘the Other’. As modern Indian Dalit theologian Philip Peacock observes, the mission as an ‘object’ and the object is generally understood as ‘the Other.’ He writes that as “the ‘Other’ who was the object of mission, had to be tamed, controlled and mainstreamed so as to serve the interest of the powerful centres of mission, the sender so as to speak.” This category has mainly expressed by the Indian Christian missionary movement without paying much attention to the caste system at large.

Contrary to this missionary model, the earliest Christian mission movement of the St. Thomas tradition in India provided a different narrative but within the social milieu of caste system. They followed a non–aggressive model of mission with no specific mission ‘object’. This model of early missionary activities arguably began from St. Thomas, the Apostle and later the by Syrian communities. It was a “peaceful mission” in the Malabar coast, without much missionary expansion in the new cultural setting. Although, during the early period,

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4 Given its importance and the extent of its common usage, the concept ‘the Other’ is a complex one. A simple meaning can be stated as: an ‘excluded or marginal group.’ Recent social science and postcolonial theory has picked up the philosophical concept of the Other and used it as a lens to understand causes of social and religious binary/duality. The category of ‘social margins’ has emerged from the theoretical analysis of the postcolonial tool at the end of the 1970s. Neil Lazarus, The Postcolonial Unconscious (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.
5 Peacock Philip Vinod, “Mission as Dis/sent: Exploring the Contours and Politics of Dalit Conversation Movement in India,” Bangalore Theological Forum 48, no. 2 (2016), 115. A decade ago, Lalsangkima Pachuau, an Indian missiologist defined the Christian mission of our times in India as "crossing of its faith boundary, or in the interaction across faith border with other faiths (or religions), we identify the esse of mission.
8 Webster indicates the limited presence of the St. Thomas Christian community on the Kerala coast. C.B. John Webster, Historiography of Christianity in India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12. This part of the land was known as Malabar and was a well-established and powerful kingdom long before the Christian era. The name appears in Asoka’s edicts dated 257 B.C. However, it is connected with one of the
not many stories depicted the practice of ‘the othering’ among the St. Thomas Christians, from the advent of the Aryans in southern part of India, a ‘social othering’ appeared also within this early Christian tradition.

This chapter maps the historical milestones and the theological trajectories that contribute to the creation of ‘the other’ among the St. Thomas or Syrian community in Kerala. How the Brahmanic and social concept of ‘purity’ and ‘transcendence’ contrasts with the naming of ‘pollution’ and immanence helps identify the metanarratives that the early Christian community appropriated to themselves in order to justify their socially dominant claims.

2.2 St. Thomas Christian Identity, Way to Dominance, and Religious Exclusivism

To know the caste dynamics among the St. Thomas Christian tradition one must first know their historical identity in the Kerala society. Surprisingly, many historical studies prove that the socio-political and religious context of the southern part of India was an ideal society of equality, justice and peace.9 It was to this community that the earliest legendary mission activity of St. Thomas took place. Irrespective of their religious beliefs or geographical areas, the people of the Malabar coast enjoyed the inclusiveness of community with all native people. For instance, in his study on the social life of the early communities in Kerala, Elamkulam P.N. Kunjanpillai points to such the native communities such as the Ezhavas, the Pulayas, the Panas, the Kuravas, the Parayas, the Vedars and other tribal and related communities who lived in the high social esteem during the time of the arrival of Christianity in India.10 This could have been a ‘hybrid Christian community’11 consisting of people from different social and religious origins such as the Jewish diaspora community12, the migrant

11 Researchers uses the term ‘hybrid Christian Community’ to denote the nature of the community as a combination of various philosophies of the time. It assumes that people who joined Christianity during the period of the St. Thomas myth are from various cultural, ethnic and tribal backgrounds; unlike the common myth of the conversion of the Brahmanic community alone.
12 According to S.G. Pothen, a large number of Jews arrived in India after the first and second destructions of Jerusalem Temple in eighth century BCE and first Century CE. Most of them settled in Cranganur where they lived for a thousand years before moving to Cochin. S.G. Pothen, The Syrian Christians of Kerala (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963) 8. An extensive study on the various migrants and the trade relations of the south Indians centuries before Christ had been done by Z.M. Paret, Malankara Nazranikal Vol.1 (Malayalam) (Kottayam: Manorama Publishing House, 1965), 43-66. See also L.A Krishna Iyer, Social History of Kerala, Vol. 1, 3-4.
‘Buddhists or Jain community’, the natives who worshiped the Dravidian god/goddess during the Sangam period, the people who practised primal religion, and an insignificant minority of Nambudiris. In other words, the early Christian community in Kerala was a combination of Aryan-Dravidian-Semitic cultures.

The first Syrian migrants who arrived in Kerala coast with the intention of trade and religious mission were believed to have arrived due to a request from the St. Thomas.

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13 From the period of Chandragupta Maurya, the presence of Jainism was there in South India. Buddhism as a missionary religion came to south India during the Sangam. K. Nambi Aroran, *Glimpses of Tamil Culture: Based on Periyapuranam* (Madurai: Koodal Publication, 1977), 137. See also George Woodcock, *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 115.

14 Dravidian movements and their various socio-religious and cultural manifestations have existed in south India for the past three millennia. J. Pandian, *Caste, Nationalism and Ethnicity: An Interpretation of Tamil Cultural and History and Social Order* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1987), 57.

15 Sangam Period is generally considered as the last three Centuries Before Christ and first three Centuries after Christ. It is during the early centuries in south India Chera, Chola and Pandya flourished. K. Subramaniam, *Brahmin Priest of Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Eastern Private Ltd, 1974), 3. According to Elamkulam Kunjanpilla, the socio-religious life of the people in Kerala during the Sangam Period had been formed and named predominantly based on the geographical areas by considering the names of the plants or trees. Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Keralam Anchum Arum Nootandukali* (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1967), 19-32.

16 In contrast to the modern scholarship on the period of Aryan mass invasion in South India, T.C. Krishnakuruppu explains an early migration Brahmins/Nambudiries in south India would have happened during the period of Parasurama, the legendary figure who became the cause of forming Kerala by throwing his axe. T.C. Krishnakuruppu, *Kerala Charithram Parasuramaniloode* (Malayalam) (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1962), 52. M. Reedharamon, the well-known Kerala historian argues that this legend should be taken seriously while considering the early history of Kerala. See *Kerala Charitram* (Malayalam) (Kottayam, D.C Books, 2007), 25-26. Many scholars from Syrian Christian, Protestant and Catholic communities support this history and follow their arguments in favour of the existence of Brahmin community in Kerala even before the arrival of St. Thomas in India.


18 It is believed that the first Syrian migration took place in 345 CE, along with a bishop and seventy-two families under the leadership of Thomas of Cana. See Mathew, C.P. and Thomas, M.M. *The Indian Churches of St. Thomas*, (Faridabad, India: DJVP, 2006), 18. Scholars like George Woodcock and many others believe that for the theology, liturgy and the doctrines of the church, the St. Thomas Christians are indebted to the church in Mesopotamia and in Persia. Woodcock, *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast*, 113. See page 114 and the following of the same book where Woodcock continues to narrate the story of the church in Seleucia. It is given the office of Catholicose (to look after the affairs in the East) who is directly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch. After the Universal council’s condemnation of Nestorius, the church of the West continued with the Antiochian Tradition (Oriental Orthodox). This legacy still shares in the ecclesiastical authority to the Syrian Christians in general and is particularly in evidence among the Jacobite Syrian Christians in Kerala. The Middle Eastern Syrian Orthodox communities are predominantly from Armenia, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq, but keep the linguistic identity through the Syriac language, which was spoken among the upper urban class. See Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001), 59. Migration of Syrians to India, especially the first migration of Thomas of Cana, might have happened due to the request of the Malabar send to the leaders of the Universal church either in Syria or in Persia. It is noted that Syriac, their liturgical language had continued as a sacred language wherever ever they had been. This Syriac speaking community is presently known as the Universal Syrian Orthodox church. The Syrian migration to Kerala took place from the same stock of Syrians from Middle East. The same community is also known by the name Jacobite, the church having been organised and strengthened by Jacob Burdana, one of the Syrian Orthodox monks turned bishops after the schism in 481CE. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A history of Christianity in Asia, Vol 1, Beginnings to 1500* (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 2006), 243. However, a few authors differ with the original name. For him it was ‘James Burdeae.’ Paulose Mor Athanasius, *The Syrian Orthodox Church: Its Religion and Philosophy*, 2nd ed., (Cheeranchira: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2005), 21; Koilparampil, *Caste in the Catholic Community in Kerala*, 49.
Christians from the head of the Eastern church. These migrants seldom practised aggressive evangelism among the natives. This may be due to the oneness and inclusiveness that they witnessed among the native indigenous community. They continued to exist as an exclusive liturgical-linguistic group. This harmonious community could not survive for long due to the forceful Aryan intrusion into South India and their introduction of varna system from the sixth or seventh century. The natives were slowly pushed outside of the social structure and were called the lowest in the caste system as a part of the process of social ‘othering’. The militant Aryans systematically repressed the natives as their subservient slaves whereas the communities who belong to and who identified with the dominant caste were exempted from any kind of discrimination.

By fifth century, the Christian community identified itself with the ‘high caste’ in the social ladder of varna system and became a socially and politically powerful and privileged community. From this time, as Placid J. Podipara observes, the way of life of the Thomas-Christians “could not be distinguished from their Hindu brethren except on a few respects, which were specifically Christians. They were an integral part of the body politic of the country.” The Christian faith failed to restrain them from continuing the Hindu social and cultural practices. Alexander Cherukarakunnel and many other scholars noted similar observations. According to Cherukarakunnel, “the Syrian Christians were very conservative and strongly attached to their high caste customs. On becoming Christians neither did they change their social customs nor lose their high social status among the Hindu Brethren [sic].” Both Podipara and Cherukarakunnel attest to the interpenetrated social and cultural oneness shared among the people of St. Thomas and Hindu religious community. This shows that there could have been many areas that they were mutually accepted due to their common

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19 Woodcock, Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast, 114.
21 The origin of ‘Varna’ is found in Vedic sources since the early mentioning of these terms comes from the Vedic Texts. The hierarchical function of four Varnas – Bruhmana, Ksatriya, Vaisya and Sudra are mentioned and described in detail in Vedas. Romila Thapar, “The First Millennium B.C. in Northern India (Up to the end of Mauryan Period),” in Recent Perspectives of Early Indian Society, edited by Romila Thapar (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995), 98.
22 By showing evidences based on the early South Indian (Tamil) literature, and also by quoting many linguistic scholars, George Koilparampil, an Indian historian argues that the caste division (an Aryan concept) might have entered in South India by sixth or seventh century. Koilparampil, Caste in the Catholic Community, 37.
24 Woodcock, Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast, 69.
social and cultural standings. At least three areas of theological convergences are significant.

First, based on caste intimacy in these communities, one cannot neglect the possibilities of sharing the commonalities of a few theological positions, particularly the knowledge of purity and its connection to the ‘transcendence’. To justify this claim, for example, we get some light from their local songs in the St. Thomas tradition. These local songs stir up the knowledge of the migrant Christians to uphold themselves to be united together; as the song “about you to-day” explains how God commands them to be united and be ‘pure’ to observe their creed in an alien land. These songs also demand their purity in blood and behaviour, knowledge and power similar to the Brahminic purity.

Second, by sharing the rituals of Hindu tradition, St. Thomas Christians comfortably adapted the core theology of the rituals, even though those rituals underwent a process of Christianisation. However, it is difficult to prove the precise points of theological convergence between the Syrian Christian and Brahmanical traditions, though one cannot overlook certain Hindu ritual integration even in the sacramental life of the church. It may be based on the common social and religious identity of ‘pure race’. This notion of purity became the impetus for forming these communities as exclusive ones.

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27 The Syrian community enjoyed a special status from the Kings through “copper-plates,” and with this they strengthened social dominance. This has been established by a host of Indian Church historians. E.M Philip explains the power and the social positions granted to Syrians through the various copper plate orders. E.M. Philip, The Indian Church of St. Thomas, 61. According to Mundadan, the known ‘copper-plates’ are the Thomas Cana plates; the Iravikorhan’s Plates; Quilon/Tharsappally/Tarisappally plates; the Thevalakara plates. Each plate contains a certain social privilege granted by the then rulers of the state. Mostly these copper plates assure their high social status. Some of these plates are preserved and kept with the Marthoma Metropolitian, Tiruvalla, Kerala and Old Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala. A. Mathias Mundadan, History of Christianity in India Vol.1 From the Beginning Up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (Up to 1542) (Bangalore: Theological Publication of India, 1989), 166. With the inscriptions on the copper plates, the Syrian Christians enjoyed a higher social status in the areas of their food, drink, utensils, ceremonies like birth, marriage, funeral and economic enhancements like education, business, job opportunities in the military from early in the century. It is true that the Syrian Christians, like Jews, were positioned equally with the nairs who remained in the socially ‘high ranking position’ that equates them with the “top Brahmanically prescribed class systems.” See Robert Eric Frykenberg, ed., Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500 with special reference to Caste, Conversion and Colonialism (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 37. Consequently, the Church’s ‘exclusive’ nature became stronger. Modern secular historians like Ramachandran Nair and Elamkulam P.N. Kunjanpillai have accepted this argument. Elamkulam P.N. Kunjanpillai postulates three social standings that the Syrian Christians claimed for themselves for centuries: equal to the high caste status with Brahmns; identification with the upper social grade due to their Syrian ethnic and linguistic background; their intimacy with the ruling class and the religious life, which they considered superior to other religious beliefs. See K.K. Ramachandran Nair, Slavery in Kerala (Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1986), 112., Elamkulam P.N. Kunjanpillai, Chila Kerala Charithra Prasangangal (Malayalam) (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970), 187-221.


29 Though the rituals are theologically-oriented, an elaborated study on the theology of rituals is not the scope of this thesis. On the other hand, theologially, argued that the Orthodox liturgy is a symbol of purity but not of pollution. When this theological confession transferred to social life, the same taboos are attributed to people who were categorically understood as polluted ones. Therefore, this liturgy, according to the Christian
Third, if Podipara’s definition of St. Thomas Christians – “Hindu or Indian in culture, Christian in religion and Syro-oriental in worship”30 – is taken seriously, one can find this theological integration of culture, religion and worship. Podipara’s three categories are interconnected to each other. Hindu culture and thought are theologically loaded within the idea of the transcendental God. This also connects to the religion and worship of a community. If the St. Thomas community shares the Hindu culture, which forms within the Vedic theological space, their religion and worship cannot exist without the influence of the Hindu culture. Though Podipara did not explicitly argue for this comparative space here, elsewhere he mentions the invariable theological possibilities that arose between Indo–Oriental life and faith. According to him, the “Indo-Oriental approach to theology by the aid… of the Oriental (especially Syrian) liturgies and of the Oriental Patristic tradition baptizing also the great philosophic thoughts of India.”31 The common philosophical space of the language of transcendence, is implicitly present within these two theological communities. Since the Vedic philosophical system envisions the immanence as opposite to the transcendence, adherents of the St. Thomas tradition also followed a similar position in their practical social life.

2.3 Transcendental Brahmanic God and Immanent Human (Atman)

In Vedic philosophy, the transcendental God decides the quality and identity of immanent human beings. But this is not the case of all human categories. As discussed above, ‘the other’ is created out of a certain category of immanent human. In Vedic thought, not only the transcendental God and ‘the other’ are not identical but they are denied any ontological connection. This relation defines the human condition in the world and correspondingly offers the social, cultural and religious identity to a human being. To the Aryan hermeneutics, Vedic philosophy owns the transcendental God through the knowledge of Vedic scriptures and exists as an entity that is unapproachable to some human conditions. In his article, “The Concept of Brahman in Hindu Philosophy,” Haridas Chaudhuri gives a vivid explanation on the nature of Brahman (transcendence) in Indian philosophy. To understand the function of Brahman and its transcendental nature, one must first understand the meaning of Brahman, which according to Chaudhuri is, “unfathomable and inexhaustible in its essence, Brahman is the ineffable Supreme transcendent, the limitations of all self–expression, whether cosmic or

31 Podipara, “Hindu in Culture,” 111.
individual.” Brahman’s function in the created world is minimal. Brahman is the reason behind all that happens in the creation, but it remains as a supreme transcendent. It is the Brahman in Brahmanic thought who is the supreme and final being of God. However, Hindu philosophy also explains it as the personal and impersonal God (saguna and nirguna) through the rational approach to understand God as Sat-Chit-Ananda meaning “being-consciousness-joy.” The change from impersonal to personal is a way opened to understand the human possibility of attaining Brahman.

Chaudhuri argues that the concept of Brahman as foundational philosophy stands as the “ultimate principle of thought” and also as the “central principle of living.” Though Brahman is considered to be the impersonal absolute and beyond, it also offers the personal space of transcendence. In this perspective, the concept of Brahman is non-contradictory to any philosophical position as “pluralism, monism, non-dualism are rather to be seen as the enlightenment position of Brahman at different stages of time.” This brings Brahman’s possibility of being a multiple entity. Chaudhuri observes that “the multiple self, the personal God, and the impersonal Absolute, are different moments in the life of the same Brahman. So, the most important thing in religions is to realise the Supreme directly and to bring into life and society the creative light of that realisation.”

The philosophical reason for this multiplicity of Brahman is not due to its affinity to impersonal form, rather to be able to reveal the Absoluteness of God to the created reality.

Bina Gupta, another contemporary scholar of Indian philosophy, in his recent book, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, argues that the Sanskrit word Brahman, which is sat-chit-ananda, can be understood in connection with the human being. The veil of illusion (maya) removes the difference between Brahman and atman (human). Here Brahman is understood as a philosophical God, a being, or ontology beyond in contrast to the Atman (human), the immanent nature. The transcendent Brahman exists in ‘pure bliss’ and ‘sacred’ nature but the atman does not. Gupta interprets the nature of ‘pure’ as attributed to God but not to human beings. In all these arguments, the Brahman is understood as the transcendental reality that does not directly relate with humans. However, Vedic philosophy holds the position of

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34 Chaudhuri, “The Concept of Brahman,” 63.
38 Gupta, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, 35-38.
39 Gupta follows Sankara’s (the eighth century Hindu reformist theologian) concept of Brahman as ‘pure bliss.’ See Gupta, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, 224-38, 261.
transcendental existence with a dualistic mode – a mode of pollution which is developed in opposition to the ‘pure’.

2.4 Douglas and Harper: Purity and Pollution, Towards Caste Expression

The theological discussion on ‘purity and pollution’ in the Indian context ambiguously raises two major concerns: first, the nature of God and second the nature of humanity. Both these ideas form in the category of caste binaries based on nature of purity attached to the God’s transcendence alone. Problematising purity is the foundation of caste. Mary Douglas, Edward B. Harper, and Adrian C. Mayar help us to understand these complexities of God, purity and pollution and the creation of the Other from the Indian social and cultural system.

In her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas, the British anthropologist who pioneered the study of purity and danger provides ample explanation on the interlacing factors of purity, sacred or divine natures and its social manifestation. Though her study is anthropological, she explains the link of purity and pollution to the transcendental or divine characteristics. According to her “the universe is divided between things and actions which are subject to restriction and others which are not; among the restrictions some are intended to protect divinity from profanation, and others to protect the profane from the dangerous intrusion of divinity.”

In her words, divinity stands as the central social construct in contrast to the profane. It means there are things or ideas congenitally divine and which need to be protected for the sake of their own existence. In religion, the sacred and profane can be understood only in comparison to the cultural knowledge of taboos. These cultural identities are also deeply connected with religious rituals and beliefs. For her, religion keeps a typical relation between purity and the concept of divine connecting ‘holy’ or ‘sacred’ against the ‘polluted’ or ‘profane’.

Douglas deals with ‘danger’, which includes the category of pollution, dirt, etc. She develops a direct link between the notion of the pollution or dirt in the *Brahmanic* religion and the idea of purity. According to her, a systematic approach to the concept of ‘purity’ and ‘dirt’ would give an answer that ‘dirt’ is opposite to purity in *Brahmanic* religion. Though Douglas’ approach of ‘purity and danger’ is a generic one, her theory gives some insight into the social and religious context of caste system, and especially in how she sees the idea of

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41 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 4-6.
42 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 34.
pollution moving to the social life of human beings.\footnote{Douglas, Purity and Danger, 4.} In the case of \textit{Brahmanic} thought, this, she believes, has created a social binary on the basis of purity and pollution or good and bad.

The \textit{Vedic} tradition generally does not consider the social impact of the idea of purity and pollution. However, Douglas asserts that the “holiness and unholliness after all need not always be absolute opposite.”\footnote{Douglas, Purity and Danger, 8-9.} With this, she misunderstands the Hindu view of dirt and pollution. For instance, she misunderstands the Hindu concept of purity and pollution when she cites the example of cow dung being a thing of dirt, can also be an agent of purity for the \textit{Brahmins}.\footnote{For Hindu religion, the cow is sacred God. Any excreta of cow will be sacred for Hindus. On the other hand, human excreta are considered as dirt or matter of pollution. Douglas, Purity and Danger, 125.} Though on an argumentative level she is correct, she overlooks the central idea of ‘dirt’ or ‘pollution’ and its attachment with human beings when she argues it for the upper caste alone. On the contrary, elsewhere she affirms that the purity and dirt are attributed hierarchically to the people as the ‘dirt’ or ‘polluted’, ones being either the ‘last’ or ‘outcaste’ in the Indian social system, “the lowest castes are the most impure… (with) bodily impurities.”\footnote{Douglas, Purity and Danger, 124.} Inherently Hinduism promotes the purity with God and that can be attributed to humans when human beings are hierarchically considered.

Primarily, such hierarchical divisions are imagined and maintained within the realm of God’s purity. It means the very social order is maintained in the knowledge of the purity of God. In this regard Edward B. Harper’s observation is very relevant. According to him, the Hindu notion of purity is to preserve the purity of God and subsequently to attribute such purity to the human condition based on their division of labour. This maintains purity for achieving the goal of caste binary.\footnote{Edward B. Harper, “Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion,” \textit{Journal of Asian Studies} 23 (1964): 196.} Reference to such binary is expressed as ‘holy’ and ‘ unholy’ or ‘sacred or secular,’ not only endorsed by God but also to the human beings like ‘holy’ to the \textit{Brahmana} community and unholy to the \textit{non–Brahmana} community.

Harper observes an application of such binary in the religious worship place. He argues that the purity of gods and the purity of people who worship God are interconnected. God can be directly worshipped only by those “mortals of high ritual purity.”\footnote{Harper, “Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste,” 151.} Harper specifically deals with the concept of impurity and its direct connection attributed to the lowest caste in Hinduism. Through this practice of purity, Hinduism not only affirms the purity of people but also enforces another section into the group of impurity. This is how purity contributes to the social exercise of caste system.
Harper continues that in the caste system, the ‘impurity’ may be transmitted from one caste to another. This happens through various acts of contact between persons or community. The inferior caste is made to believe the narrative of their own pollution as they understand the degree of purity within the knowledge of God. A higher degree of purity is assumed as belonging to the Absolute God and not to the ‘deity’ of impure communities. Some gods are purer than some other deities; vegetarian deities are purer than non-vegetarian deities. This knowledge is transferred to the people at the bottom of the caste system. In all these cases, the Brahmanas stand as a representative of purity in all manners. It is through the Brahmanas that the rest of the caste who are in the Varna (hierarchy in the caste system) receive benefit in their community. God is ‘purer’ than Brahmanas, and Brahmanas are purer than Sudras. Some Sudra caste members are purer than others, but all Sudras are pure relative to the outcaste. In this analysis, Harper brings a hierarchy of purity to both the level of God and human. While extending the degree of purity to the lowest state, the last one outside the caste ladder becomes impure. The caste impurity and its social impact of untouchability is its most inhuman face. While any scholars agree with this social impact, Adrian C. Mayer’s observation in this regard is worth noting. Mayer writes:

Castes were arranged in hierarchical order, from the highest and most sacred to the lowest and least worthy. This hierarchy was maintained by two religious’ ideas. The first is that of the reincarnation, which comforted the lowest caste for the present suffering by assuring them of an advance in the hierarchy if they obeyed their superior and observed the caste law, which held them down to their present position. The second principle was that of pollution, that the lower defiled the higher in a spiritual and ritual sense. Closely related were the ideas of untouchability, unapproachability and restricted commensality and inter-caste marriages. These ideas worked for a separation of caste on ritual and connubial levels.

Mayer’s two ideas need more attention. First, Mayer not only sees the social, economic, and political scope by which the community of the bottom caste would continue to be satisfied in social stratification but also the internal impact on their social identity. Second, the concept of purity attached to sacredness obliquely denies access to the pure or transcendence to the untouchables. This creates an ‘othering’ based on the concept of purity, as Mayer explains, helping the dominant to affirm their attachment to the transcendental and others to continue in the non-transcendental status. The caste status once fixed through birth remains for ever.

To bring back the voices of Douglas and Harper in this regard, both agree that the attribution of pollution is irrevocable. Once a caste is polluted in the hierarchy, it remains polluted forever. Douglas elaborates:

Hinduism teaches for centuries that...for each individual the precise conjunction of the planets at the time he [sic] was born signifies much for his [sic] personal good or ill-fortune. Horoscopes are for everybody. In both these instances, though the individual can be warned by diviners about what is in store for him [sic], he [sic] cannot change it radically, only soften a little the hard blows, defer or abandon hopeless desires, be alert to the opportunities that will lie in his [sic] path.\footnote{Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 83-84.}

Once born in a caste, the particular caste identity continues, though the \textit{Advaita} offers re-incarnational position, there is rarely a chance for a \textit{Chandala} to be the \textit{Barahamana}.

Like Douglas, Harper’s study affirms the impossibility for an untouchable to become pure. Therefore, they are disqualified from the question of purity. It means the untouchables can only create impurity but not purity. On the one hand, the \textit{Brahmanic} dominance finds its space from the purity of gods. When the god and human relate, the pure God and pure \textit{Brahmanas} may get along, but the touch of the impure affects them towards impure. Even though Harper limits his finding on purity and pollution to the purity of gods and \textit{Brahmanas}, he has a point to make on its corresponding relation to human purity and pollution. The above discussion demonstrates that the theory of purity and pollution inherently contours on its foundation of \textit{Vedic} view of a metaphysical God and its correlation to the caste system of Indian society.

However, scholars have also observed the ‘purity and pollution’ in a slightly different way. For instance, M.N. Srinivas, a scholar in the caste system observes that purity and pollution must be seen not on a religious angle but must rather be seen on an “endogamous hierarchy based on occupation.”\footnote{M.N. Srinivas, \textit{Caste in Modern India and Other Essays} (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 3.} Gilbert Slater, another scholar in Dravidian studies, sees caste as a pre-Aryan system existed on the basis of the continuity of the traditional occupations and marriage lineage.\footnote{Gilbert Slater, \textit{The Dravidian Elements in Indian Culture} (New Delhi: Ess Publications, 1976); 48-52.} J.H. Hutton also explains the pre-Aryan existence of caste through racial and economic components.\footnote{J.H. Hutton, \textit{Caste in India: Its Nature, Function, and Origin, 3rd ed.}; (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 177.} All these scholars understand the caste hierarchy based on the labour one does, caste is fulfilling only the social responsibility of each member in the society.

Even though there are different views to look into the theory of purity and pollution like Douglas and Harper, one must also note it from the point of view of the Dalit people. To put
one representative voice, Peniel Rajkumar explains it well. According to him, while the caste system is maintained with the measure of purity and pollution, it discriminates against the Dalit or the lower group in the caste system. Rajkumar argues that, “… the caste system thrived (and thrives) as a result of these asymmetries fabricated by the underlying notions of purity and pollution.” And further, Peniel continues, “attributed pollution” is the fundamental criteria employed to discriminate against the Dalits. It has severe social, political, and economic connotations.

2.5 Varna System, Untouchability and Traditional Christianity.

Based on Rig Veda and other archaeological evidence, James Massey attests that “the root of the Dalits goes back 3500 years.” If we follow Massey’s understanding of Dalits, Sudras, the last in the caste hierarchy, and the Chandala, who stands outside the caste ladder are together known the Dalits. Massey provides a historical lineage to this community with a popular term “Dasas and Dasyus (servant),” the native black population. The white Aryans, the Sanskrit speaking invaders concurred and enslaved the ‘black race’ around 1500 BCE. According to Massey, the Vedas and Manusmruti, the Hindu scriptural and canonical text explain the Hindu way of life identifying dasas, the indigenous inhabitants as lower than them. All these attributions and interpretations are made in the religious aspect of life. This religious contribution of caste system made a group known as dasas with an inferior identity within the Varna system.

In Brahmanic Hinduism, this hierarchy is created and maintained on the basis of four-Varna system. Modern scholars like Bhagwan Das and Gen’ichi Yamasaki explain the complexities of the Varna system. Das directly connects the notion of caste system within the dynamics of ‘birth and ascribed status’ given through Varna system. Whereas more than birth and ascribed status, for Yamasaki, the purity and pollution divide or create a social

57 Peniel Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010), 19.
58 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 19.
60 The existing slaves (dasyus/dasas) remain opposite Vedic gods who are masters or pure. The nature of dasyus, the earliest inhabitants of the region do not qualify to associate with the transcendental other and they remain as outcaste, the immanent other. James Massey, Roots of Dalit History, Christianity, Theology and Spirituality (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 1-20, Yamazaki, “Introduction: Social Discrimination,” 3-8.
binary. Yamasaki consolidates his ideas of social binary (Varna-Jati) and explains the religious ways in which it takes shape in caste-based society.64

The Brahmans, who constituted the highest ranked Varna, monopolised the positions of priest and teacher of the Vedas; the Kshetriyas took charge of politics and the military; the Vaisyas formed the commoner ranks of cultivators, herders and merchants; and the sutras were relegated to the position of servants. The top three Varnas were the regular members of Aryan society. They are called twice born and were allowed to participate in the relationship presided over by the Brahmans. Their ‘second’ birth was the initiation ceremony into the Vedic studies (Upanayana) which they performed while they were young. The lowest of the ladder are Shudras and below the Shudra class are the most inferior people who were called untouchables65 or Chandalas.66 The Brahmans become the ambassadors of the transcendental and the Chandala are those opposite to the Brahmans.

A. Mathias Mundadan, an Indian church historian, takes the position of accepting the practice of Varna system among the St. Thomas Christians. It implicitly gives the assumption that the caste practice existed in the church for centuries. Mundadan states that over the centuries, Orthodox Christians have identified with the “upper caste” based on the Varna system enjoying the social status of this community in the Hindu religious system.67 Mundadan’s findings are not new. Secular historians like Elamkulam P.N. Kunjanpillai postulate the same argument with three social standings that the Orthodox Christians claim for themselves: equal to the high caste status with Brahmans; identification with the upper social grade due to their Syrian ethnic and linguistic background; their intimacy with the ruling class and the religious life, which they considered superior to other religious beliefs.68

The St. Thomas Christians mostly leaned towards the Brahmanic and dominant identity of transcendental notion rather than the immanent one. Syrians found an intimacy in faith in a philosophical God or the transcendental God that the Brahmans engage in their daily life.

66 Chandogya Upanishad antagonistically comparing Chandalas to a dog or a hog. According to Chandogya Upanishad, “[t]herefore he [sic], whose conduct is good, quickly attains to some good existence, such as that of a Brahmana, a Kshetriya or a Vaisya. Next, he [sic] who is viciously disposed, soon assumes the form of some inferior creature; such as that of a dog, a hog, or a Chandala.” See Chandogya Upanishad 5:10:7. Rajendralala Mitra, trans., ed. The Chhandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda: With Extract from the Commentary of Sankara Acharya (Kolkata: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), 92. James Massey offers a comprehensive study on how Vedas and other Hindu scriptures antagonistically appropriate the Chandala. See Massey, “Dalits: Historical Roots,” 5-25.
67 Mundadan, History of Christianity in India, 24-30.
68 Kunjanpillai, Chila Kerala Charithra Prasangangal, 187-221.
This view continued throughout the history of the St. Thomas Christians or Syrian Christians in particular. The Dalits were considered to be untouchables or outcastes and therefore the caste system seemed to be an integral part of the Syrian Christians in India. The mimicking of the Brahmanic system of caste continued to play a major role in the social, religious and cultural life of the Syrian Christian community.

By emphasising the purified Brahmanic caste identity, the Syrian not only enjoyed a ‘non-negotiable space’ among the caste society but was also privileged to keep the untouchables away from their social identity. Susan Visvanathan argues that the Orthodox Christians were considered agents of high-level purity when communicating with the caste Hindus. In this regard, she testifies to the power they had in ‘neutralising pollution’ through ‘purity touch’ for the Brahmins and Nair, if they (i.e., the Brahmins) had come into contact with lower caste or with a ‘polluted touch’. This formed a completely new perspective of social and religious status based on the power of their knowledge of God. In the above practices, a religious psyche is created on ‘Dalit body’ as a non-touchable body.

2.6 Syrian Christians and Caste System: Mor Gregorios, Mor Osthatheos, Ninan Koshy, and C. J. Fuller

From the early 1960s the scholars of St. Thomas tradition in India gradually accepted the caste practice among the Syrian Christians in India. Mor Gregorios expressed this view in one of his early articles “The Ancient Syrian Church of India: A Contemporary Picture” published in 1961. In this article he laments the inability of Syrian Christians to find solution to the eternal vulnerability of the church to the caste system. He confirms not only the existence of ‘caste structure’ within the church but also the critical social standing of the Dalit Christians who newly joined the Syrian church. He believes that there is difficulty in ‘assimilating the new converts’ into the Orthodox church and to eternally banish the caste system from the church.

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69 Visvanathan, The Christians of Kerala, 3.

70 This act was common in Kerala and in many places, it continues even today. For instance, Orthodox Christians construct Churches near the Hindu temples so that they could also perform some ‘neutralizing rituals’ that the temple requires. This has been confirmed by Syrian Christians in the past. In some cases, the Syrian Christians are invited to purify the Hindu temple due the pollution of the lower caste. L.W. Brown explains another incident where the Syrians purified a temple which had been polluted. Brown, The Indian Christians of St. Thomas, 172. In 1928, T. K. Joseph, a Syrian Christian explains a standard practice of Syrian Christians in his time. This he narrates as, “the present writer himself in his boyhood about thirty years ago used to be asked by Hindu temple servants to touch conventionally polluted provisions intended for the stone’s throw from his house.” T.K. Joseph, “Malabar Miscellany: A Rajasimma Inscription at Talekkad in Cochin,” Indian Antiquary 57(1928), 29. This cannot be considered as an old practice alone. Even today, this practice is continued in some areas. Sibi Edathil, “Cheriya Palliyum Charithravum (Malayalam),” in Divyadarshanam, Kothamangalam, Feast on Kanni 20, 2015 Special Issue, ed., Sajan Varghese, (Kottayam: Mangalam Publication, 2015), 11-17.


Yet, he envisions more conversions from the ‘poor and the once down-trodden’. The church rejects any integral change that reduces the Brahmanic social and cultural practices.

Mor Gregorios’ position indirectly reveals two perennial attitudes of the church. First, the Orthodox church considers the ‘untouchables’ to be objects of ‘religious conversion.’ Second, by qualifying the untouchables as ‘once’ down–trodden people, the church no longer identifies their sufferings and pain but finds an object of mission. Addressing the Dalits as ‘poor and the downtrodden’ shows the inaccuracy in understanding the evil of the caste structure in general and the Dalits’ concerns in particular.

On the other hand, Mor Osthathesos Geevarghese discusses the issue of ‘class’ in his book, The Theology of a Classless Society, in which he expresses his concerns regarding class and caste divisions in the church and society. While addressing the in-depth risk of being a ‘class-divided’ society, he also reminds us of the equal danger of the interplay between the class and the caste. Elsewhere, while critiquing the educational system that perpetuates the notion of caste system, Mar Osthathesos stresses Varna system and believes that it “domesticate[s] the exploited, uncritical, inferior, powerless” to remain in their own conditions. However, Mor Osthathesos also could not initiate a meaningful engagement in battling the caste issue in the church other than addressing a general approach to the ‘class’ struggle in the country. He imagined a classless society but could not speak about a casteless society or church.

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73 Varghese, “The Ancient Syrian Church of India,” 286.
75 Mar Osthathesos, The Theology of a Classless Society, 34. In the same book, M.M. Thomas wrote a forward where he explains the inseparable nature of class and caste issues in India. Probably, this indication highlights the caste system, which integrally connects with the issues of class and the life of socially margins or downtrodden. See M.M. Thomas, “Forward,” in The Theology of a Classless Society, Geevarghese Mar Osthathesos (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1979), 9. M.E. Prabhakar explains this phenomenon as “the origins of caste include economic factors, as much as the composition of class includes socio-cultural elements. The closely inter-linked and interacting forces of caste and class have resulted in the formation of a unique oppressive social system of our country.” M.E. Prabhakar, “Caste-Class, Patriarchy and Doing Dalit Theology,” in Frontiers of Dalit Theology, ed. V. Devasahayam (Madras, India: ISPCK/Gurukul, 1997), 79. However, V. Devasahayam believes that fundamentally caste and class are different though there can have a close relation. According to Devasahayam, “the categories of caste and class, though are closely related, yet they are distinct and, in a way, worlds apart. While class is an alien, Western concept, caste is uniquely Indian. While class is based on one’s achievement, caste is based on birth, the former indicating the achieved status and the latter of the ascriptive status. While class is individual based, with flexibility and opens in terms of mobility, caste is group based and is rigid and fixed. Class is built on economic foundations while caste is based on religious foundations; class and caste are determined by market economy and karma theory respectively.” V. Devasahayam, “Doing Dalit Theology: Basic Assumptions,” in Frontiers of Dalit Theology, ed. V. Devasahayam (Madras: ISPCK/Gurukul, 1997), 272. Shyam Babu’s recent study on Caste and Class among the Dalits justifies that there is an inseparable connection between class and caste. Shyam Babu, “Caste and Class Among the Dalits,” in Dalit Studies, ed. Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Sathyarayana (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
76 Mar Osthathesos, The Theology of a Classless Society, 120.
Caste in the Kerala churches\textsuperscript{77} was a ground-breaking study done by Ninan Koshy in 1968. His study proves that the caste practices and the dynamics of the ‘upper social status’ of the Syrian Christian faith continues even during this period. The major findings of his study reveal that the dominant Syrian Christian community fostered on the Dalits a ‘lower caste consciousness’ or ‘valueless status’ for the sake of making the Dalits their slaves in their field and other activity. This goal was achieved through the misuse of the bodies of the marginalised for socio-political privileges.\textsuperscript{78} According to the caste consciousness, the Dalits are made to believe that economic affluence are the right of the dominant community. Koshy believes that the caste system promoted a social binary in terms of ‘sacredness.’\textsuperscript{79} Koshy’s treatment of ‘sacredness’ and the binary experienced in the Indian community provides us with a new direction in the discussion of the transcendental and immanent other in India.

From the historical point of view of the earlier scholars on caste practice and Syrian tradition, C.J. Fuller locates his research on the significance of the caste reflections among the Syrian Christians. Fuller offers strong inputs in this regard.\textsuperscript{80} Fuller understands as:

Christian and Hindu behaviour concerning the rules of caste and pollution are almost identical, although Christians could sometimes act as pollution neutralisers. But the most important qualification is that Christians have no concept of bodily pollution. Thus, Christians and Hindus only share an orthopraxy in inter-caste relations; it does not operate within the common ideology.\textsuperscript{81}

This indicates an ideological synthesis and the practice of a common orthopraxy between Hindus and Christians in Kerala. The ideological synthesis permeates not only the religious space but also the entire life system of the society. Fuller argues that it is because of the commonality they share in the caste practice, that the caste life of the Kerala Christian community is visible both in their social and religious life. Many social statistics provided also prove the practice of caste among early Christians in India.\textsuperscript{82} Fuller’s thesis is also

\textsuperscript{77} Ninan Koshy, \textit{Caste in the Kerala Churches} (Bangalore: CISRS, 1968), 7-27.
\textsuperscript{78} Koshy, \textit{Caste in the Kerala Churches}, 7-13.
\textsuperscript{79} Koshy, \textit{Caste in the Kerala Churches}, 11.
\textsuperscript{81} C.J. Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” \textit{Man} 11, no. 1 (1976): 53.
\textsuperscript{82} The history proves that some Syrian masters would hold even more than 200 slaves, as bonded labourers for their dominant masters: men, women, and children. These slaves were denied all social privileges such as education, clothing, freedom to commute, freedom of speech, owning land. Disregarding these social norms led to brutal punishments. The implementation of this barbaric regime was to prevent the people at the margins from gaining knowledge and becoming aware of their rights, as this would otherwise threaten the freedom and the dominance of the upper caste. Mathew Philip, \textit{Transition of Social Life in Kerala} (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1960), 8., Gurukkal, \textit{Myth, Charithram, Samooham}, 330-41., Nair, \textit{Slavery in Kerala}, 2-3., L.W. Brown, \textit{The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar} (Cambridge: The University Press, 1956), 168-69. Ayyar, \textit{Anthropology of the Syrian Christians}, 53-53.
supported by Placid J. Padipara, that each community in the early Malabar (Kerala) context shaped their society with a caste identity. According to Podipara, like any other non-Christian community, St. Thomas Christians also conditioned their individuality by the rules of caste.\textsuperscript{83} Fuller again affirms that:

the principle criterion for membership of the Syrian caste, as I shall now term it, is that one has to claim descent from St Thomas’s Nambudiri converts and that the claim is accepted by others. This claim, or rather the status which attaches to its acceptance, is transmitted through the patrilineal clan. Thus, membership of the Syrian caste is acquired ascriptively by birth although, as we shall see, there are exceptions. Of course, not all Syrian Christians believe that they are descended from St Thomas’ converts. There are as many cynics in the community as in any other and the cynics are supported by most of the evidences. The claim is essentially similar to that of the claims of innumerable other castes in India.\textsuperscript{84}

To disprove the cynics, Fuller takes the example of newly converted Christians from the lower caste in the caste ladder who were not encouraged to marry the traditional Christians.\textsuperscript{85} A strict endogamy was practised.\textsuperscript{86} The converted Christians were still considered polluted. Fuller gives a good observation on the memory of the pollution. According to him, “the question of ‘forgetting’ caste is problematic and not so simply explained like ‘forgetting’ genealogies, given the importance of caste membership in India.”\textsuperscript{87} The above analysis prompts the integral relation of Syrian Christians and the caste understanding of purity and pollution.

In his conclusion, Fuller observes that “Christians and Hindus share a common Orthopraxy – i.e. behave in accordance with the same set of rules concerning caste and pollution – in respect of relation between castes, although the Christians also had a role as pollution neutralisers in certain contexts.”\textsuperscript{88} When the Kerala Christians began exercising their faith and other religious activities, the Hindu influence had not been reduced at any level. In some cases, Christians acted more hierarchically than Hindus considering their position of acting as pollution neutralisers. They were doubly raised in the concept of purity. Fuller’s study gives more light to their social behaviours too. According to him, “Christians and Hindus thus form one total community, for they are integrated, albeit with some qualification, at both the behavioural and ideological levels.”\textsuperscript{89} The commonality of the high

\textsuperscript{83} Placid Podipara, “Hindu in Culture,” 107.
\textsuperscript{84} Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” 61.
\textsuperscript{85} Though Fuller’s study is done on the general Syrian Christians and specifically among the Syrian Catholics, this claim is true with the Syrian Orthodox community too.
\textsuperscript{86} Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” 57.
\textsuperscript{87} Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” 57.
\textsuperscript{88} Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” 68.
\textsuperscript{89} Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” 67-68.
status of both these communities based on their theological assumptions also made them identify with the upper social status.

2.7 Syrian Christians: Re-visiting the History, A Caste Lens

When analysing the arguments of the above scholars, they observed the presence of caste practice among the Syrian Christians in different ways. Although the above study shows the St. Thomas or Syrian Christians’ authentic, indigenous and inculturated church, being shaped as the dominant one and followed a social practice equal to the Brahmanic, the examples of the physical expression of the interactions between the Syrian and the Dalit community has not happened yet. The following details give a concluding idea of a few historical examples through the Dalit lens helping us to consolidate the empirical notion of ‘the other’ among the Syrian Christians.

To give an account of the Dalit experience in the Syrian church, especially prior to the Synod of Diamper, is a hazardous task as there are not many documents, texts or scriptures of the early Christians preserved due to the order of Bishop Menez to burn them. Though the early documents of the Syrian Christians were destroyed, the decisions of the Synod of Udanamperur provide a few evidences that reflect on how the Dalits were treated by the early Christians. Christians appeared “quasi-caste shaped in the culture” and on their social level, the St. Thomas Christians “stood next to the Brahmins.” To prove this claim, Podipara quotes Joseph Sebastiani’s book Prima Spedizione alle Indie Orientali in (1666) in which Sebastiani writes, as:

like the high caste people of the country the Thomas Christian would not touch nor go near those of the low castes. If they happened to touch or go near the latter, they would purify themselves by a bath. This was a means to keep up their nobility and position in the society. In the public roads those of the inferior castes had to give way to them, and they had the right to kill anyone who would deny them this mark of distinction.

Sebastiani’s account vividly portrays the untouchability and the aggressive attitude the Thomas Christians exercised towards the Dalit community. The community was more

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90 The Synod of Diamper met under the leadership of the Portuguese Arch Bishop Menezes on the 20th June 1599 and continued for seven days. Though the main emphasis of the Synod was to navigate the Syrian community towards the Roman Church, some decisions taken at the Synod were to stop the caste practice existed among the Syrian community. Mathew and Thomas, The Indian Churches of St. Thomas, 35-37.

91 The synod decrees itself explains the details of the books that are to be destroyed. The full English translation of the Synod decision are incorporated in James Hough’s book. See Hough James, The History of Christianity in India: From the Commencement of the Christian Era, Vol. 2 (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1839), 513-683. This has been explained by most of the Indian historians.


concerned with preserving their identity along with the caste Hindus who follow the similar caste rules.

K.N. Daniel and James Hough give the details of the Synod of Diamper, which is recorded in Malayalam and in English respectively. A comprehensive account of the entire Synod proceedings with its decisions in a compiled text namely *Canons of the Synod of Diamper*. If we concentrate on a few quotes to identify the above claims, the Synod canons one to four of the ninth section explain the prohibition of the Syrian Christians’ practice of purity and pollution. The decree number nine of the section four in the decree deals with the slaves, who were kept with the Syrian families. The decree says “[t]hat no person was presumed to keep an infidel slave without baptising him [sic].” In the following decree again it has been decided that once baptised, the slaves were not allowed to be sold to the people of another faith, but “though when it is necessary, and they are their lawful slaves, they may sell them to other Christians.” The same canon prohibits all kinds of superstitions connected to the pollution of a touch to a lower caste person by the Syrian Christian. Canon ten of section nine prevents the “misbehaviour” with the “lower caste people who work for their private and public activities.” The above decrees testify at least two major ways of caste practices exercised within the Syrian community. First, the Syrians customarily kept slaves with them and imposed social discrimination against the ‘Dalit community’ similar to the practices of the Brahmin community against the Dalits; second, they considered the Dalits to be polluted and polluting.

To push the matter further, first, keeping the Dalits as slaves in the Syrian families were also recorded by Anathakrishna Ayyar, a state official and a non-Christian. As his personal statement, he remarks that the institution of slavery/untouchability is pre-eminently anti-Christian and “breaks the unity of spirit, deadens the energy of divine love, prays of the vital of Christianity.” Ayyar narrates the details of the slavery practices of Syrian Christians:

> …for thousands of years, these agrestic serfs continued to exist in a state of hereditary bondage exposed to the caprice or at times to the brutality of the owner, and disposable according to his will and pleasure. The Brahmins and the members of the caste below them had a number of bondsmen born in slavery. Syrian Christians also possessed them in large numbers.

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95 The decisions of the Synod have been codified as a Canon. Daniel, *Canon of the Synod of Diamper*, 187-91.
98 Daniel, *Canon of the Synod of Diamper*, 197.
These slaves were denied social privileges such as education, clothing, freedom to commute, freedom of speech and owning land. Most importantly they have been denied the experience of God as they were polluted.101

Second, the attribution of pollution to the Dalit community was understood through the social practice of untouchability. For documented evidence, apart from the Udayamperur Synod’s reflection, a personal diary of a priest namely Palakunnel Mathai Mariam Kathanar,102 a Syrian Catholic priest who lived in the later part of nineteenth Century, describes the Syrian practice of untouchability. In his diary, Kathanar, narrates his missionary experiences among the Dalit community. Through the narratives of his interactions with the Dalits, we understand how Syrian Christians emphasised the practice of untouchability, even after they converted into Christianity. The diary describes a few unpleasant incidents of taking oaths from the Dalit community before they convert to Christianity. In an oath taken by the Dalits before the sacrament of baptism, the Dalits had to publicly pronounce their decision to continue in their polluted status. Nor can they demand any kind of freedom after being baptised and given membership in the church.103 It seems, the church wanted them not to offend the caste Hindus on any ground.104 In effect, the church demands that the Dalits continue to remain untouchables, even if they join to Christianity. The Dalits are doubly discriminated when the caste Syrians discouraged the Dalit worshipping together in the same church.105 Kathanar’s diary shows the ambiguous experiences and apathetic demeanour – continued untouchability and casting out from the Syrian church – that the Dalits had to suffer under the Syrian Christian community.

Placid J. Podipara demonstrates the continued caste practice even in the twentieth century and the Syrians taking the position of pollution neutralizers. He states that:

…in almost every respect they (Thomas Christians) lived an almost caste-bound life, so much that they avoided the touch of low-caste persons, who were not allowed to come near their houses. Their touch, however, was considered by high-caste Hindus as sufficient to purify objects regarded as ‘defiled’ by the touch of low-caste persons. Thomas-Christians would eat, as hosts or guests, only with those of their own social status, social equality being based on ethnic identity.106

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On the one hand, the St. Thomas Christians continue their social distance with the Dalits and acted as pollution neutralizers among the higher caste, on the other. In doing so, the primary assumption is that the people from the untouchable community were considered as people with a defiled body. Not only are they defiled themselves, the Brahmins believe, but those who touch them also become polluted. Such pollutions can be neutralized by the touch of a Syrian Christian. For instance, in any case, a dominant caste gets defiled by the touch or presence of a bottom caste, Podipara narrates, it can be neutralized by the touch or the presence of a Syrian Christian.\textsuperscript{107} This is a clear paradox; using the Syrian body as a site of purity in relation to the polluted, and pollution neutralizers in terms of caste community higher than them. Susan Visvanathan unpacks this anomaly.

The body of Dalit becomes a site of pollution whereas the upper caste body stands for purity. In her study in 1999, \textit{The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba}, Susan Visvanathan, who holds the rich experience of both Brahmanic and Orthodox traditions, positively expounds this enigmatic relation between the Hindu and Christian life as ‘common world’ of ‘time, space and the body’.\textsuperscript{108} Visvanathan recalls some of the social practices and rituals that take place even in the present-day context. For instance, in her recent writings, Visvanathan affirms a custom, surveyed among Yakoba of Kottayam (Orthodox Christians) that after the Easter service, people cry ‘go away’ (poyin) as they walk in procession down the street. This heraldic voice signifies that higher castes are on the way and lower castes therefore must move themselves from the path, which was fundamentally based on their notion of purity in relation to their social and religious notions.\textsuperscript{109} The inferior other has overshadowed the idiom of purity and pollution. As George Koilparampil also noted, the Dalit body problematizes the social interaction and creates untouchability as the norm to be practised even within the Syrian Christian community in India.\textsuperscript{110}

Kathanar’s diary and many other documents show that the Dalits who embraced the Syrian faith were not allowed to be a part of the dominant worshipping system. The separate churches were created for them. A recent study done on one of the mission movements of the church proves that the members who recently embraced Orthodox faith from the Dalit community are not completely encouraged to be a part of the main churches. In most cases, separate churches were built for the Dalit communities exclusively. For instance, the St. Paul’s mission, one of the mission units of the Syrian Orthodox church in India, has taken up

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{107} If the Brahmins are defiled by the touch or the presence of a lower caste person during any ritual or related exercises (like ritual bath or fasting), it “was considered a hindrance” to the ritual or related activities. Podipara, “The Thomas-Christians and ‘Adaptation’,” 175.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Visvanathan, \textit{The Christians of Kerala}, 3-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Visvanathan, \textit{The Christians of Kerala}, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Koilparampil, \textit{Caste in the Catholic Community}, 150-57.
\end{itemize}
mission in eighteen states of the Indian union. The mission works done in Kerala and in other states of India are largely among the Dalit communities through the sharing of the Gospel, charitable activity, and addressing to engage in several social issues. Surprisingly, the relationship between the Syrian Christians and the newly converted community remains the same as it was earlier. The traditional Orthodox Christians resent the new community worshipping with them even today and the mission board was compelled to make decisions of separate worshipping centres for the newly embraced Dalit community. As a result, separate churches have been built for the Dalit and Adivasi (tribal) Christians. Therefore, the mission board decided to construct separate churches in all the new places even if the ‘traditional’ and ‘dominant’ churches existed in the same place. According to the mission report, currently, they have constructed separate churches for the Dalit Christians in Sultan Batheri and Vaynadu in Kerala and Hulluhally in Bangalore, Karnataka. There is a tension between the Syrian and Dalit Christians missional approach in worshipping together and their claim on the purity of their body and the Dalit Christian’s polluted body. The very mission works the church carried among the Dalits was turned out to be a second layer of ‘othering’ experienced by the Dalits. When the Syrian Christians followed the missionary model of mission, the Dalits experienced double marginalization. First, on the caste issue of transcendence and the immanent and second, the transcendent and the missiological other.

111 Based on the reports of St. Paul’s Mission of India, until 2011.
112 For the past two decades, the church has initiated missionary activities among the socially marginalized in various urban and rural areas in India. For example, a special centre for women and children were set up at Attappadi and at Thheckuvatta at Palakkadu district. Female infanticide is still practiced in these villages. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM, 25 April 1998, 4. (Hand written). At Paalunda, in Malappuram district, Sathimangalam in Tamil Nadu, Hulluhalil in Karnataka, Ramithirai in Madhyapradesh centres were begun for Dalits and Adivasis. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM, 23 April 1999, 14. (Hand written); At Aryanadu in Thiruvananthapuranum district, a rehabilitation centre for sex workers has been started. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 26 April 2000, 19. In 2000-2001, at Pashaaor and Masanagudy (Tamil Nadu- Kerala Border), a centre for the Dalit empowerment programme commenced. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 26 April 2001, 27. Mattathikkadu, Kollegal, Konkar Palay, Annaikal centres aiming for the Adivasis empowerment program were started. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 26 May 2002, 38. Separate churches in Bathery, Vynadu were constructed for the newly converted Dalit villages. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 28 May 2003, 44. A social centre was begun at Moga village, Punjab among the socially abandoned people. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 28 April 2004, 50. At Gigganny, Bangalore the mission commenced with a centre for the bonded Dalit labourers. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 20 April 2005, 32. Old age home at Odakkaly, is a centre for the Handicapped was established. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 20 April 2006, 58. A centre was started for the agricultural labours at Mayanoor, Trichur District. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 26 April 2007, 65., and April 2007, 72. Centres were initiated at Palanpur, Himachal Pradesh and Munnidguda in Orrisa among the Dalit community. St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 24 April 2008, 81.
114 St. Paul’s Mission of India, Minutes of the AGM (Hand written), 20 May 2003, 38.
2.8 Re-visiting the Transcendental – Immanent Binary: Y.T. Vinayraj on the Missiological Other

Even though there are no direct expressions found between the transcendence of God and the caste system, the above discussions provide us with many examples of the intimacy of these two thoughts. The Syrian Christians have consciously appropriated the idea of transcendence with the ‘pure’ that the Brahmins and the Syrians equally associate with the common idea of God as pure. This is a problem when it is argued that pollution is contrary to ‘pure’ and all polluted are opposite to the transcendent. This theological notion embodies the practice of caste in social and religious life creating a binary between the sacred and defiled, pure and polluted, transcendent and immanent. On the above theological base, when we re-read the transcendental and immanent nature of God, it is important to note that the opposite to pure or transcendent becomes the Dalit or ‘the other’ in the caste system. In the theological appropriation of purity and pollution, Y.T. Vinayraj has used an equivalent theological term such as the transcendental and immanent to understand the core of the caste binary.

The knowledge of caste, according to Vinayraj lies in the ‘knowledge’ of the duality of human social conditions that no Christian tradition could overcome. Vinayraj develops this position in one of his earlier books, Re-imagining Dalit Theology: Post Modern Reading. According to him, caste is a specific kind of Brahmanic-Hindu theology of the Vedic knowledge system. He writes that:

Caste as a theology of soul relegated the validity of body and thus the social position of the people who toil in the land. Knowledge is situated in the soul and disseminated through ritualistic practice. Those who know the content of ritualistic practices determine or control the social power. It is this theology of soul, which determines the distance between the social bodies. This is the theory behind the system of purity and pollution. Dalits are determined as the polluted/defiled people ontologically.

Like many other scholars who discuss the Indian caste system, Vinayraj also believes that caste is a specific kind of Brahmanic-Hindu knowledge system, which exists upon the pillars of purity and pollution. It is this system that has determined the Dalits as the polluted or defiled people or the other ontologically. Differently stated, it deals with how the purity is equated to the practice of the ‘pure’ human being and the ‘polluted’ is connected with the untouchable and distanced bodies that keep a direct link with the knowledge of God.

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116 Vinayraj, Re-Imagining Dalit Theology, 27.
117 Vinayraj, Re-Imagining Dalit Theology, 27.
According to Vinayraj, this impurity is paradoxical to the pure. In this view, Vinayraj adds a core argument of how the pollution works on soul and body, which determines the ultimate immanent other. The two major components: soul and body are essentially related to the question of pure or polluted on the one hand and transcendental or immanent on the other. It deals with how purity and the soul are connected to each other. Moreover, based on the ritualistic knowledge and practice of the ‘pure,’ the social and religious powers are confined to the people who claim to be the holders of such knowledge. On the contrary, from the position of knowledge it manifests to human bodies particularly to ‘polluted’ bodies as untouchable and distanced ones. It means ontologically the polluted bodies are the bodies of untouchables or the Dalit bodies.

The Orthodox interactions with the Dalit bodies are to be understood in this context. It is true that the Orthodox missional context in India is understood as the spaces of implanting dominant ecclesial identities that consider the Dalit as weak and inferior to them. Apart from the historical and cultural deviations of the issue, the Vinayraj finds these situations on the theological ground and has articulated in his recent theological discussions on ‘the other’. Here, Vinayraj argues that the creation of the other is a conscious theological effort by the dominant theological voices in the Indian context. As discussed throughout this chapter, he blames the antagonistic theological juxtaposition of God (transcendent) and the human (immanent) of the traditional Christian theology in India. Elsewhere he argues that the route of this difference is a by–product of the ‘pure’ transcendence offered by the Western theological and philosophical epistemology. The pure transcendence is opposite to the ‘polluted’ immanence, which categorically becomes the other.

Vinayraj suggests a missiological other or immanent other, which is created by the dominant or superior caste over the inferior or subordinate caste. In this dichotomy of transcendent and immanent, Vinayraj believes that the “the site of marginality that has been located as the ‘missiological end’ of Christian mission in the modern period” and this has created a missiological other. His approach in connecting the mission, the margins, and the Other directs us to know that mission stands for the dominant, while the margins are the Dalits, tribal, and the Adivasis. The totality of these communities constitutes ‘the Other’.

118 Y.T. Vinayraj, Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 70. For Vinayraj, Western or Eastern, these concepts are same in the Christian tradition. Vinayraj, Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy, 69.
120 Vinayraj, Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy, 70.
121 Vinayraj, “God and the Other,” 96.
122 Vinayraj, “God and the Other,” 98.
All these social standings were used for the Dalits to be kept away from their social and religious life, which Vinayraj believes, have a strong theological appropriation from Hindu philosophical to the practical notion of ‘othering’. In this process, the dominant receives the privileges through a site of attributing the polluted body as the Dalit body. Such practices are not invisible to date even in the traditional Christianity in India that professes a cosmic mission. Differently stated, the dominant nature of the early Christian community denied divine space for the Dalit body in the Indian context. While practically locating the issue, the church has neither innovatively addressed the caste-ridden practice of untouchability nor imagined revisiting the existing dichotomy within the cosmic theology of the church.

While imagining an Orthodox engagement with the margins of the Indian society, one cannot ignore Vinayraj’s epistemological discussion on the transcendental and immanent other and its corresponding relation to the caste distance maintained with the churches. Vinayraj’s view on the ontology of purity and pollution becomes a signpost to locate the interaction between the Orthodox Christians and Dalits in relation to their knowledge of God. Vinayraj’s position needs more attention to discuss the Orthodox mission and the social and religious marginality in the Indian context. This, in turn, as Vinayraj imagines, has informed the development of a transcendental other against an immanent other much like that within orthodox Hindu tradition of purity and pollution. From the Indian Christian socio-political and religious situation, Orthodox Christianity takes the pure body (transcendent) and the Dalits are attributed with a polluted body (immanent). This problematizes the Dalit theologians attempt to understand complete dignity for the Dalit body in response to the ‘so-called’ dominant bodies in the Indian society.

2.9 Conclusion
In relation to the caste practice of the early Christian community in India, this chapter provides ample evidence as to the social binaries created both in a historical and theological point of view. This does not mean that one can ignore the early church’s immense contribution to the social, religious, and political life on Indian soil. In spite of the ‘caste’ interference within the early church, the community had a good footing in the Indian social system due to their peaceful co-habitation within the multi-faith Indian community. However, based on the above analysis, this chapter highlights the true account of the early Indian church’s inadequate attention to practically connect practically with the struggles of the Dalit life.

The above discussion further identifies that the central cause of the caste practice of the early Christian tradition in India was its intimacy exercised with the Vedic theological notion of the Brahmanic transcendental God and its direct link to the purity of the Brahmaṇa caste.
Even though Orthodox theology does not permit any duality in its social practice, on a practical level the Orthodox ignore their rich and potential theology. As a result, the knowledge of the transcendental God alone continued to ignore the practical experience of God in the suffering of the Dalits in India. From a theological understanding of transcendental and immanent nature of God and the equivalent practical expression of purity and pollution derailed the church’s original vision of the intimacy with the people within socially margins.

The church faces many contrary objections towards the practice of its theology in a social context of marginality. These findings of this chapter, therefore, are significant signpost in the progress of this study. This would also enable the Indian church to think beyond the caste categories. The caste binary and its contradictions would continue to impede the church’s original vision. Moreover, the outcome of this chapter can also to take new directions in the caste practice in the Indian society for imagining an equal social or religious status of people of all social categories.

It is difficult to conclude that today the ‘othering’ exercised among the St. Thomas Christian has now stopped. The new voices from the Indian Christians in general and from Orthodox Christians in particular who imagine addressing the caste issues in the church provide new horizons of handling these issues in the Indian context. The following chapter takes up these voices and envisages meaningful steps to combat the issue of caste in the church and society.
3. Rejecting the Dominant Answers: Envisioning A Theology of Margins

Indian-Christian theology involves a critical and constructive reflection on the contextual resistance-liberation movements in India, especially those arising from the dynamics of religious (Christian) and ethnocultural (Dalit and Adivasi) minorities, as they counter the reach of the dominant ideologies of Hindutva and contribute in creative ways to circulate themes of their particularised experience of the Divine One (in Her/His relatedness to human beings and the world), in the light of the paradigm of Jesus Christ.

Sathianathan Clarke1

A positive Orthodox missiology is needed today for the unification of humanity around a Triune God in the place of the negative missiology of the past which was more a judgement of other religions than a witness of Christ.

Mor Osthatheos Geevarghese2

3.1 Introduction
The previous chapter examined the influence of Vedic thought and its social reflection on the caste system among the St. Thomas Christians in India. It is through the knowledge of purity and pollution located within an account of divine transcendence and immanence that the Vedic religion expanded the social division in the community. This early Indian Christian tradition imbibed the elements of caste division, in a way which continues to inform a dichotomy between its theology and the social life. This group of Christians grappled with these issues in a later stage of their history but could not find a just and sustainable model of inculturation for the Indian context. The caste division continued to be a reality within the tradition of the early church.

These challenges are not limited only to the early Christian community in India. Indian Christianity in general underwent similar caste issues. In this context, the two major challenges the church in India had to face were the uncritical adaptation, first, Indian philosophy, and second, Western philosophy. To understand the matter further, similar to the Syrian Christians, Indian Christianity largely followed Brahmanical ideologies or the Hindu philosophical system in their theologising. J. Russell Chandran, a prominent Indian Christian

theologian, makes this important claim: “in the early stage of Indian Christian reflection, the task was seen as either refuting the philosophies and practices of Hinduism or translating the Christian faith into the terminology of one of the Hindu philosophical systems.”\(^3\) As Chandran points out, Indian Christian theology aimed to become local\(^4\) by drawing attention to Indian philosophical thoughts.

Second, the Indian church was highly influenced by Western missionary theology. The Western Christian mission in India felt that the “Indian Church should accept the theological formulations made in the West.”\(^5\) Western missions generally doubted the possibility of developing an authentic and indigenous Indian Christian theology. Chandran specifies the Indian concerns in this regard. For him, the common Western missionary idea was to begin the missionary work with a totally “negative approach to other faiths and cultures.”\(^6\) To produce a theology from a context of other faiths and cultures was considered an unhelpful process.

Coupled with the Indian and Western philosophical theologies, one can argue that the Indian Christian theologians overlooked the ‘caste’ issue for a long time in their theological endeavours. This created a dichotomy in Indian theology. The socially marginalised voices were disregarded in the Indian theological context. This was a result of them emphasising the idea of the transcendence against the imminence of God. This concludes with two observations. First, the dominant Christian traditions like St. Thomas Christians and the Western missionary traditions like Catholic and Protestant theologians articulated their ecclesial and theological legacy based in the Indian or Western philosophical grounds of transcendence and ‘purity’. Second, based on the attachment of ‘pollution’ the social and religious issues of the community of margins were practically ignored to a large extent, with the exceptions of marginal voices.

When driven to respond to the issues of the socially marginalized, St. Thomas’ tradition and the other Christian traditions did so through the general lens of the ‘poor and the marginalised’ often omitting reference to the evils of a caste system practiced inside and outside the church. As one result of this lacuna, there emerged a counter-voice articulated exclusively from the Dalit communities.

This chapter explores the responses of a few voices who followed the Indian and Western philosophical traditions on caste and their failure to locate ‘the problem’ of the Dalit


community within Indian Christian theological formulations. It will also demonstrate the emergence of a counter Indian theological movement namely Dalit Theology. Differently stated, this chapter seeks to understand how the dominant Christian groups failed to imagine the concerns of the marginalised and how the people at the margins developed a counter Christian theology in India.

3.2 Caste Solutions: Western Missionaries and Conversion Movements

Until the arrival of Western Christian Missionaries to India, there is little evidence of the embrace of the Christian faith by the people at the bottom of the caste ladder (the Dalits). The movement sought to help the Dalits by way of changing their religion. They did not concentrate on the social and religious liberation of the Dalits from the exploitation of the dominant castes. This means that the missionary churches also could not get rid of the caste problems, similar to that of the St. Thomas community. The central motto of the Christian conversion movement was religious conversion but not the social change.

Philip Peacock identifies two different modes of conversion initiated by the Western missionaries in India: ‘caste conversion’ and ‘Dalit conversion’. For Philip, ‘caste conversion’ means the process of converting people from the dominant community to Christianity whereas ‘Dalit conversion’ refers to converting people from the weaker section of society. For Philip believes that the caste conversions served to maintain the dominant nature of the church where the vision was to expand the numeric size of caste people. This can also be considered as the mandate of the colonial mission. Converting the people from the lowest strata of society was to expand the numeric size of the church at large. Philip continues:

for the caste converts the challenge was how to subvert the colonial message so as to make sense of their faith and deal with the disrepute of being seen as the allies of the colonisers. For the Dalit context on the other hand the colonial message was appropriated as offering an alternative to both the dominant and oppressive religious tradition and their own native faith which was deemed polluted.

Philip realises this as a dichotomy in the missional practice of the church. Moreover, this created a social and religious gap between the dominant and the marginal communities within the church.

To cite an example, Robert De Nobili (1577-1656) realised the limitation of converting the lower caste people and initiated mission among the upper caste Brahmins. He changed

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himself to look like a Hindu sanyasi (monk) and evangelised the Brahmins. By learning Sanskrit and Tamil and the theological vocabulary of Indian languages, he adapted Hindu customs and ceremonies to Christian life aiming to evangelize Christian thought into the Brahmanic system of thinking. This provided a Brahmanic philosophical Christian group in Christianity.\(^9\)

The protestant missions such as the Lutheran and the English Missions propagated the gospel predominantly among the Dalit community. During this period, many high caste Brahmins also joined the church and formed a community of both the caste and the Dalit groups. However, the church predominantly expressed a caste view that was reflected not only at the administrative level but also in theological articulations.

Most of the theologians preferred to construct their theology based on the foundation of Brahmanic philosophy and Western missionary theology. For example, Ram Mohan Roy, and Keshab Chandras Sen, Brahmabandhav Upadhyahya, Vengal Chakkarai, P. Chenchiah, P.D. Devanandan and many others constructed an Indian theology inclined to the Brahmanical (Vedic or Advaita) thought.\(^10\) In doing so, neither the Christian Missionaries nor the Indian philosophical theologians imagined a theology that could focus on the victims of the caste system in India. However, during this period, Indian Christian theologians did not ignore the category of the ‘poor and the marginalized’ in their theology. Of course, they did not specify the caste issues or the Dalit’s concerns. They articulated their theology with a dominant philosophical language, which was alien to the Dalit experience.

The influence of the Western humanitarian, liberal, and rationalist movement of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries impacted social change worldwide.\(^11\) This has also influenced among the Indian Christian thought, particularly among the St. Thomas/Syrian church. During this period, the traditional socio-religious practices encouraged new social engagements of humanizing by reiterating individual and collective identities. In the case of the Syrian church, for instance, the emphasis on education to all social sections of the people, seminary education to the church leaders, opening up the liturgy and the Bible through

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10 A concise edited text on most of the missionary work and their historical-theological impressions have been published in the book *Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges*. See Joshua Kalapati, Jeyaraj Daniel, and Gabriel Merigala, eds. *Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: An Appraisal of the Missionary Legacy in India*, Thedharma Deepika 29th Anniversary Special Commemorative Volume Released as a Festschrift in Honour of Roger and June Hedlund (Chennai: Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies/Inter Church Service Association Books, 2016).

translation and printing them in vernacular language, and converting people from the Dalit community to the Orthodox tradition made a significant difference.  

Before we analyse the Indian Christian theologians’ philosophical response to the caste system, we will briefly investigate how the Syrian community responded to combat the caste practices within the church.

3.3 Caste and Syrian Solution: Patriarch Peter III, Mor Gregorios Chathuruthil, Mor Osthathoe Pathros

The Syrian church in Kerala had an unfriendly relation to the Western missionary movement predominantly because of the proselytizing attitude of the missionaries. However, the church cannot ignore the indirect influence that the Western missionaries contributed to their social and religious life. This also brought a new approach to the mission thinking of the Syrian churches. Though Syrian theology is different from Protestant missionary theology, the contextual missionary and socio-political influences enabled the Syrian church to initiate a missionary model of evangelism among the Dalit community.

3.3.1 Patriarch Peter III: The Immanent Upheld

From the latter part of the nineteenth century, as a partial response to the Dalit struggles, the Syrian church hierarchy initiated a large-scale religious mission amongst the Dalit community. The social impact of the work of the Western missionaries in Kerala and the liberative activities of a few social reformers compelled the Orthodox churches to explore new possibilities of interacting with the Dalit community. The Orthodox Bishops in Kerala were comforted when the Patriarch of Antioch, the supreme head of the church issued an

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13 The Syrian churches developed a reactionary method to all the foreign missions equating with proselytization or conversion and also opposed all of their moves to stop the newly converted with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. This developed a resisting/retaliating outlook to all similar attempt of subjugation from the foreign missions; and also, from the Portuguese to the English missionaries. George Koilparampil, Caste in the Catholic Community (Emakulam, Kerala: St. Francis De Sales Press, 1982), 74-82.

14 Among the many social reformers in Kerala, the main figures were Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924), Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928), and Sree Ayyankali (1863-1941).

15 Peter III, the Patriarch who visited India in 1875 to settle the issue between the Syrian and protestant communities had personally witnessed the social, economic, and religious vulnerability of caste practice. It is important to note that the Patriarch himself visited India before sending and had direct knowledge of the plight of the Dalits community.
encyclical favours the Dalit mission program in the Orthodox Church. During his visit, the Patriarch had personally witnessed the Dalit struggles and a few Bishops requested him to allow them to work among the Dalits. To this matter, the Patriarch responded to the Bishop’s letter:

We have received the letter that Mor Athanasius Paulose Metropolitan, our blessed and vigorous spiritual son has sent on 29th July 1893. In it, you have informed me about the construction of a school come church building near your parish where more than a hundred people accepted baptism from the gentiles and the functioning of the school with reading and learning...as the loyal apostle Paul instructs us that in Christ there is no slave or master, nor male or female and also for your vigorous reverence for the sake of making them our brothers because they are all one in Messiah. The heavenly angels will rejoice over repentant sinners. Our children, our hope for you is that you are always fervent in faith and bring back the lost ones to the lap of the church and to the true faith and diligently seek to help them through the words, work, or money.

The letter advises the leaders and the laity of the church to accommodate the Dalits in the Orthodox community. This is based on two important theological grounds. According to the Patriarch, first, Orthodoxy is obliged to fulfil the Christian missionary imperatives of bringing people into the sacramental life. Second, the affirmation of the nature of an undivided church or the body of Christ can be fulfilled only when the church could practice in a community with any difference of caste, class, colour or gender. It also gives a glimpse of how the Syrian treated the Dalit even after they embraced the Orthodox faith. The author who reports the Patriarch’s letter in Edavka Patrika uses the words “haphazard manner (kaattikkootti)” to denote the Orthodox-Dalit relationship. Even though the Syrian

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16 This was published in one of the earliest newsletters of the Orthodox churches, Edavaka Patrika in 1883 AD and provides ample evidence of the church’s initiative to relate to the Dalit communities. The main content of the bull released from the Kurkuma Dayara (Kurkuma Monastery) on 25th October (Thulam) 1893, was published in Edavaka Patrika in 1897. In fact, this encyclical is a reply to the letter sent by the Indian Bishop in which he requested the Patriarch to instruct the Kallunkathara Church, one of the Orthodox parishes where the very first Pulaya (the Dalit caste) Church started, to settle the issues of the traditional church towards the newly converted Pulaya members. “Pulasabhakal (Pulaya Churches),” Malankara Edavaka Pathrika 6, no. 7 (1897): 124-25.

17 The brief story was depicted in the Edavaka Pathirka, a monthly publication, published with the caption “Pulaya Sabhakal (The Pulaya Churches)” provides a glimpse of the view of Peter III, the Patriarch of Antioch and some of the Bishops in Kerala towards the Dalits in Kerala. The Patriarch advises his Syrian community in India to initiate more close relations to the Dalits in terms of their conversion to the Orthodox faith. During his visit to India, the Patriarch instructed the laity, but they were reluctant to accept his direction in this matter. “Pulasabhakal,” 123.

18 “Pulasabhakal,” 126. (my own translation)

19 Edavaka Pathrika provides a glimpse into the way in which the Orthodox church initiated some movements to uplift the social and religious conditions of the marginalised community. It began with the formation of the Pulaya Churches as part of the Orthodox churches. This story is briefly recorded in the seventh volume of Edavaka Patrika 1897 in which we see the Syrian attitude towards the Dalits in society. For instance, around 100 families joined in the Orthodox Church in Chemnithala, Kerala but they had to be in a separate Pulaya Shabha (church). According to the text in Edavaka Patrika, the Pulaya community were joined with the Church even before their baptism. This means that they were given pastoral care even before their baptism.
community invited the Dalits to Orthodoxy, their interactions with them were not based on a
genuine love for humanity but were initiated only due to the instruction from the Patriarch.\(^{20}\)
The caste Syrians constructed separate parishes for the Dalit community rather than
worshipping all together in one church. During this time, one of disciples of the Patriarch,
Mor Gregorios of Chathuruthil, commonly known as Parumala Thirumeni in his life (1848-
1902),\(^{21}\) was empowered to continue the Patriarch’s vision of Dalit liberation by instructing
the parishes to look after the welfare of the newly joined Dalits.\(^{22}\)

3.3.2 Mor Gregorios of Chathuruthil: Life with the Dalits and Rejection from the Tradition

Mor Gregorios of Chathuruthil, a visionary and a philanthropist, introduced new ways of
doing mission in the church. As an Orthodox bishop, his main intention was not to challenge
the existing Orthodox attitude to the Dalit community but rather to provide a social
supportive system that enhanced their academic and economic identity. To achieve this goal,
he embraced the Dalit people within the Orthodox community.

Mor Gregorios’ primary aim was to liberate the Dalits from the continued bondage of
slavery, social evils, and superstitions attached to their life. His revolutionary involvement
was focussed on alleviating the caste thinking from the society. To achieve ultimate social
liberation from the Dalit struggles, his proposal was a spiritual renaissance. This concept
paved the way for him to initiate evangelism among the Dalits through human love and
further to fight against the caste system.\(^{23}\) He started a mission for the people of all faiths
especially baptising many from the margins of society.\(^{24}\) One of the main methods by which
Mor Gregorios empowered the ‘self-hood’ of the Dalit community was by fostering access to
modern education.\(^{25}\)

However, the Syrian community did not encourage or support this new movement; they
strongly objected to the new converts worshipping alongside the traditional Christians.\(^{26}\) The
caste Syrians continued, in spite of Patriarch’s instruction, to show their resentment against
the movement of inducting the Dalits in the Syrian churches. This resistance notwithstanding,

\(^{20}\) “Pulasabhabkal,” 124.
\(^{21}\) Mor Gregorios, popularly known as "Parumala Thirumeni" was born at Mulanthuruthy near Cochin, on
15th June 1848 and ordained as a Bishop by the Patriarch Peter III. From childhood days he followed a
disciplined life and had a deep fascination with ecclesial activity. He was ordained as a bishop at the young age
of 28. He passed away at the age of 54 on 3rd November 1902 after a saintly life of prayer and involvement
with the poor and the marginalised. See Samuel Chandanappally, Malankara Sabha Pithakkanmar (Malayalam)
(Chandanappally, Kerala: Ceedees Books, 1990), 1-9. Hereafter, Mor Gregorios of Parumala is also mentioned
as ‘Parumala Thirumeni’.
\(^{22}\) “Pulasabhabkal,” 139.
\(^{24}\) Iype, The Parumala Kochu Thirumeni, 20-25.
\(^{25}\) Jacob Kurian, et al; Parumala Smruthi: Parumala Thirumeni Dehaviyoga Satabdi Grantham,1902-2002
(Malayalam) (Devalokam: Malankara Sabha Mazika, 2002), 285.
\(^{26}\) In her study on the life and rituals of Syrian Christians in Kerala, Susan Visvanathan mentions how caste
practice was deeply rooted among the Syrian Christians. Visvanathan, The Christians of Kerala, 2.
Mor Gregorios helped to construct separate schools and churches specifically for the Pulaya (the Dalit) community who embraced the Orthodox faith. For example, he encouraged the Kallunkathara parish in Kottayam, Kerala to convert many Pulaya families to the Syrian church. They built separate schools and churches for the newly joined community. He continued his support to build Pulaya parishes in many other places, such as Puthuppally, Amayannoor, Pampadi, Kottayam, Veliyanadu, Chenganoor, Kallisseri, and Chennithala in Kerala. Though new Dalit separate parishes were intended to enhance self-identity, in reality, it was an act that helped the caste-minded Syrian to not associate in any form with the untouchable communities. For Mor Gregorios, against the reactions of the caste Syrians, this was the only way by which the church could help the Dalits.

Despite the repeated advice from the Patriarch Mor Gregorios could not fruitfully and effectively continue his evangelizing work due to the strong resistance from his own community. In one of the volumes of Edavaka Patrika this contradiction in their theology and its practice is described in the following way: “caste discrimination and the aristocratic mentality are satanic.” In spite of expressing the harsh words like ‘satanic’ to the act of aristocratic mentality to the Syrian community, the Mor Gregorios’ movement could not stand as an answer to the caste system.

3.3.3 Mor Pathros Osthatheos: Dalit Movements and the Discontinued Vision of the Hierarchy

Similar to the missional approach of Mor Gregorios, Mor Pathros Osthatheos (1886-1968) also initiated a mission to the Dalits, foreseeing a battle over the caste issues in the church. Since Mor Osthatheos wanted to engage with the Dalits more officially, he formed a

27 “Pulasabhakal,” 124.
28 “Pulasabhakal,” 124.
29 “Pulasabhakal,” 123.
30 “Pulasabhakal,” 123.
31 Mor Osthatheos Pathros was born to Mr. Cherian and Mrs. Kunja Maria, of Tripunithura, Cochin State on 20th June 1886 into a Syrian Orthodox family. His theological education was earned from a Bishop’s College, Calcutta, a protestant Seminary in 1919. In those days, a Syrian deacon studying in a protestant seminary itself was a big challenge. But his courage and determination brought him to the ‘systematic study mission’ from the missionary faculty of the Bishop’s college, which later paved the way for a new life for thousands of underprivileged people in Kerala. After the successful completion of his theological education, he dedicated his life to serve the poor and the marginalised subalterns in society. In the same year he participated in the Vaikom Agitation (Vaikom sathyagram), a social agitation movement aimed to fight against the ‘untouchability’ practiced in Kerala society. He was appointed as a special officer for the backward community, by the Cochin State in 1925. Later the church consecrated him as the Bishop and gave him the responsibility for an economically backward Christian community. Before the end of his earthly life on 2nd February 1968, he converted and baptised 22735 members of the Dalits community. These details were personally taken from the biography etched at his tomb at the Carmel monastery, Kandanadu, Kerala, India. See also P.P. Varkey and K.V. Mammen. trans., Pathros Mor Osthatheos: A Prophet Like Missionary trans. Punnoose U. Panoor, (Kottayam, Kerala: Kottackal Publishers, 2012), 17-49.
movement called the ‘Servant of Cross’.\textsuperscript{32} His biography shares his dream for Orthodox churches to initiate the liberative mission among the Dalits, fulfilling the gospel imperative of mission. Mor Osthatheos’ vision of the ‘Dalit liberation’ was published in the leading newspapers of his time. ‘The Swaraj’ published his article, titled “Rev. Peter’s Message,” which shows his interest in Dalit liberation through the participation of the Syrian community. He believed that “if the ancient Syrian Christian community of Kerala had been sufficiently faithful to the freedom giving the Gospel of Christ, they would have done wonders.”\textsuperscript{33} This was released immediately after his participation in “Vaikom Sathyagram”\textsuperscript{34} in 1924. In that social agitation, he prophetically expressed his voice against the denial of social justice to the socially marginalized people based on his conviction of the universal dispensation of justice.\textsuperscript{35}

By initiating evangelizing movements among the Dalit community, Mor Osthatheos also had a theological conviction to fulfil social justice to the voiceless people of the society by educating young family members. The Bishop gained this theological impetus during his theological education at Serampore College, Calcutta.\textsuperscript{36} Soon after his theological education, he realized the importance of using vernacular language within and outside the Syriac churches for accomplishing the acceptance of the Dalit community who did not follow the Syriac liturgical language.\textsuperscript{37} To this goal, he started translating the Syriac liturgical books into Malayalam, the vernacular language. This enabled him to reach the underprivileged through worshipping in a common language. However, he faced strong resistance from the church hierarchy who questioned the need to change the holy Syriac language from the liturgy.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{32} The Servant of Cross in the Orthodox churches converted people from the socially underprivileged category to the Syrian Orthodox fold. Mor Paulose Athanasius, \textit{The Syrian Orthodox Church: Its Religion and Philosophy} (Changanaserry, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2005), 187.
\textsuperscript{33} Cited in Varkey and Mammen \textit{Pathros Mor Osthatheos}, 7, originally published in \textit{The Swaraj}, (Madras: April 30, 1924). Much earlier to this act, he showed his impatience towards the practice of ‘slavery’ in Kerala society. For instance, he wrote about “slavery” in which he deliberates the uncivilised activity of slavery though it had been officially banned in 1855. He wrote this view in his personal diary titled “Slavery” dated 21\textsuperscript{st} June 1905, which was prepared to read at the Gospel convention at Kadumangalam, Cochin and was later published in \textit{Kristhavin Varnana}, the parish bulletin.
\textsuperscript{34} Vaikom Satyagraha, a social agitation movement was organized by people from various lower castes including members from the Pulaya community, in order to fight against untouchability. Some caste Hindus, including Mahatma Gandhi, supported the movement under the banner of the ‘freedom movement’. T.K. Ravindran, \textit{Vaikom Satyagraha and Gandhi} (Trichur: Sree Narayan Institute of Social and Cultural Development, 1975), 52. See also W.G. Gladstone, \textit{Protestant Christianity and Peoples Movements} (Trivandrum: Seminary Publications, 1984), 388-403.
\textsuperscript{35} Aniyon Kallath, \textit{Karmelile Karmayogi} (Malayalam) (Kandanadu: T.V. Philopose Corepiscope, 1991), 103-104.
\textsuperscript{36} Varkey and Mammen. \textit{Pathros Mor Osthatheos}, 37.
\textsuperscript{37} Varkey and Mammen. \textit{Pathros Mor Osthatheos}, 42-44.
\textsuperscript{38} Most of the information in this regard was collected from people who are directly or indirectly part of the mission. One such conversation was with Prof. D. Mathews. As a young man working with Indian Railways, Mathews used to travel and stay with Mor Osthatheos for missionary activities during the 1950’s and 1960’s.
The principal aim of Mor Osthatheos’ mission was to achieve the complete social liberation of the Dalit community. In an unconventional way, he visited and dined with the Dalits. He knew that it would provoke the Syrian Christians with their claimed superiority. P.P. Varkey and K.V. Mammen explain the opposing mindset of the Syrian community with their attitude towards the Dalit community:

In many parishes, it was unthinkable standing along with parayas and pulayas inside the church. In some places superiority of Syrian Christians was due to their Brahmin tradition. To them if an Ezhava women touched a well, water would become unclean. Hence, it was usual to draw water and give. Consider the condition of parayas and pulayas. Even the … pulayas who was toiling in the fields to get rice and money for them, he [sic] was not permitted to come near the house.39

Knowing the task of changing the attitude of the Syrian Christians, Mor Osthatheos engaged among them during the Sunday sermons. His teachings “for a few, it was a new information. To some, it was a contemptuous thing. A few would murmur. There was a small section of people in each parish interested in gospel work.”40 A majority of the members of his own (Syrian) community did not appreciate or pay attention to the need for embracing the Dalit community.

Despite the initiation of the evangelizing movements of Mor Gregorios and Mor Osthatheos, the opposition from the Syrian community pushed the church away from materializing a sustainable mission of engagement with the Dalit community. Reflecting on this unlikely attitude of the church, Mor Osthatheos Geevarghese, another Orthodox mission theologian of recent times, wrote in the preface of Pathros Mor Osthatheos, A Prophet Like Missionary:

I do not have the opinion that a bishop of our church or even myself can ever have a sacrificial life like that of Pathros Mor Osthatheos. And also, I do not assume that the dream of the founder of ‘Servant of Cross’ can be achieved until the church embodies the model of our broken Lord who lived, died and resurrected and also accepts the newly converted Christians to be like that of the traditional Christians.41

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39 Varkey and Mammen. eds., Pathros Mor Osthatheos, 52.  
40 Varkey and Mammen. eds., Pathros Mor Osthatheos, 52.  
The church’s inability to empathetically engage with the Dalit community is revealed through his words. Mor Osthatheos’ indication of “the church’s embodying nature into the broken body of Jesus Christ” is completely neglected over that period of time. Similar feelings are shared by many other scholars in the church. In his book, *The Syrian Orthodox Church: Its Religion and Philosophy*, Mar Athanasius metaphorically mentions a criticism that though the church maintains a theology that is worthy enough to tackle the ‘filthiness’ of the church. According to him, “an old pool of water needs cleansing. Once cleaned of all filth, the pure fountain from below will give forth good sweet springs of water as at the beginning. It is not necessary to distract or cover up the pool, if you see it dirty now. It needs only cleansing.”

Mar Athanasius indicates the need to transform the church from teachings that do not comply with its theology. If the observations of Mor Osthatheos and Mar Athanasius are true, despite the initiation of engagement with the Dalit community, the church’s attitude remains as a dominant caste with dominant philosophical thought.

3.4 Indian Christian Theology and Orthodox Theologians: Mor Gregorios Paulose, Mor Osthatheos Geevarghese

From the above stories, the Syrian community’s sympathetic approach to the economically poor and the needy cannot be ignored. In the later time, Syrian theologians like Mor Gregorios and Mor Osthatheos frequently discussed the ‘poor and the downtrodden’. The former concentrated on the cosmic ontology of the poor, whereas the latter focussed on the ‘economic or class’ struggles of the marginalized communities.

3.4.1 Mor Gregorios Paulose’s ‘Cosmic Man’: No Dalits Included?

Mor Gregorios’ *Cosmic Man* is a well-argued thesis on the universality of human nature under the divine presence. He draws our attention to the early teachers of the church to understand the God-world or human relationship and its universality. The cosmic nature of human beings exists not only by limiting oneself within the pure zone of God (transcendence) but also by extending its scope to the ‘outside or world’. He argues that by building upon the theology of early teachers, and particularly Gregory of Nyssa, Orthodox theology speaks positive notes on world and the creation. In Jesus Christ, the entire creation comes into a cosmic relationship. There exists an integral connection “between life and body, between the so-called horizontal and vertical, between the ordinary life of human beings and their

42 Mor Paulose Athanasius, *The Syrian Orthodox Church: Its Religion and Philosophy* (Changanaserry, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2005), 196.
44 Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 233.
‘spiritual’ life, between human lives and other lives.” He opposes the common notion of the world as evil. He does not appreciate any binary of stigmatized evil or pollution against good or pure based on the social realities of the world. He explains it as the “matter (world) along with its qualities has as its basis the will and the wisdom of God. Matter is not alien to God, nor is it any less being than other created being, for they too have come from the will and the wisdom of God.” For Mor Gregorios, the dichotomy of matter as evil or impure and God as pure does not endure in the cosmic understanding of Orthodox theology.

Having stated his cosmic vision for human being from the Christian theological perspective, one must ask the question whether cosmic humanhood includes the Dalit community. To answer this question, we should examine how Mor Gregorios appropriates Vedic philosophy in his theology.

The Hindu philosophical and liturgical acts appear to be an embodiment of dispensing ‘good’ to the people with a cosmic vision. In an article published in 1986, “The Challenge of Hinduism: What Can Christians Learn from It?” Mor Gregorios explains his approach to Hinduism and its positive space in the life of humanity and especially in the liturgical thought of Christianity. Mor Gregorius tries to understand the liturgical and sacramental meaning of God choosing from the Vedic, Gita-Bhakti and Advaita traditions. According to him, the Vedic tradition is an important agent for developing a Christian theology in the Indian context. The concept of ‘sacrifice’ (yajna) in Vedic tradition can connect with the liturgy and the Eucharistic or sacrificial expression of Christian theology. It resembles the human sacrifice found in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Humanity is not confined to the individual nature of Christ alone but is also a cosmic reality of creation. In this regard, the Veda offers a cosmic vision of salvation against individualistic understanding. Contrary to this, for Mor. Gregorios, some form of Christianity and the Advaita focus on individual salvation. This shows that the relationship between Advaita and Christianity has been interpreted in different ways. With the concept of yajna, Mor Gregorios developed one such interpretation and credits its value in today’s thoughts of different religious faiths.

In both the Christian and Hindu philosophical thought of Mor Gregorios, he developed a cosmic perspective of God and the World. For him, creating a binary between God and the world is problematic. He asserts that it is dangerous to “falsely separate matter and spirit,

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46 Mar Gregorios, Cosmic Man, 107.
49 Mor Gregorios, “The Challenge of Hinduism,” 42.
body and soul, this-worldly and the other-worldly, church and state, political-economic and religious.”50 In this way, he takes the courage to reinterpret humanity and the cosmos as an inclusive nature of God in Christ. Jesus Christ’s consubstantial nature with all human beings – whether they be Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Marxist or Buddhist – becomes one of the major concerns in his theology.51 According to him, Christ’s consubstantiality to the community of other faith allows Indian Orthodoxy to develop new trajectories to the Christology. In this venture, Mor Gregorios conceptualises Christ’s humanity, extended to all people.

However, Mor Gregorios does not answer whether the Dalits are included in the cosmic vision of human. His ontological treatment of ‘evil’ and Brahmanic philosophy ignores the epistemological reality of the Dalit and their notion of God and the world. He fails to foresee the direct caste link between evil or impurity with Dalit life and so neglects to express the caste struggles and the Dalit sufferings. Practically, the Dalits are not only kept away from participating in the yajna but also their presence pollutes the entire Vedic liturgical performance. Mor Gregorios does not talk about the contradiction in this Hindu philosophical attitude. As an Indian theologian, knowing the fact that the denial of sacredness from the Dalit humanity is real, his silence in this regard is disappointing. Further, Mor Gregorius’ scheme of a positive approach to the ‘world’, especially in the context of the social and religious marginality, does not accommodate the Dalit world. In the Indian context Mor Gregorios’ position was predominately attached to the transcendental or existential level. His theology is more attached to the Hindu and Christian philosophical traditions. This has not given room for the margins of society in its essence. As many of the voices from the Orthodox theology are silent, it carries a danger of creating a caste of the ‘polluted’ within the Orthodox milieu in India.

3.4.2 Mor Osthatheos Geevarghese: Class Struggle – No Specific Dalit Struggle
In spite of personal attachment to the Indian mission and attachment to the ‘poor and the needy’ in society, Mor Osthatheos’ overwhelming interest in appropriating the Indian philosophical thoughts into his theological expressions needs more attention. He supports the Indian Christian theologian’s position of logos spermatikoi (scattered seeds of truth).52 Mor Osthatheos’ main focus is to endorse the Vedanta of Sankaracharya and Vishistaadvaita of Ramanujah. “Hinduism teaches that there are jivanmuktas who attain perfection while

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50 Mar Gregorios, “In Him Was Life;” 59.
remaining in body and also videha-muktas who attain liberation only after death.” For him, Indian theologians should use Indian Philosophy as the early church fathers had used Plato and Aristotle in theologising Christian doctrines. According to this perspective, the Indian Christian community should potentially communicate to the Indian thinker’s similar revelation of God in both Christianity and Hinduism. This interconnection can be understood as:

_Brahman, who is ekam eva advitiyam_ (one without a second) according to Hindu scriptures, has given us a similar revelation of himself (_Brahman_) in historians that Christ is that _evam ava advitiyam_ for the whole of humanity to realise God through Him; i.e. the Logos, the _Guru_, the _Om_, the _Chit_ of the Triune God through both _Satchitanad_ and _Trimurti_ and _allah_ in one Holy Trinity.  

Hindu philosophy must be appropriated in the Indian Christian context and a key task lies in marrying the similar revelations of the Hindu philosophical God to the Christian context. His argument in this regard is based on early teacher’s use of Plato and Aristotle and various other philosophies in developing Christian theology. Mor Osthatheos encourages the church to make use of the Indian philosophy with the social realities in India. Upon these philosophical grounds, Mor Osthatheos developed his ideas on _The Theology of the Classless Society_.

Unlike Mor Gregorios, Mor Osthatheos is aware of the dangers of the caste practice in the church. The contradiction he senses reflects an anomaly in the church’s approach to “casteism and discriminations.” However, he confuses the caste issues with class struggle. He argues for a ‘just society’ by humanity being transformed into a classless society. The social divisions based on class is what Mor Osthatheos projects as an “unjust-humanity society.” Though he understood the problem correctly, the remedy that he offers to make a ‘just society’ is to follow the Hindu philosophical view of _jivanmuktas_ (liberation here and now), which helps one to attain perfection while remaining in the body and also _Videha-muktas_ (liberation after death). Based on the same philosophy, he predicted that the “class distinctions and sacraments cannot go together.” His rejection of class is a positive sign in the modern theology of the Syrian churches. However, on a practical level, he continues to appropriate _Brahman_, the philosophical God and could not take the issue of caste any further as the central issue of the church’s social divisions.

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56 Mar Osthatheos, _The Theology of a Classless Society_, 34.
57 Mar Osthatheos, _The Theology of a Classless Society_, 119.
Mor Osthathoe’s the interest in the caste struggle is not as an epistemology of evil but only a critique of a social system based on economic disparity. That is why he seldom sees Dalit issues as a major theological concern of the Indian church and society. In this sense, though he had an empathetic concern for the poor and the needy, like any other theologian who follows the Hindu philosophical school of thought, he always remained within the transcendental notion of understanding God and restrained from developing a language of patronising the Dalit community and their issues.

Despite their concern for the poor or the social discrimination of the people in the name of class and caste, neither Mor Gregorios nor Mar Osthathoe rejected the anomaly of the ‘caste practice’ within their ecclesial life. They address these issues from a philanthropic perspective more than they question the ontic problems. On a theological level, they have not explained how a Dalit community or body, which according to the Indian philosophical thought is inherently detached from sacredness, could attain the liberation, particularly within context of a caste-oriented church against their cosmic vision of Orthodox Christian or Hindu theology.

3.5 Indian Christian Theology, Early Teachers, and A Journey towards Liberation

As disappointing as the Syrian church’s approach to the caste system is, one must turn attention to the missionary church’s response to caste practice. As discussed earlier, for more than a few hundred years, a host of theologians like Roberto De Nobili, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, A.J. Appasamy, P. Chenchiah, V. Chakkarai, and P.D. Devanandan have developed theological approaches for the Indian context. They aimed for a theology that took context seriously with an Indian or Western philosophical foundation. This general claim was accepted by Boyd and other scholars who analysed Indian Christian theology until the 1980s. The contextual concerns of the Dalit community were not their major theological concerns. However, the period of M.M. Thomas, S. J. Samantha, Samuel Rayan brought new life to Indian Christian theology partly due to the global impact of post–World War II and the impact of liberation theology in Third World countries.

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61 The impact of Latin American Liberation theology in the Indian subcontinent provided a new face to the marginalised community. During this period, the theologians were encouraged to make a shift from philosophy to praxis. Praxis in view of the life situations of the poor and the needy became a slogan. Liberation theology slogans, such as “preferential option for the poor,” became a dictum within the theological engagement in India too. According to Aloysius Pieris, the liberation theology’s claim of its root in the Word of God can be achieved only if two biblical axioms come true namely, first, “the irreconcilable antagonism between God and Mammon,” and second, “the irrevocable covenant between God and the Poor.” Aloysius Pieris, “A Theology of
M.M. Thomas, an Indian theologian, advocated the new shift through his book *Salvation and Humanisation*. ‘Humanisation’ became a key word, reinterpreting ‘divinisation’ and ‘salvation.’ In this book he argued that “the mission of salvation and task of humanisation are integrally related to each other, even if they cannot be considered identical.”

For him, the theological task is to make obvious that “salvation is spiritual inwardness of true humanisation, and that humanisation is inherent in the message of salvation in Christ.” Thomas’ new approach helped Indian theology to think of salvation from a social perspective.

Thomas’ God, as he envisions, is in Christ and Christ’s relation to the life situation of the people. He explains that Indian Christian theology should be a “reflection in an articulated form, on God, Christ, and the church at the point of meeting of the Christian faith with the Indian people and their world-views, cultures and beliefs.” For Thomas’ theology, this world and its present realities are very important. According to him, “the glorified humanity of the Risen Christ is to be realised not after death but by men in the corporateness of their relations in society and to the cosmos.” He connects this process to the question of mission. He states:

…the crucial question raised in the theology of mission… is that of the relation between the gospel and salvation and the struggles of men everywhere for their humanity, constituting as this (in) the contemporary context of the world in which the gospel has to be communicated. The question, in other words, is that of the relation between Mission and Humanization.

Thomas holds a unique position in Indian Christian theology due to his above position of bringing God and the world into a mutuality. It is in this mutuality that he finds the struggles of the people as an impetus to salvation. Salvation becomes a process of humanisation, bringing the people of struggle into the human form of Jesus Christ. As Y.T. Vinayraj understands M.M. Thomas, this is the “eschatological hope in the contemporary life.”

Thomas’ view on Christian mission is an involvement in the struggle of social life, and this

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includes caste struggle. For Thomas, it is necessary to the caste system as part of Christin mission. In the preface of Ninan Koshy’s book *Caste in Kerala Churches*, before his articulation of ‘salvation as humanisation’, Thomas notes the importance of developing the policies of “Christian missions and churches in relation to caste.”68 Adrian Bird consolidates Thomas’ attitude to caste and the Dalits in his research, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, and names Thomas as developing “significant theological signposts for the emergence of Dalit theology.”69 The need to interpret the notion of God contextually found meaning in Thomas’s articulations.

During this period, a theological shift of focus from transcendence to imminence was to be seen among theologians who embraced liberation theology as the locus of their theological endeavours. Samartha’s disowning of Advaita’s atman as an immanent category of Christ takes shape during this period. For Samartha, it is an “unsuitable category” for the purpose of expression of the meaning of the person of Christ.70 He believed that Advaita as a philosophical concept minimised the world since Brahma becomes the ground of being ‘culminated’. Since the essential nature of the human culminates in the atman, there is a devaluation of the human personality.71 Samartha locates the problem of Advaita as the lack of the nature of imminence within the scope of God. Similarly, by favouring the dominant Hindu interpretation of God, the early Christian community minimised the immanence of God and its corresponding connection with humanity in its socially marginalised contexts.

Another scholar’s name to be mentioned along these lines is Samuel Rayan, a Catholic theologian from Kerala. He positions himself with the theology of margins, particularly in his Christological thoughts. His two articles in 1974, “An Indian Christology: A Discussion of Methods”72 and “Interpreting Christ in India: The Contribution of Roman Catholic Seminaries,”73 sought to reread Christology in the context of social margins in India. Even though Rayan’s theological interpretations are not free from the Indian philosophical views, he concentrated a theological perspective for the suffering masses in Indian. He proposes a Christology that connects with the “integrated Indian situation, cultural as well as religious.”74 According to him:

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…a Christology of the Suffering Servant and of his redemptive cross… shaped in India’s experience of toil uplifts and builds…an Indian Christology, (which) will therefore centre on the Lord who is spirit, the Risen Lord, on the indwelling Christ, (the Antarayamin) and on the Christ whose body we are. It will lead us to discover and experience of Christ as true and ultimate Self of our self.\(^\text{75}\)

His major contribution in this regard seems to be the possibility of understanding Christ from below – a God who is immanent.

From this period many Indian Christian theologians felt the need to liberate Indian Christian theology from its philosophical views.\(^\text{76}\) Samartha’s testimony on the danger of “Indian philosophy’s tendency to ignore the social dimension of human life”\(^\text{77}\) is another example of taking the context of the margins seriously. Likewise, Rayan’s appropriation of the ‘suffering servant and Christ’ is a clear theological movement in this regard. However, none of these theologians clearly developed a theology that reflects the life and the experience of the Dalit people alone.

The major underpinning factor during this period was the influence of the Latin American liberation theology. This helped theologians see the economic polarisation and the class struggle of the poor and socially marginalised. It was done mostly with the Marxian social analysis. As Franklyn Balasundaram opines, the use of the Marxian tool seeking economic liberation was inadequate in the caste context of Indian society.\(^\text{78}\) Balasundaram affirms that while the liberation model of theology in India does not strictly follow Latin American Liberation theology. Marxian analysis has been highly influential in the Indian context.\(^\text{79}\)

Similar movements like EATWOT addressed the issues of the poor and the marginalised but did not give attention to the caste dynamics. In the Asian context, EATWOT has emerged in response to the philosophical theology produced by the Asian Theologians, particularly by the Indian theologians. Differently stated, the Asian or Indian context were ripening to find a God-talk moving from the philosophical view of theology to the contextual experience of the marginalised and poor. M.P. Joseph writes that “the conversation that EATWOT has been involved in is informed by a profound awareness of the presence of God in the struggles of the poor and the marginalised to protect life.”\(^\text{80}\) The main question that EATWOT asked was how do the poor and the marginalised encounter God in the midst of their struggle to survive? But the primary attention was not on the specifics of the Dalits’ struggles, though the voices

\(^{75}\) Rayan, “Interpreting Christ in India: The Contribution of Roman Catholic Seminaries,” 231.

\(^{76}\) Bird, M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology.

\(^{77}\) Samartha, The Hindu Response, 171.

\(^{78}\) Franklyn J Balasundaram, “Dalit Theology and Other Theologies,” in Frontiers of Dalit Theology, ed. V. Devasahayam (Madras, India: ISPCK/Gurukul, 1997), 255.

\(^{79}\) Balasundaram, “Dalit Theology and Other Theologies,” 255.

from various corners emerged to have a contextual theology reimagining the Dalit as the subject and not as an object of mission.

To consolidate the above argument, James Massey’s observation is very helpful. According to Massey only two categories of theologies existed in India prior to the emergence of Dalit Theology: Western (European) theology and Indian Christian Theology of the upper caste converts. Massey challenges these systems for their inadequacy to directly reflect on human history. Human history, for Massey, is the history of the people of the land. This is the historical presence of the immanent God. Other theologies ignored human life and focused only on the ontological. For instance, “the Indian Christian Theology, which is rooted in the *Vedantic* and *Hindu Brahmancial* philosophical system…ignore[s the] reality of human history.” This is irrelevant to the Dalits’ causes because these “theological expressions are centred around ideas, not in actions.” The three points that Indian Christians theology ignored are, Massey writes, first, “the importance of history for the Dalits,” second, “the source of Dalit history,” and third, “the solidarity and the Dalits.” Massey argues that past history, which is with their pathos and pain, is very important in moving towards the future. Only by rejecting the dominant theology can one develop a new theology based on the pathos and pains of the millions of the Dalits in India.

### 3.6 Dalit Liberation and Dalit Theology: New Goal in Indian Christian Theology

As noted earlier, up to the 1980s the attempt of Indian Christian theology to creatively respond to the context of the caste system failed due to its uncritical appropriation of either Indian or Western philosophical theology. Furthermore, Liberation theology and the intent for ‘economic empowerment’ could not help ‘complete’ engagement with the concerns of the caste struggles. In a theological lens, if the Indian or Western philosophical schools emphasised the transcendental aspect of God, Liberation theology put an extra emphasis on the materialistic liberation ‘alone’ by drawing attention from Marxist social analysis. In both cases, an in-depth discussion on caste, the central reality of Indian social system, was ignored. The suffering or the *pathos* of the Dalits was denied space in the Indian Christian theology. Out of this, Dalit historical consciousness of their *pathos* was raised as counter voice or theology in the Indian context. A. P. Nirmal argues that Indian Christian theology

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81 Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 74.
82 Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 75.
84 Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 80.
85 For Massey, this theology becomes ‘irrelevant’ in the Indian context along with missionary and traditional European Christian theology that the missionaries have not creatively addressed the paradox of the practice of caste and Christian faith. Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 72.
followed a path of Vedic philosophies and the dominant caste constitutes the theology in India. In this “Brahmanic tradition” the scope for human experience is nullified and it perpetuates the “intuition or interiority-oriented” approach, which does not appeal to the masses.86 This consciousness of the Dalit community joined together to articulate their experience of God in humanity.

Many of Nirmal’s contemporary Dalit theologians expressed their views for taking up a shift in the Indian Christian theology. Looking at the existing nature of the Indian Christian theology, V. Devasahayam articulates its inadequacy based on the parameters assumed in the Dalit experience. According to him, “Dalits were not recognised as people or as subjects of theology. They were not even considered as the beneficiaries of Indian Christian theology. In the theologies that followed, Dalits were denied a name and face and were hidden under the general rubric of ‘the poor’. Dalits were denied a voice and hence were deprived of our hope.”87 Predominantly, the absence of the integral ‘life experience’ of the Dalits in Indian Christian theology or any other theologies that talk about the poor and the marginalised has triggered the discussion of theology from the perspective of the Dalit experience.88 Dalit theology emerged, on the one hand, in the context of the denial of Dalit identity, and on the other, in the denial of experience. There was an overemphasis on the speculative, individualistic, and other-worldly theology, even though it was not given its proper place in Indian Christian theology.89

A.P. Nirmal argues that the central goal of Dalit theology is to find the relationship between God and the full humanity of the Dalit community. Nirmal uses the biblical metaphor that “our goal is the ‘glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21)” and “the realisation of our full humanness or conversely, our full divinity, the idea of the imago Dei (Gen 1:26, 27).”90 This search stresses not an abstract interpretation of God but rather it focuses on God and the Dalits meeting in the contemporary historical context where Dalits

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88 By this time Dalit consciousness emergence among not only with the Christian Dalits but also among Dalits nationwide. The term ‘Dalits,’ was first used in journalistic writing as far back as 1931 to connote the then untouched gains made currency only in the early 1970s with the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra. Even in the book Reading in Indian Christian Theology (R.S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves in 1993, R.S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, eds. Readings in Indian Christian Theology Vol.I London: SPCK, 1993) when more than a decade before A.P. Nirmal had called for a new theological paradigm in the Indian Christian theoloogy called “Towards a Shudra theology.” However, they did not include the Dalit theologians or their theology in that book. On the other hand, in 1992, when M. M. Thomas and P.T. Thomas edited a book of Indian Christian theology, in the introduction M.M. Thomas mentioned the contribution of the Dalit theologians who pioneered a people’s theology introduction. theology in the that book by reasoning their selection of authors. See Thomas and Thomas, P.T, Towards an Indian Christian Theology.
find meaning to the lopsided identity attributed to the Dalits as non-people, the Other, the untouchables, the avarnas, and many other apppellations. The focus on the movement from the transcendental to the immanent or human became the forefront of this theological methodology. This language, Dalit theology envisions, is the realisation of the full-human from the suffering and pain of Dalits. This is the methodological foundation that Dalit Theology offers to Indian Christian theology.

On a historical note, the first time the term ‘Dalit theology’ was used was by A.P. Nirmal in his paper “Towards a Shudra Theology” at a Carey Society meeting of the United Theological College, in Bangalore in April 1981. Towards the beginning of the 1980s, theologians like A.P. Nirmal, V. Devasahayam, Anthony Raj, T.K. John, M. Azariah, James Massey, and Samuel Rayan visualised a specific theology for the Dalits, of which A.P. Nirmal is considered to be the first protagonist.

However, while Nirmal calls this movement a counter theological movement from existing Indian Christian theology, Dalit theologians like James Massey do not agree. From the very beginning, the essential task of Dalit theology was to address the caste system. In Devasahayam’s estimation, no theological method in India can be adequate if it does not recognise “caste as the contextual reality and a major structure of oppression.” He continues that “we (dalits) are particularly angry with those theologians who want to relate the Gospel to the Brahminic culture, the culture of the oppressors and an oppressive culture and force it on the Indian church, which is predominantly a Dalit church.” Dalit theology is a counter caste ideology, which seeks to promote values such as liberty, equality, fraternity, freedom, community, and a community of peace, wellbeing, and justice for all. This justice has not penetrated the entire community of the Dalit churches.

Countering an existing theology on the basis of ‘justice,’ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel suggests that there needs to be sufficient appropriation of the concept of liberation in any theology.

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92 Arvind P. Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” in A Reader in Dalit Theology, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal and V. Devasahayam (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1990), 143.


Dalit theology, for that matter, as a search for the liberation of the people at the bottom of the society helps us to understand this phenomenon. According to Ayrookuzhiel:

the Dalit search for values of human equality, justice, freedom and utopia runs counter to *Bhramanical* culture and religion, which had evolved in the semi-feudal economic and political structure, based on the ideology of purity and pollution expressing hierarchy, inequality and sacred-profane dichotomy in human experience. Dalit theology runs counter to this alienating cultural experience both at the level of meaning and social structure.\(^\text{97}\)

Keeping Nirmal’s view of Dalit theology as a ‘counter theology,’ Ayrookuzhiel argues for a society that brings forth a community that enjoys the fullness of liberation. To establish the ‘fulness of liberation,’ the foremost aspect of ‘counter’ activity is to reinstate social ‘justice’ to all. ‘Justice’, according to him, goes beyond the church and extends to the socio-economic and political realities of the Dalit community.

Nirmal’s position develops Dalit theology as one of “radical discontinuity with the classical Indian Christian theology.”\(^\text{98}\) It is this discontinuity from the ‘dominant narrative’ to the ‘little narrative’ that makes Dalit theology unique. Later, in his historical study on Dalit Christians, C.B. John Webster affirms Dalit theology’s claim as a true and historical turn in Indian Christian theology. It has been understood that the Dalit voice is heard as a powerful movement in Indian Christian theological circles.\(^\text{99}\) An observation made by George Oommen is also worth noting. For him, the method of Indian Christian theology was a history of the elite Christians of high caste. The “mass movement” of the Dalits and Tribal, by contrast,\(^\text{100}\) has helped Dalit theology to be heard in the theological world. Dalits have not been subjects of history; on the contrary Dalits were the victims of literary tradition.\(^\text{101}\) Dalit theology was a resurrection of the Dalit body in the Indian context. In fact, Nirmal’s criticism of Indian Christian theology was also seen as a counter argument on the *Vedic* politics of the human body.

### 3.7 Dalit Christian Body: Offered Transcendence?

One of the crucial theological issues that Dalit theology had to unlock was the epistemology of the Dalit body. The *Vedic* body neither encourages or assures the divineness of the Dalit body nor allows it to socially respond as a common body. This means that the attributed

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\(^\text{98}\) Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 59.


\(^\text{101}\) Devasahayam, “Doing Dalit Theology,” 274.
pollution of the Dalit body cannot change into the pure body. Dalit theology argues against such Vedic body politics in view of Christian theology. Though there are contradictions to be clarified within Dalit theology, it commonly accepts the non-divineness of the Dalit body.\textsuperscript{102} Vinayraj argues that this is the central problem that Dalit theology should answer. The Brahmanic–Hindu epistemologies of modern ‘almighty mind’ and pre–modern ‘universal soul’ devalued the Dalit body. Dalit theology emerges from the broken bodies of the Dalits.\textsuperscript{103} The task before Dalit theology is to furnish answers to the dichotomy between the notion of God and the Dalit body.

When Nirmal posits the Dalit body according to the Vedic philosophical point of view it becomes a valueless category. The human body reduces only to matter, a lifeless thing. He comments that the Advaita denies matter and material reality. On the one hand, the Vishista Advaita accepts “the world, man [sic] and matter seriously” but linking this to God as his body. On the other hand, lokayata, an ancient school of Indian materialism takes “matter and material reality with utter seriousness but negates anything beyond matter.”\textsuperscript{104} He ridicules the Orthodox schools’ attributes on ‘matter’ as non-potential elements. Nirmal accepts the fact that matter has no potential in its own existence but keeps this potential with the “combination or integration,” making the matter “actual.” He calls it the hidden potentialities of matter and proposes that Indian Christian theology see this as the “spirit or spirituality of matter.”\textsuperscript{105}

He continues to argue that because Advaita does not negate the Pratyaksha (perception) outright, the Advaitic self, which is the combination of both universal and individual, must take the ‘individual self’, which is “in this world linked with the ‘body’–matter.”\textsuperscript{106} In this sense, Nirmal tries to raise the concern of the relationship between the body and consciousness. The self–realisation in Adviatha happens in the body or in matter. For him, the ‘consciousness’, does remain “grounded to the empirical through its body.”\textsuperscript{107} Nirmal believes, therefore, that the body or matter is a potential means of consciousness and it

\textsuperscript{102} On the one hand, Nirmal and the early school argue for Jesus’ direct connection to the Dalit body through the sight of sufferings and pathos. Jesus – the humanity and divinity of God – is the most crucial area to be discussed while developing a theology of liberation of the Dalit body. It needs more attention because Dalit theology brings two opposing factors about the Dalit Body. Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 140-41. On the other hand, the modern school of Dalit theology opposes this view, suggesting that the divinity in the Dalit body is just an ‘offered transcendence’. Y.T. Vinayraj, Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 7. The latter argument gains more attention in the third generation Dalit theological discussion.


\textsuperscript{104} Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 114.

\textsuperscript{105} Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 115.

\textsuperscript{106} Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 115.

\textsuperscript{107} Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 115.
remains a value-loaded category. Nirmal says, “to speak in terms of the ‘spiritual’ side of matter is not to deny matter and the material.”

Nirmal identifies an inseparable link between the Dalit Deha (material body) and sufferings in both an empirical and spiritual sense. This link begins with the ontology of the Dalit body and its subsequent empirical sufferings at the site of the denied “essential humankind” of the Dalit. Basically, they are pushed to subjugation and oppression. Further, for Nirmal, the site of the Dalit’s empirical body becomes the site of empirical sufferings. The explanation of an irregular or degraded body could be seen from the other appellations, such as the bisected, the dispelled, the scattered, the crushed, and the destroyed. However, people or bodies become a theological category of ‘God’s people’ in Nirmal’s Dalit theological discussion.

In the recent Dalit theological conversation, Y.T. Vinayraj takes a different line of thought. In general, whether it is Western or Eastern Christian thought, Vinayraj believes that any attribution to the sacredness of the Dalit body is an “offered transcendence.” This is because of the Vedic philosophic equation of sacredness (of God) with purity and the Dalit body with pollution. Here, the purity of God can be held by a certain category of humans, namely Brahmans alone. As the sacredness of God rejects any form of pollution, the Brahmin body rejects the Dalit body as theological and social propositions. Vinayraj rejects the Brahmanic claim of the ‘pure’ transcendence of Brahmanic religion, which is opposite to the ‘polluted’ category of immanence. The Western tradition, he argues, fails to address the ‘immanent turn’ due to the Western theological position of the ‘pure’ and absolutizing positions of the ‘transcendental’ one. The connection between the Dalit body and the polluted or defiled ontology is a fixed reality.

Why do Dalit bodies stand as ontologically polluted? He argues that “the Orthodox Hindu tradition denied the sacredness in the Dalit body whereas the Western theological epistemology offered transcendence to the Dalit body. However, both these traditions did not consider the absence of transcendence in the Dalit bodies.” While recognising the body of the Dalit in the divine plan of God, according to the Hindu tradition, we see also its absence. For the Orthodox Hindu tradition, scripturally, Dalits do not come within the four parts of

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109 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 139.

110 According to him, the Dalit body is not inherently divine in Vedic philosophy. Any attribution of divinity to the Dalit body is only an offer made by Christianity. For him, this does not mean the inherent transcendency of the Dalit body. Vinayraj, Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy, 69.

111 Vinayraj, Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy, 70.

112 Vinayraj, Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy, 8.
God’s body. Therefore, he continues, a body that exists outside the body of God cannot talk about transcendence. Whereas, by articulation “God became flesh,” the Western theological tradition interpreted that the Dalit body includes in that plan the ‘sacredness’ of the human body. According to him, it is just an “offered transcendence” through the sacramental theologies.\(^\text{113}\)

Because the divineness of the Dalit body is an ‘offered’ one, Vinayraj does not accept the divine status but wishes to call the Dalit body a political body. His main argument in this regard is that “Dalits” are not a caste category, whereas the Dalit body becomes the hermeneutical tool of Dalit theology, which is a political activity.\(^\text{114}\) According to him, “the Dalit body as a political subjective denies the scars of its ontological discrimination, traces of epistemological violation, and the stigmas of its theological violence.”\(^\text{115}\) As a political body, the Dalit body becomes a material body, which is also an immanent body. However, immanence is not referred to here as a closed materialism that denies any sense of transcendence; rather it is to signify ‘open materialism’ which is internally vibrant and differentiating or transcending within itself.\(^\text{116}\) He argues that the Dalit body is not a thing. It is rather “an ever-changing subjectivity in the historical process of its political becoming.”\(^\text{117}\) In thinking so, Vinayraj neither denies the element of transcendence nor over simplifies the immanence. However, the atrocities and discrimination enforced upon the Dalit body can only addressed if the suffering and pain of the Dalit body is appropriated within the theological scope of immanence.

### 3.8 The Epistemology of Dalit theology

Dalit *pathos* and the historical conciseness are very significant as far as the Dalit theology is concerned. James Massey’s view is that the entire movement of Dalit expression is a reverse positioning of the Dalits from object to subject in the historical consciousness.\(^\text{118}\) Countering the generalised experience of the ‘poor and the marginalised’, Dalit theology emphasises the specific historical consciousness developed within Dalit experience grounded on Dalit suffering and *pathos*.\(^\text{119}\) In doing so, the forgotten history of the Dalits becomes basic to Dalit theology itself, and so, as Mohan Razu points out, draws on Dalit indignation, humiliation,

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\(^\text{113}\) Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 7-8.
\(^\text{114}\) Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 91-106.
\(^\text{115}\) Vinayraj, “God and the Other,” 113.
\(^\text{116}\) Vinayraj, “God and the Other,” 99.
\(^\text{117}\) Vinayraj, “God and the Other,” 113.
\(^\text{118}\) James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 121-29.
\(^\text{119}\) Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 220.
exclusion and oppression. Razu refers to this experience as one of ‘collective memories’. Though Razu talks about the Dalit memory of sufferings, scholars like Peniel Rajkumar name it ‘historical consciousness’. This has a slightly different meaning in that, according to Rajkumar, Dalit historical consciousness would create a “Dalit community-consciousness.”

For Dalits, community consciousness is the experience of the ‘historical sufferings and pains’. In this process, Dalit theology can search for God in response to the totality of the Dalit experience. For Razu, however, Rajkumar’s tendency to ‘valorise’ the Dalit pathos can reduce that pathos to a mere ‘valorising’ agent. Nirmal concludes this argument by drawing all of these elements into Dalit theology. According to him “the historical Dalit Consciousness” is the primary datum of a Christian Dalit Theology. Through this evaluation of pathos, Dalit theology promotes a perspective or a method that empowers the Dalits in reflecting and determining the notion of God involving the experience of Dalit identity. The praxis of Dalit theology comes only after the knowledge of pathos that brings the Dalits together on historical ground.

Nirmal’s use of Dalit pathos as an epistemological premise of Dalit theology is a significant step in the Dalit praxis because it extends this human experience into God. Nirmal’s interpretation of pathos does not contradict praxis. The expected Dalit praxis can exchange an embrace of both divine and human. This falls in line with contextual theology’s main stimulus of praxis based on ‘cross and the context (suffering)’. Nirmal appropriates this idea in theologising in the Dalit context. By reclaiming the thoughts from liberation theology, Nirmal sets the centrality of the Cross and suffering in relation to the life of the Dalits and the liberation aimed through Dalit theology. In one of his early articles, by quoting Leonardo Boff the liberation theologian, Nirmal affirms that the participation of God in human pain through the passion of Jesus symbolised in his crucifixion’ seeks to understand contextual ‘theological knowing’. However, Nirmal was aware of the danger of over-emphasising the praxis-based epistemology of liberation theology in the context of the Dalit experience of pathos. When it comes to the Dalit theology, for Nirmal, the starting point is the participation of God in human pain that is characterised by the New Testament as the passion of Jesus symbolised in his crucifixion.

Pathos epistemology has been developed against liberation theology’s praxiological knowing of human alone. Against a motif of liberation theology, Nirmal argues that even

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121 Peniel Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010), 49.
122 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
123 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
124 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 140-41.
125 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
prior to praxis, the Dalit must know God in and through suffering. For Dalit theology, pain and *pathos* is the beginning of knowledge. Even before the Dalit “thinks about pathos; pain-pathos is simply there.”126 Knowing the pain-*pathos* has to come first because in pain-*pathos* the sufferer knows God. This is because “the sufferer in and through his/her pain-*pathos* knows that God participates in human pain.”127 Nirmal takes this experience of pain as the epistemological base to construct a Christology: pain-*pathos* stands at the beginning of Dalit Christological knowledge.128 According to Nirmal, “through pain and pathos the Dalits come to know Jesus Christ as always in the Biblical God who is the one who participates in human pains.”129 Nirmal emphasized that the understanding of this God must happen at the level of a suffering God.

However, Nirmal’s position on *pathos* epistemology, as the core of Dalit theology has been critiqued for oversimplifying the Dalit discourses based on the sympathetic social conditions of the Dalit community. In his book *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, Peniel Rajkumar contends that the *pathos* paradigm can reinforce a “slavish mentality” and deeply inculcated “sense of inferiority” among the Dalits.130 For Rajkumar, the consciousness of pathos is a reinforcement of their own oppression, which seldom eradicates the root cause of pathos. Though Peniel’s criticism of valorising the *pathos* remains valid, Dalit theology cannot completely ignore the sufferings and *pathos* of the Dalit masses even today.

**3.9 Conclusion**

The findings of this chapter demonstrate how the Indian church initiated different ways by which they could combat caste-based social divisions. However, mostly the Indian church remained within the theological fold of the transcendental approach. In addressing the caste struggle and particularly Dalit concerns and treatment within the Christian community – whether traditional churches or missionary churches – there appears a clear deficiency in the theologies informing the dominant communities. The reason for this deficiency is due to the church’s failure to locate the real problem of theology in view of the caste system.

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126 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
127 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
128 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
129 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
130 Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 115. Peniel Rajkumar opposes Nirmal’s view and suggests that only the resistance that can create a new identity of liberation possible. According to Peniel, a Christology that affixes the negative self-imaging of the Dalits will tacitly copies the reinforcement of the “slavish mentality” by affirming the servanthood of Jesus. He observes that the *pathos* epistemology of Christology a factor that reinforces the very hegemonic aspect of caste system. This may only help in making the Dalit to continue in their servitude situation. Peniel Rajkumar, “‘How’ Does the Bible Mean? The Bible and the Dalit Liberation in India,” *Political Theology* 11, no. 3 (2010): 418.
In spite of several attempts to invite the Dalits into Orthodoxy and also in the missionary churches, the concept of the pure or transcendent has continued to play a determining role or played the primary role. It means that the church’s approach maintained the caste binary created within the *Vedic* philosophic system. The high caste church’s dominance was self-explanatory in their articulation of theology.

Although this caste-church legitimised itself as a paternal agent to the spiritual upliftment of the Dalit community, the Dalits rejected all their ‘offered transcendence’. Coupled with the caste and social dominance, both the traditional and missionary churches followed a similar approach to the Dalits. This paved the way for the Dalits to disassociate from the dominant communities. Moreover, their theological legitimization through Indian philosophical thoughts or the euro-centred ideologies held no meaning for the Dalit community.

Due in part to this experience, the people of the Dalit community turned to consider the counter experience of God in their own life situations of *pathos* and suffering. They identified their sufferings with the suffering of God in Jesus Christ. By deviating from the philosophical and euro-centric theology, the Dalit theologians developed their sense of Christ’s Dalitness. Such theology disowns the manufactured and limited spaces given to the Dalit body. If the Dalit body is not included within the experience of transcendence (divine) and immanence (human), such philosophies threaten the very identity of the Dalit community. These findings of Dalit theology require a further investigation as to how Dalit theology imagines transcendence or immanence through its Christology. While aiming to have conversation between the Christological voices of Dalit and Orthodox theology, such discussion will help us further determine the Orthodox position of Christology. The next chapter looks specifically at Dalit Christological positions on the transcendence and immanence of God in Christ.
4. Christ’s Dalit Body: Immanent and Transcendent Dalit Christology

When we are converted and make the faith-commitment, we shall discover that we are with the dalits, the people of God, God’s beloved Christ, crucified and buried outside the gate. Their tombs God is breaking open in the night when the non-dalits are sleeping. With the break of day, we shall see the wounds we have inflicted on crucified bodies and lives filled with light and life. We shall see them and touch them reverently and come to have faith in fresh depths, and come to express it in the cry, My Lord and my God. A cry in which all the crushed and crucified of history shall be affirmed as the body of Christ on whose unveiled face the glory of God shines and from whole heart streams the water of life in which non-dalits, if they change, may find cleaning and life.

Samuel Rayan

It is important to realise that I seek not to attack the “truth” of classical Christological doctrines, but to discuss ways to avoid negative consequences that follow when such doctrines are narrowly interpreted and lead to cramped psychological and spiritual attitudes among Christians. In such cases, it can be argued, the classical formulae defeat the purposes for which they were originally articulated.

Stanley J. Samartha

4.1 Introduction

The background of the emergence of Dalit theology, a counter Indian theological imagination, occupied the previous chapter. Dalit theology upholds the historic consciousness and God’s all-encompassing engagement in the Dalit experiences, stimulating a theology developed from the immanent experience of the Dalit people. Much theology in India developed its idea of God through Western philosophical method or Vedic philosophical notion and this philosophical God stands on the side of those who exploited the Dalit community. The intention of Dalit theology was not to discard the divine or transcendent aspect of God, but it rejected the over-emphasis of the philosophical or transcendental approach in theology. The emphasis of Dalit theology falls on the Dalit experience and on an understanding of God in Christ who is embodied as human or immanent. This context sought

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to understand new meaning of God in Christ who, in his sufferings, could embrace the Dalit humanity with equal dignity and identity.

Reclaiming the fullness of humanity becomes the central goal in the search for God in Dalit theological tradition. From the beginning of Dalit theological thought, this idea has been vividly expressed. The Dalit consciousness seeks not the utopian goal of liberating the Dalits to the “land flowing with milk and honey,” but to empower them in a way that seeks their full humanity.³ For V. Devasahayam, the major objective of Dalit theology was the attainment of the full humanity and identity of the Dalits within the nature of God – the divine and human – and so in the all-encompassing characteristics of “recreation, resurrection, revolution, liberation, maternal care, defending and empowering the weak and the oppressed.”⁴ This full humanity of the Dalit tradition is often named ‘the Dalitness’, an immanent Dalit experience.

Theologically, the Dalitness of Dalit must be understood as the human expression of Christ. It is the essence of the Dalit self, which manifested in the pathos of the Dalit community as a transforming agent of knowing God. This pathos or suffering experience of the Dalits drives towards the experience of God.⁵ In doing so, Dalitness necessitates a counter voice, which led the community towards the voice of God. Prabhakar calls this the voice of the pathos and affirms that it can provide the impulse to the knowledge of the Dalit God.⁶ Here, God is understood as the one who suffers with and serves the Dalits.

Dalit Christology offers a communitarian or trinitarian concept of God.⁷ This notion of God holds that “the Triune God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – in Christ…is on the side of the Dalits and not of the non-Dalits who are the oppressors.”⁸ The Dalits can perceive a God who has similar experience to the Dalit humanity. Therefore, they find their God in Christ who was embodied, suffered, died, and who rose again from the dead.

To help to understand this God in Christ in Dalit theology, this chapter focusses on the Dalit Christological discourses – their development and theological positions – in view of the divine and human nature of Christ within the background of the discussion of the Dalit body. The focus will be given to immanent Christology, which drives the Dalit theological voice to

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³ Aravind P. Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” in A Reader in Dalit Theology, ed. Aravind P. Nirmal and V. Devasahayam (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1990), 62.
⁵ Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 59.
⁷ Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 58.
interact with other Christologies that could share the similar theological stimulus. Given that there are now five decades of Dalit Christology, there is a huge amount of literature. The following characterises the material according to the three key generations and draws attention only to three Dalit theologians representing one from each generation. They are Arvind. P. Nirmal, Sathianathan Clark, and Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar representing the first, second and third generations, respectively. However, many other Dalit theological voices are also appropriated in all generations, whenever it is necessary.

4.2 A General Note on Dalit Christology: A Liberator-Servant

To imagine Christ as a liberator of the Dalits, freeing them from their antagonistic identity of permanent sufferings, the Dalit theologians created a new lens to understand Christ. For instance, Prabhakar understands God as the Dalit’s liberator who offers freedom in its fullness. Prabhakar writes that “knowing Jesus Christ is to realise that God became (hu)man in him and revealed the divine will to be with humanity amidst their (our) sinfulness, calling them (us) for salvation and freedom in him.”

This offered freedom in Jesus is what the Dalit theologians mean by ‘Jesus as the Dalit liberator’. The liberator God stands by the side of the Dalits. Prabhakar continues this position that “God (in Christ) is on the side of the Dalit and not of the non-Dalits, who are oppressors.”

To the Dalits, God takes their sufferings and continue to identify with their experience of suffering and pain. According to Prabhakar, “Christ has made us his ‘liberated servants’ to continue our struggle for freedom against all suffering, with the assurance that he will come again to consummate his rule on earth.” Prabhakar explains two important characteristics of the Dalit God in Christ. First, the Dalit God offers complete liberation or salvation and, second, such liberation is experienced not only in the ‘immediate’ term, but also in the ‘eschatological’ vision, indicating both the immanent and the divine characteristics of God.

Though the name attributed to Jesus as liberator or saviour of the earthly oppression runs perhaps counter to much of the philosophical Christian world, Prabhakar highlights the significance of the same model of Jesus to understand the present (context) and future (eschatological) life of the Dalits. On the other hand, Jesus Christ as just a ‘spiritual saviour’ who liberates people from their sin and guilt lacks meaning in Dalit theology. On the contrary, Prabhakar puts it as:

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9 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 409.
10 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 411-12.
11 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 419.
Dalits tend to see salvation in a historical process, in their context of suffering and struggles against ‘earthly oppression’. Jesus Christ, the Saviour, is the one who gave his life as a ransom for many and who will come again to establish God’s justice on earth and fully liberate the oppressed from the misery of human sin and suffering. God in Jesus Christ is the liberator in history. What the Dalits think of Jesus Christ and God’s saving act in and through him is integrally linked with their dehumanised social existence and their hope for a future in Christ, freed from all inhumanity and injustice.

For Prabhakar, salvation is, first, that Christ liberates the human from conditions of injustice and inhumanity, and second, that it includes an eschatology of God’s completeness of saving activity. This gives Dalit theology a space to understand both the completion of the transcendental future and also the fulfilment of the fullness of humanhood in the present human life.

Prabhakar’s view helps us understand the Dalit theological shift from the universality (divinity) of God to the particularity (humanity) of God in Christ. When Prabhakar writes a creed for the Christian Dalits, he points to the interconnection of Christ’s suffering and liberation in the divine and human plan of God. The Dalit’s “cries for liberation from harsh caste-bondage were heard by God, who came to us in Jesus Christ to live with us and save all people from their sins. We believe in Jesus Christ, born to virgin Mary and anointed by God’s Spirit as the Son of God.” This creed becomes the foundational position for developing Dalit Christology, which looks for an all-encompassing or cosmic liberation of humankind. Prabhakar adds the word “shalom” (total well-being or all-encompassing) of all humanity, and particularly the oppressed and broken become the central space to continue the Dalit Christological discussion. This shalom or total well-being is embodied in the divinity and humanity of God in Christ. All of these expressions are affirmed in the sufferings of the Dalits and the suffering of Christ. A suffering God becomes a servant God to the Dalits, who travels alongside of the service of the Dalits.

4.3 Arvind P. Nirmal and An Immanent Dalit God

Nirmal begins by asking the Dalits to reject every non-Dalit God or deity. Though he identifies the Jewish Jesus as a non-Dalit God, his key focus fall on the Hindu gods. He writes that:

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12 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 405.
13 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 419.
14 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 409.
15 For Nirmal, Jewish Jesus means the Western understanding of Christ. Nirmal imagines that the Jewish way of understanding Jesus would not help the Dalit to experience their God. To liberate the Jewish God who fails to identify with the Dalitness of Dalits, Nirmal always advised the Dalits to reject the non-Dalit deities. Aravind P. Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1990), 27. See also Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 225-26.
A non-dalit deity friends have rejected Rama – the deity whom millions of Hindu worships and pray. The story goes that Rama killed Shanbuka – a dalit, because Shanbuka had undertaken tapascharya, a life of prayer and asceticism. The dominant religious tradition denied the right to pray to the dalit. Rama, therefore, simply killed Shanbuka and performed dharma – a religious act. This is why dalits have rejected Rama. For dalits, Rama is a killer God Killer and murderer of Dalits.

Nirmal argues that the right selection of God in the exploitative and corrupt system of caste plays a major role in determining the future of the Dalit community. Rejecting a god who promotes the killing of Dalits and embracing a God who preserves the Dalit humanhood becomes a political act. In this, Dalit theology is concerned with people who are denied their essential humanhood and become – in the New Testament language – no people. Finding the right theology of God for the Dalits is a process of “theology by, for and of an oppressed people” or a people’s theology. Nirmal’s notion of God begins with Jesus Christ. His Christ is not as a Jewish God, but a Dalit God and the significance of Christ-talk lies in the crucial relationship between the life of Christian Dalits and Christ’s life, which he imagines similar to the Dalit life.

4.3.1 Christ’s Sufferings and Servanthood
Nirmal configures a new connection between ‘servanthood’ and the life of Christ. For Nirmal, God is a servant God. Like the God in Latin American Liberation theology and Black American theology, God is identified in the ‘servanthood’ of God. In Dalit theology, God’s experience of service is linked to the Dalit attitude and experience of servitude. Nirmal affirms that only a God who had undergone a similar experience to that of the Dalit can relate. The God of Christian Dalits is understood as the self-existent, the Svayambhu, who does not create others to do servile work. God’s own self undertakes the servile works. Nirmal continues, since we, the Indian Dalits, are this God’s people, “service has been our lot and our privilege.” It is this same God manifest in Jesus Christ, and the Dalits imagine a servant-God whom the Gospel writer identified in Jesus.

Nirmal explains the connection between serving God and the service rendered to the people of the upper caste by the Dalits. Without questioning the nature of service that the Dalits do, Nirmal turns towards a descriptive way of knowing service. Many have critiqued

17 Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 27.
18 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 139.
Nirmal for his soft approach towards the service, which they identify as a category of shame. However, Nirmal’s God becomes a waiter, a *dhobi* (the washer man or women), a *bhangi* (the scavenger) because traditionally all such services have been done by the Dalits. This means Dalits have participated in this servant-God’s ministry. The Gospel identified Jesus with the Servant of God of Isaiah. In his service, he was utterly faithful to God.

Nirmal’s interpretation of Christ as servant is also supported by scholars like Prabhakar. For Prabhakar, “the Dalit understanding of God’s revelation and presence will be tempered by their subaltern existence, within an oppressive society.” The servant God leads the Dalits into their liberation. The liberation of the bodily sufferings of the Dalits is the central hermeneutical position of the Dalit God. This takes shape in the context of the unavoidable sufferings of the Dalits and he states, as:

> It is precisely in and through the weaker, the downtrodden, the crushed, the oppressed and the marginalised that God’s saving glory is manifested or displayed. Differently stated, the pain-*pathos* in the Dalit body is resembled with the same body of God in Jesus Christ, whose body is explained within the site of suffering on the cross. This is because broken belongs to the very being of God.

He identifies the inseparable relation between the servant God and the suffering of the Dalit people. In the suffering and the brokenness of God, one can identify the Dalit God, who is found on the Cross. If the Cross is understood as an image of suffering, it can also be symbolised as the sufferings of the Dalits. The analogy of the Cross becomes a symbol of ‘Dalit life’ expressing the nature of God’s life in It is the Dalit life of God that provides the idea of divinity and humanity that blends in the Cross of Jesus.

This suffering on the Cross has two dimensions. First, the suffering on the Cross relates to earthly suffering. Such an image shows how the suffering of humanity is always attached to the sufferings of God. Second, suffering leads towards death and resurrection. The resurrected Christ invites the Dalits to join in the continuity of suffering but in God’s divinity. When Prabhakar reflects on this same idea, he asserts that the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus open the possibility of the universal fact of God’s salvation and God’s option for the poor and oppressed. Such universal facts, as Nirmal expressed earlier, resembles Jesus’ Cross and suffering with the Dalits – the Dalitness of Dalits – and reveals the expression of the divine and human nature of God in Jesus Christ.

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25 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 70.
27 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 418.
4.3.2 Christ in Dalitness and Pathos Epistemology

‘Suffering’ becomes the site of Dalitness, which is central to the Dalit theology. For Nirmal, there is first human suffering and then the concept of God. Dalits once infamously called untouchables, uphold and celebrate their identity as Dalits through a radical imagination of the Dalitness of God the Father in Jesus Christ. Prabhakar defines ‘Dalitness’ in a similar manner and is based on the identity of the poor and the oppressed in the ‘common world’ of ‘time, space and the body’. In this perspective, neither pathos nor liberation can be withdrawn from the Dalit life. For Prabhakar, Dalitness becomes central to the Dalit Christology as it is attached to the suffering and pathos. If the immediate life of the immanence of God is revealed in Christ, the liberation or salvation is also part of God’s eschatological offer to human beings. It also means that the Dalitness of Christ is the combination of both the transcendental (divinity) and immanent (humanity) nature of God.

For some scholars this focus on Dalitness in Dalit theology reduces the traditional concept of God. For instance, John Parrot complains that Dalit theologians have not done justice to the Christological thoughts in their entirety: “Nirmal and Prabhakar, in their valid attempt to seek an answer to the oppression of Dalits, have reduced Christ (and God) to their own category of Dalitness.” Parratt’s comment recalls the Dalit theologian’s opposite criticism of the classical Christian theology. Finding divinity in the human experience is thoroughly critiqued by such schools of theologians.

It is for this reason that Nirmal clarifies his account of the ‘Dalit methodological exclusiveness’. The Dalitness of Dalits takes us to the experience of Dalit pathos. The Dalit pathos is considered as the epistemological agent of Dalit life. Nirmal offers both these terms to understand Dalit Christology. In his deliberations, the Dalitness and the pathos constitute the totality of Dalit life, which itself gives the stimulants for the Dalit emancipation. It is integrally connected with the inter-reading between first, on Dalit suffering and second, Jesus’ pathos on the Cross.

To expand this claim, first, according to Nirmal, any God-talk in the Dalit context should essentially reflect the fact that the “Dalit people’s experience is pathos or suffering.”

Human pathos and its relation to God is not an isolated case in Dalit theology. Many of Nirmal’s contemporary theologians developed these thoughts. For example, Devasahayam,

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28 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 142.
29 Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 98.
31 John Parratt, The Other Jesus: Christology in Asian Perspective (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 109.
32 Parratt, The Other Jesus, 109.
33 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
another Dalit theologian denies the concept of ‘sovereign Lord’ and finds God-talk within the human weakness and sufferings. As Devasahayam explains it:

God presents another vision of Godself when perceived in Jesus, as not almighty, sovereign Lord but as one who comes in weakness and humility to stand with those despised and suffering people. God is not seen as a ruthless judge demanding a pound of flesh from the sinner but as one who is participating in the agony along with the agonising people. The power of God is to be reinterpreted as the serenity of God i.e. the capacity to share and bear the grief of the suffering humanity.  

Sufferings, pathos, and pains are the central identity of God’s incarnation and the identity that God identifies with the suffering communities. Dalits experience their pathos as an entry to the knowledge of God.

Second, Christ’s pathos and the Cross bring the relevant relation between the Dalits and the divine together. The connecting bridge seems to be the Cross of Jesus. As God’s Cross experience and Dalit’s pathos experience are similar, Dalitness demonstrates the conjoining category in the Dalit Christology. Along with Nirmal, Prabhakar affirms that “Jesus’ Dalitness is best symbolised by the Cross. On the Cross, he was the broken the crushed, the split, the torn, the driven asunder man – the Dalit in the fullest possible meaning of that term.” Both Nirmal and Prabhakar speak about the inseparable relationship of pathos with Jesus, the Cross, and Dalitness.

One of the criticisms that Nirmal faces in his treatment of pathos epistemology is that the pathos does not encourage Dalit praxis but rather creates a lethargic attitude. Nirmal responds to this issue very clearly in his approach to pathos epistemology by prioritising the Dalit responses. For him, while following Dalit theology, one should first experience the pathos or sufferings of the Dalit and then move to the Dalit praxis. Only when one can experience suffering, can they identify with the suffering of Christ on the Cross. Prabhakar supplements the praxis nature of pathos and sufferings through a comparative view on Dalit suffering and God’s suffering experience. According to Prabhakar, “suffering as the Human One and Servant of God, He took our oppression and pain upon him and laid down his life on the cross to redeem us He was dead and buried but rose again to live forever.” Unlike liberation theology, pathos moves prior to praxis. This aim for complete redemption or liberation to the

35 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
36 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 414.
37 Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 141.
38 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 420.
Dalit starts from the knowledge of *pathos*. Thus, the suffering turns to “redemptive suffering” to renew and to liberate towards new humanity out of the rigid and oppressive caste society.\(^{39}\)

Nirmal conceives the significance of Christ-talk in the crucial relationship between the life of Dalit Christians and Christ’s life orienting towards the life experience of the Dalitness in Dalit life. Jesus’ Dalitness coupled with suffering and *pathos* is the key to the “mystery of his divine and human unity.”\(^{40}\) Prabhakar’s argument in this regard can be taken as a concluding note to Nirmal. Prabhakar writes that “it is in and through this pain-*pathos* that the sufferer knows God. This is because the sufferer in and through his/her pain-*pathos* knows that God participates in human pain.”\(^{41}\) The human *pathos* of God in Christ is a foundational Christological expression that contributes towards an understanding of God in the immanent form.

### 4.3.3 Christology: A Madyameeka (Middle Way) Position of Divinity and Humanity

Nirmal’s quest for understanding Christ never leaves the question of the divinity and humanity in Christ. While describing the God-human, Nirmal develops his Christology on the basis of the human life of Jesus (the broken life, death) and the divine entity of resurrection. This language of Jesus’ particularity and universality was well-structured by Nirmal. He affirms Jesus’ particularity by saying, Jesus “is one with the broken. He suffers when his people suffer. He weeps when his people weep. He laughs when his people laugh. He dies in his people’s death,” and explains his universality combined with the life of Dalit by explaining, he “rises again in his people’s resurrection.”\(^{42}\) Nirmal finds particularity and universality in the ‘historical’ premise. This historical premise is where one finds the humanity of God.

First, Nirmal develops the idea of a ‘divine-human’ debate within the concept of the Dalit ‘body’ that also affirms the historical body of Jesus. The body that comes out of material, for Nirmal, was created within the plan of spirit or spirituality.\(^{43}\) So it is both material and divine. It seems his ‘material’ can also be interpreted as humanity. In order to explain this idea, he takes the concept of material and *Lokayata*, which rejects Advaita and transforms towards the spiritual. In this shift, the historical Jesus is the humanity of Jesus. With the above method or epistemological questions of the Dalit body, Nirmal continues as a critique of the ‘philosophical sloppiness’ of Indian Christian theology.

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\(^{39}\) Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 423.

\(^{40}\) Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 225.

\(^{41}\) Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 412.

\(^{42}\) Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” 65-70.

\(^{43}\) Nirmal deal with the Dalit body as a sociological sight of suffering and pain. He deals with this concern to develop his Christology. In this view, his *pathos* epistemology was an all-encompassing answer to the entirety of the Dalit struggle and identity.
He imagines, instead, a system called *Lokayata* of the Indian thoughts. According to one legend, *Brahaspati*, the supposed founder of this school, was the son of a man named *Loka* and hence the name *Lokayata* for his views. Literally, the word ‘*Loka*’ means world or common people. *Lokayata* and so could mean either ‘this-worldism’ or the views prevalent among the common people or the masses.44 “*Lokayata*” is a “derogatory” term as “the true knowledge or *Brahma Vidya*” seems to be the monopoly of “high caste *Brahmins*” as opposed to the vast majority of the people at the margins. Nirmal suggests that one must reconstruct a basic outline of *Lokayata* to make it more respectable from the writings of the opposite schools.45 As a common notion, the *Lokayatikas* do not follow the sense of inference (*Anumana*) in their epistemology. However, Nirmal does not approve this comment of the opponents of *Lokayata*.46

Second, the question of the concept of God in the material is also the question of transcendence.47 As far as *Advaita Vedanta* is concerned there is no need to offer any apology for transcendence. But Nirmal finds in *Lokayata* a means to explain transcendence. There is a point of contact provided by *Lokayata* itself. *Lokayata* takes the elements as ‘eternal’. ‘Eternity’ cannot be inferred from our *Pratyaksha* experience of temporality. We can only experience temporality. *Lokayata* might say that the elements have always been there. Alternatively, we have to infer from our present *Pratyaksha* experience of the elements that they must have existed in the past and that they will continue to do so in the future. In so ‘inferring’ we are ‘transcending’ the concept of temporality and speaking of the higher and transcendent concept of ‘eternity’.48

For Nirmal, in the *Lokayata* system, the human body receives an elevated position. *Lokayata* believes ‘self’ as *Deha* (body). Here, the self (body) is an active agent. Nirmal says that the “self” and “God” could be conceived as active agents in an analogous way.49 The body represents the empirically known world where perception or *Pratyaksha*50 is important over inference or *Anubhava*.51 Nirmal believes that the real quarrel between the *Lokayatikas*

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49 Nirmal, *Heuristic Explorations*, 112.
50 The word *Pratyaksha* is derived from two Sanskrit words, i.e. *Prati* and *Aksha*. The word *Prati* means ‘in front of’ and the word *Aksha* means ‘eye’. *Pratyaksha* therefore means ‘that which is in front of one’s eye’. The idea of *pratyaksha* is more like ‘immanence’.
51 The word *Anu* means an order, a sequence or a following. The word behave means ‘becoming’, ‘living’, ‘feeling’ or ‘experiencing’. The word *Anubhava* thus indicates that our ‘becoming’, ‘living’, ‘feeling’, ‘experiencing’ or ‘knowing’ should ‘follow’ the Reality. Literally, therefore, *Anubhava* means ‘life or experience following after or in accordance with or in the order of.’ The idea of *Anubhava* is more like ‘transcendence’ Nirmal, *Heuristic Explorations*, 106-16.
and the Advaita Vedantins is over their respective emphases on Pratyaksha (perception) and Anubhava (inference or interiority). This is a middle path.

Moving from Advaita philosophy to the Buddhist thought of Madhyama way or path (middle way) was an important step in Nirmal’s theology to explain the transcendence and the immanence of God. This analogy was also influenced by the notions of Pratyaksha (perception) and Anumana (inference or reasoning). This middle way, however, “will have to retain the positive epistemological concerns represented both by Pratyaksha and Anumana.” Differently stated, Nirmal takes a middle path – between Pratyaksha and Anumana meaning transcendence (divinity) and immanence (humanity), which resembles his concept of Lokayata that also aims at a middle path of both material and spiritual.

Nirmal’s shift from Indian Vedic philosophic thought or euro-centric philosophic to the Indian material philosophy is a significant move as far as the Indian Christian theology is concerned. The credit of Nirmal’s works goes to imagination to find a theology from material philosophy without weakening the classical God-talk of both transcendent and immanent category of God. He aimed to rediscover Indian materialism when addressing the issues of poverty, religious superstition, social caste-structures and so on. Nirmal’s view is to give importance to material or human existence equal to that of the transcendence or divine. The Dalit identity and the value of the Dalit body does not reduce the importance of the immanent nature or the divine nature of God in Christ. In this struggle, Nirmal imagined his Christology without contradicting the divine (transcendent) and the human (immanent) nature of God in the foundation of immanent experiences of Dalits.

4.4 Sathianathan Clarke: A Cosmic Christology

Although Sathianathan Clarke, a second-generation Dalit theologian, wrote extensively on the social and political concerns of the Dalits, his notion of God in relation to the Dalit life

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52 Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 109.
53 Nirmal, Heuristic Explorations, 105-6.
features in most of his theological expressions. Understanding God from the wounds of humanity, Clarke writes that human beings are the extension of God’s love and freedom in the broken experience of life. Dalits who constantly experienced the brokenness are created as friends of God. God unconditionally embraces the people at the margins. The daily experience of Dalit life can form their divine experience. More specifically, Christ’s all-encompassing presence is felt in Dalit life. Clarke does not like to call this a ‘counter theology’ with the fear that it can “reinforce the self-other dichotomy,” which he calls a regular theology. However, he too emphasises the human side of the theology, more than the transcendental approach alone.

4.4.1 Liberator Jesus-Centric and Christo-Centric God: Inter-relationality with Oppressors

Sathianathan Clarke imagines a God who embodies human and acts in the world with an inter-relational mode. Influenced by liberation theology, his inter-relational God is the one who leads the people in their struggles and identifies Godself as the mighty God as explained in the Exodus event. Such a God participates in the human history of salvation. This salvific community forms an inter-relational existence, confessing to the liberative God who is revealed in the history.

Clarke’s vision of ‘inter-relationality’ of God and community does not limit it to just an organic relation to one community per se, i.e., only with Christianity. It goes beyond and reaches to the commitment of communities in relation to a God affirmation. At one level, this community becomes an example of a prototype of intercommunion with God and people. The goal of such a community of God, as Clarke suggests, includes the sustenance of life in fullness. This community demands a resistive-liberative objective and similarly it must aim for an unconditional exercise of the all-encompassing nature of God within the life of the intracommunity. Clarke writes that:

The theatre of the working of God encompasses the entire historical and geographical world; and the resistance-liberation striving of Dalit and Adivasis is a significant occasion of this all-embracing working of God. Thus, theology involves a community’s decision to take stock of its offer to join in with the inter-community dynamic of God. This is understood to be the divine directionality toward life in all its related fullness.

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56 Clarke, “Dalit Overcoming Violation,” 291.
57 Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural,” 214.
58 Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural,” 214.
Although he does not claim that this is the only mode of God working in the world, he affirms the imperative presence of the inter-relation of Jesus Christ with human communities on the social margins and communities of different social, religious, and political identities. For Clarke, it should be understood as “in life with the life and teachings of Jesus, the embodiment of life in all its related fullness” and that is his central premise for Christology.

Further he imagines the inter-relationality with an intercommunion of God in Christ, human and the world. According to Clarke:

> With regard to *God*, the spectacular and miraculous aspects must not be exaggerated, yet mystery must not be exhausted from God: God is indeed the subject, rather than an object, of all human being and world relationships. God is creator, sustained and liberator of human beings and world. In explicating the *human being*, the co-agency of human beings and God must be interpreted in making the social, economic and political world. This posits the world as open-ended and available to “being constructed.” Also, the ontological and existential right of every human being to be free and equal must not be compromised, even in a world that is centred in God… In all theologising, it must be affirmed that God is the ultimate symbol; thus, the two symbols of human being and world are accountable to the symbol of God.

In this view, Clarke’s symbol of God seems to be an active agent in the socio-economic and political world. This has an important meaning for the Dalit life. The real struggle of Dalit life is directly connected to their socio-economic and political life. So, God has to be a symbol that participates also in the struggles of the world. Though Clarke’s God neither overemphasises the transcendental entity nor denies the immanent experience of human life, he sides with the immanent or oppressed people. More importantly, Clarke’s God lives among the ‘struggles of human life’, embodies these categories, and is actively involved in the struggles and sufferings of human communities. In particular, it is within “resistive-liberative momentum of minorities in India and within the intracommunity dynamism of Christian celebration of the source and sustainer of this activity, Jesus Christ.” In short, he sees the embodiment of such liberation in Jesus Christ.

Clarke’s basic premises of doing theology is the strong sense of the historical Jesus, who is also potentially understood as the transcendental God. His liberationist paradigm envisions an “interlocking of divine and human” that generates “life now and reimagines future life for communities pushed toward physical and economic death,” which will be “filtered through the inspirational person and work of Jesus Christ.”

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Further, Clarke’s historical Jesus includes the divine ontology of Christ. It should be noted that Clarke spends time to understand God’s engagement in the historic context of ‘present’ and the impact in ‘future’ more than fragmentising the transcendental nature of God. It is in this line of argument that he expands his Christic notion of God to include a universal God. He demonstrates how the Christian notion of God in Jesus is relevant to begin the discussion from a ‘particular point’, which further carries its potential to the universal. Clarke’s historical Jesus is a universal God. According to him:

A universal God wills this for the common human community. Yet the specifically Christian dimension that emerges through such reflections is the significance of Jesus Christ, who through his solidarity with the poor and marginalised shapes and propels this theological vision to achieve fullness of life of all. It is because of this solidarity, manifest in God-become-flesh, that the fluidity, tentativeness and abstraction of theology, Christology and biblical studies are committed fully to the liberation of the excluded, poor and colonised.  

Clarke’s position on historical Jesus does not significantly differ from the Christic notion of God. However, Clarke places a greater emphasis on the Jesus-centric than on the Christo-centric:

The human One (Jesus) in his identity with the pain-pathos of Dalits reveals the fullness of the Divine. There was not much divergence in Christ (the Divine One) apart from what is manifest in the serving and suffering Jesus of Nazareth. Along with God, Christ too, is emptied into Jesus. The exalted and cosmic dimensions of Christ are not explored; instead, the quite mundane suffering and serving Jesus becomes more that sufficed for explicating Dalit Christology.

Though he not strictly rejects the transcendental element of Christ ‘alone’, Jesus-centric is more like an anthropological turn of Jesus.

On the other hand, by taking the cosmic dimension of Christ, it means that Clark’s Jesus is also a Christ-centric category. Clark explains the ‘self-emptying’ nature of Christ. The symbol that connects to the ‘emptyingness’ with Jesus must see within the ‘Dalitness’ that the Dalit theologians attribute to Jesus. Emptyingness is the paradigm which becomes the basis of Dalit identity and life. In this sense Clarke accepts both the emptiness and Dalitness of Jesus, which in fact reflects both divine and human or Christo and Jesus centric approaches. For Clarke, there cannot be a Dalitness without ‘emptyingness.’ ‘Emptyingness’ is also Christic in the sense that he never loses his transcendence. However, Clarke insisted that this human-divine relation must be sought within the immanent life experience of the Dalits and other oppressive communities.

63 Clarke, “The Task, Method and Content,” 12.
64 Clarke, “Dalit Theology: An Introductory,” 31-32.
4.4.2 Dalit Drum: A Symbol of Christological Exploration

While understanding the Dalit life from the living experience of the Dalit community, Clarke utilises a Dalit immanent symbol to examine the potentials to experience God in Christ. Clarke’s 1999 classic book, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* exemplifies such a logic of Dalit Christology. Clarke connects the Dalit tradition of ‘drum beating’ with the ‘material and divine’ category of Christology. Clarke initiates a theoretically enlightened reading through an ethnographic study conducted at a Dalit (Paraiyar) village in Tamil Nadu, India. In his study, Clarke argues how the Dalit drum, a musical instrument that is beaten to invoke divine engagements, initiates a God-talk. His search opens a new lens to understand how the Dalit goddess Ellaiyamman affirms Dalit concerns in the context of caste dominance and oppression. According to Clarke, “the aspects of the Paraiyar’s collective religious experience as represented in the drum, which, as consistently argued, symbolises their particular ongoing encounter with the Divine, cannot but be symptomatic of the trans-historical and pan-geographic Christic presence embracive of all creation.”65 The drum, which is made out of the skin of dead cows, stands as a polluted symbol for the dominant. Though the drum is beaten-up to make music for others, it makes sacred and life-giving music to gather people together. Like the beaten-up body of Christ that provides the source of sacredness and life, for Clarke, the drum symbolises Christ.66

In so reflecting, Clarke brings a new trajectory to the Dalit theological symbols and its equal and relevant scope as it is seen in the high caste Hindu structures and symbols. Moreover, he believes that:

Christ is a methodologically vital concept in doing Indian-Christian theology. Christ enfleshes and qualifies the condition of God, giving it its Christian distinction and particularity. The score for a Dalit Christology is produced through the harmonising of its expansive and constrictive poles. On the one hand, Christ as drum is presented as a contextual, enriching and fruitful theological affirmation with which to integrate the collective religious experiences of the Dalits. On the other hand, a potentially serviceable Jesus as deviant is construed in consonance with the collective appropriation of the Christic presence through the drum.67

Against the dominant theological symbols such as the music, art, architecture etc., Clarke appropriates the Dalit drum as a theological symbol representing an array of discursive and non-discursive theophoric voices within the theological conversation on Jesus Christ.68

Unlike most contextual (regional) Christology that emerges out of the influence of Latin

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65 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 189.
66 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 63-71
67 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 207.
68 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 5.
American liberation theology, Clarke finds his Christ from the ‘life symbols’ of Dalits irrespective of any particular religious identities.\(^6^9\) To Clarke, the reason that the drum becomes the image of the divine to empower the Paraiyar is both “(a) to ascertain their humans and humaneness in a social and historical situation in which this is systematically denied and (b) to actualise this human identity in their relationship with their human beings despite many odds.”\(^7^0\) Here, the drum is a force to empower the Dalit community together in their religious or other gatherings, while Christ as a liberator saves them from their situations of danger. According to Clarke:

    Christ enables them to assert their own communal identity before God and in the face of other human beings. It is because of the experiencing and appropriating of their own human identity before God, as mediated and sustained by the drum, that the Paraiyar are able to ascertain and assert their collective humanity this midst of the evaluative and derogatory judgements of caste communities.\(^7^1\)

For Clarke, the drum embodies a theology that “the divine is both experienced and explicated” and it provides an “experiential marking/sounding of the Divine.”\(^7^2\) In this process Clarke develops three major themes from the symbol of the Drum:

    first, the drum as a medium of divine-human communication that invokes, contains and dispenses divine power; second, the drum as an instrument of linking the subalternity of communities for resistive and emancipatory communal affirmation, which exemplifies the solidarity of the human and divine in their resistance of human and demonic forces; and third, the drum as a symbol of manifesting and managing corporate suffering.\(^7^3\)

As Clarke suggests, the Dalit drum meets both the divine and human category of God within their use of drum beating. First, it shows the activeness of God’s presence among the Dalit community and God’s communion with the subaltern suffering people. Second, this process invokes the foundation of the divine and human relations that exemplifies the resistance of the Dalits against their oppressors. If we understand Clarke in these two dimensions of approach to the drum, these perspectives also aim to involve the actual social and economic stiltedness of God in Jesus Christ, even though he was rejected in the community. He narrates how the drum finds a derogatory connotation outside the Dalit community similar to the life of Jesus. Clarke’s proposal “Christ as Drum” emerges not out of a peripheral experience of

\(^6^9\) In a later position Clarke himself admits that “the human Jesus was the Human One from God who identified with and contains to work with the poor, the colonised, Minjung, Dalits, Adivasis, Othered women, and the outcast in their right to live as human beings with dignity and justice. Clarke, “Asian Christian Theology: Birds’-Eye,” 9.
\(^7^0\) Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 190.
\(^7^1\) Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 190.
\(^7^2\) Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 4.
\(^7^3\) Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 5.
the sufferings of the community but rather it results from their complete interaction and relationship with the Dalit life. The drum beating of Dalits “conjoins both material and spiritual aspects of the mediation of divine blessedness.”\textsuperscript{74}

When the drum stands for Christ, the two dimensions of the drum become the characteristics of Clarke’s two-dimensional Christ. It is understood as an idea of “expansive side” and “constrictive side,” or in other words, as the terms of divinity and humanity of Christ. He writes that:

On the expansive side, it is both trans-historical and pan-geographic. While being situated within the confines of Christian discourse, it seeks to capture and name a Divine motif that is relevant to all time and space. On the constructive side, it is bound up with the life and praxis of Jesus of Nazareth and the impact this had on the early Christian community, which proclaimed him as Christ.\textsuperscript{75}

Implicitly, it is a call for understanding the divinity and humanity of Christ, a proposal to have a dialectical relationship between these two. In so doing, Clarke envisions that “the Christian community is able to lift up the paradigmatic conception of Jesus Christ, which functions to qualify God under whom living collectively makes sense, provides meaning and gives order.”\textsuperscript{76}

As observed, through the drum Clarke seeks to find the cultural, religious and social possibilities of Dalit life. In this perspective, Clark interprets the drum on its functional level equating the function of Jesus and also the plurality of sounds of the drum with a pluralistic model.\textsuperscript{77} This means Clarke’s theologising, on the one hand, had to consider the liberative Dalit life and its functions within the life of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, he had to address the plurality of resources that the Indian context, particularly the Dalit life, offers. The plurality has to be asserted. Having known the open-ended notion of the plurality of symbols to interpret Christ, Clarke’s expression of Christology is that “Christ as Drum and Christ as Logos are complementary routes.”\textsuperscript{78} In this category of Christ, Christ as Drum relates to the human life and Christ as logos stands for the Christic approach. For Clark, these two dimensions inseparably constitute his notion of Christ, the drum.

Clark argues that the expansive pole of Christology affirms the Christic presence and “Christ as drum may best be comprehended as the immanent presence of God that directs and draws creation towards the human through the dynamics of emancipatory resistance and

\textsuperscript{74} Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 4.
\textsuperscript{75} Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 183.
\textsuperscript{76} Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 185.
\textsuperscript{77} Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 199.
\textsuperscript{78} Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 201.
emancipatory reconciliation.”79 The constrictive pole of Christology focuses on Jesus of Nazareth interpreting Jesus through the Christic presence as appropriated by the drum. It involves two things: a shift from concerns of Jesus’ ontology to his functionality and from a corresponding notion of determining validity to an acceptance of ambiguity and plurality. In the category of the immanent presence of God in the expansive pole, in fact, Clark is trying to explain how God’s ontology works in the Christological appropriation. On the other hand, Jesus involves in and moves with the history of the ‘polluted’ ones, which becomes a key appropriation of Christology without losing the expansive or constrictive sides.

4.4.3 Drum: A Divine-Human Cosmic Christology

The influence of the drum, the Dalit symbol for developing Christological appropriations, is unique in Clarke’s theology. Even though not explicit, his approach in this regard was to explain how the divinity and humanity of Christ works within the symbol of the drum. Clarke writes that:

A significant feature of Jesus results from his being immanent among those ‘out of normal place’. The drum associates the christic presence particularly among those outside of the realm and space of the sacred word. Jesus’ manifestation of glory outside the respectable space at the inn, and at the heart of the stable (which puts him among those associated with cattle from which comes leather drum), is a graphic symbol of this deviant locatedness.80

With this interpretation, he locates Jesus Christ as the divine-human agency described within the Dalit experience. He draws the Dalit’s complete attention to the drum that becomes their ‘sole scriptura’. The drum becomes an ineffable manner of concentration for the emancipation of the Dalit life. Clark confines such a view by affirming that “the Kingdom call is in accord with the sonorous Divine drum beat that the Dalits have had hope in and have sought solace in; it appears in the concrete figure of Jesus the deviant.”81

As reflected earlier, Clark clarifies that “for the Paraiyar (Dalits), the drum is an instrument of mediation between the Divine and the human that channels the efficacious power of the Divine in or to acquire material gains.”82 Through the drum, theology is invited to ponder upon the dialectics of upholding the sense of mystery of divine-human communion without neglecting the very materiality from which and for which this mediation occurs. He continues that “while subaltern religion and its relationship with Divine power has generally highlighted material benefits, this does not imply that their relationship with the Divine is

79 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 207.
80 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 202.
81 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 202.
82 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 165.
devoid of the central aspect of mystery and ambiguity. The drum lifts up the inexplicable and unutterable nature of Divine-human relationship in combination with its materiality.\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 165.}

The two particularities of explaining the drum’s characteristics on both divine and human experience are as follows. First, the drum suggests both the inexplicable and the unutterable aspects of communication between the divine and human. The Dalit experience of pain and oppression makes them unable to voice where the drum becomes the mediation between divine and human. This failure to articulate on the part of Dalits signifies the dimension of mystery that is also an intrinsic dimension of divine-human relationally. It means that the drum is a tangible reminder of divine-human relational that is cryptic, incomprehensible, uninscribable and uncommunicable in human language.\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 164.} Second, the divine-human dimensions are also connected to materiality. In the material part, by drawing attention to the power of the drumming, “a material reward for the devotees and the community: physical and mental health and wholeness; financial security and bounty; and harmony, sufficiency and well-being for the family and the community” is assured.\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 164-65.} Materiality connects to the humanity and it directs towards Christ’s human experience, especially the sufferings of the Dalit life.

Through the drum the divine-human relationship expands towards the liberation of human suffering. According to Clarke, the “drum is also understood as an instrument of resistive and emancipatory religious and communitarian identity and a means of exemplifying and managing communal sufferings.”\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 165-69.} It is “a vehicle of Divine-human mediation that energises and steers subaltern resistive and emancipatory communal potentialities towards living in freedom in the midst of colossal human suffering.”\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 187.} The Dalits were not allowed to read or hear the \textit{Vedic} scriptures. In this context, the drum replaces the scriptures and brings the intuition of both divine experiences. According to Clarke, “if the immanent presence of the Christ is affirmed as embracing all human beings from the beginning of creation, the Christic presence as manifest among the Paraiyar through the symbols of the drum cannot be viewed merely as the context since it also represents the particular context of God’s relational and mediating activity among God’s people.”\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 184.} While acknowledging Christ within the Trinitarian view, he says that God as Christ symbolises God as redemptively embracing the world by becoming immanent. The Christ dynamic of emancipatory reconciliation is thus concretised in the drum.\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}, 193.} The drum that is the resistive symbol also functions as a means of...
reconciliation with the caste community. This reconciliation is made not by ignoring the 'sufferings' of the Dalit community. Clarke continues, “the way of the suffering and the path of the Christ are intimately bound up in the drum. Suffering in a way becomes the meeting place of the working of Christ and the striving of subaltern collective subjectivity, and the drum symbolises this collusion within the framework of colossal corporate suffering.” Like Nirmal, Clarke also understands that the suffering is part of his divine-human nature of Christ.

In Y.T. Vinayraj’s opinion, Sathianathan Clarke makes two key contributions. First, by following the liberation paradigm, “he renders the social location of exclusion, marginality and discrimination as a theological site for God’s preferential option for the poor.” Second, he moves beyond the ‘methodological exclusivism’ of Arvind P. Nirmal. Vinayraj believes that Clarke’s Dalit theology “offers transcendence to Dalit bodies from ‘beyond’ based on a Christian philosophy, which is foregrounded in the Western notion of ‘wholly Other’.”

While accepting Clarke’s differently oriented emphasis on Dalit as an essential category, Vinayraj affirms that Clarke fails to keep a consistent theoretical framework but positively takes a Gramscian notion of subaltern class consciousness; making an ‘anti-caste consciousness’. With the same positive note, Clarke believes that the role of the resistive and the constructive can help foster the self-respect and dignity of the Dalits.

However, Vinayraj’s criticism cannot be completely accepted. It is true that Clarke struggled to combine both the transcendental and immanent nature of God. For instance, when he talked about the centrifugal nature of his drum, connecting to the humanity of God, he failed to mention the centripetal aspect of God, Jesus’ divinity. Nonetheless, while he attempts to balance of both natures of Christ, he is himself unclear as to whether he has solved this problem of transcendental-immanent nature through the language of divinity-humanity in Christ. In spite of all criticism, Clarke’s drum Christology opens the scope for divine-human embrace of Christ’s nature reflecting human life with his cosmic vision.

### 4.5 Paniel Rajkumar: Dalit Christology as an Ethical-Theological Engagement.

This discussion of first and second generation theologians, focused on how the Dalit God takes the shape of divinity and humanity in the discourse of Christology. Peniel Rajkumar, representing the third-generation, offers his Christological debate from a different

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90 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 193.
91 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 194.
93 Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 99.
94 Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 98.
95 Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 98.
methodological view. His answer to the Dalit problem lies in the social and material liberation of the Dalits through a political praxis based on ethical-theological paradigms. This process is an immanent expression of God in Christ.

By slightly deviating from the first and second generation Dalit theologians, Rajkumar’s proposal of understanding God in Christ emulates a Dalit social transformation based on a social praxis. He problematizes Dalit theology’s scope of a social change with its present form because, for him, it lacks practical expression. Upon such criticism, he develops his ethical understanding of God, particularly from a Christological point of view that addresses the Dalit problems in the everyday context.

Rajkumar begins his theological position by questioning the existing lethargic approach of the pathos epistemology of the Dalit theology and looks for praxis-based Biblical paradigms of liberation. Rajkumar writes that:

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\text{My argument is that, given the state of the Indian Church, there is need for a biblical paradigm that will both offer a critique of casteism within the Church as well as enable the Church, which is predominantly Dalit, to participate more effectively in the task of Dalit liberation. Hence, there is need for: (1) a paradigm which will enable the Indian Church to derive the predicates of the obligatory which constitute an ethical response to caste discrimination, and (2) a paradigm which will offer space for the Dalit communities to derive an agential self-identity… whereby the Dalits valorise their identity as agents.}\]

To achieve the goal of a practical Christology, Rajkumar hopes that one should look into the fundamental view of Dalit life – the caste and its implication within the ethical paradigm. Since caste is a general category of problem he specifies as ‘purity and pollution’, an ethical category is central to the cause of Dalit sufferings. Having assumed the potentials of Dalit movements, Rajkumar expresses this lacuna in exercising the liberation paradigms in the Dalit situation. According to him:

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\text{The lacuna between theology and action can effectively be bridged through an ethical framework, which will help Christians to rethink their attitudes to caste from a Christian perspective. Dalit theology should offer space to derive the predicates of the obligatory which constitute an ethical response to caste-based discrimination. So, it becomes imperative for Dalit theology to offer an ethical framework to engage with caste.}\]

Rajkumar believes that the perpetual problem of the Indian caste system is the social division that forces people to be exclusive in their own social layers. He argues that the relevance and foundation of doing Dalit theology precisely must be to identify discrimination among such social layers, particularly with the bottom layers of the Dalits.

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96 Peniel Rajkumar, “‘How’ Does the Bible Mean? The Bible and the Dalit Liberation in India,” *Political Theology* 11, no. 3 (2010): 419.

Rajkumar believes that this impact has gone to the psyche of the Dalits. The problem happens due to the internalisation of knowledge of the nexus between prejudice and elitism in the Indian caste situation and it can be best understood through the notes of purity and pollution. However, “Dalit theology has not taken up the pedagogic function of pointing to Christian ethical principles on the basis of which caste-based discrimination that can be morally assessed.” Rajkumar claims that one of the failures of Dalit theology is that no sufficient study has been conducted so far on the far-reaching consequences of the union of purity and pollution and the influence they wield on the ‘caste psyche’ with regard to the Indian caste system.

4.5.1 Dalit Christology: Beyond Pathos Epistemology

Before we discuss Rajkumar’s understanding of Christ, we need to know why he develops his Christ differently than the earlier Dalit theologians. Rajkumar’s understanding of Christ begins from criticism against the previous models of Dalit Christology, developed on pathos epistemology. For Rajkumar, it is problematic to follow the Latin American liberation theology for appropriating the Dalit suffering or pathos. Like Rajkumar, many Dalit theologians have noted the limitation of appropriating contextual theologies to the Dalit theology without knowing the in-depth notion of caste dynamics in the Indian context. One such theologian, James Massey, directly comments that the “Latin American liberation theology, black theology, Minjung theology and the Filipino theology of struggle, certainly help us in understanding the role of history in the constrains of Dalit theology. Nevertheless, in India, there are a number of questions and doubts raised with regard to the history of the Dalits.” Indian theology cannot have an authentic theology without being critical about its own historical consciousness. Like Massey, Rajkumar is also sensitive to the historical consciousness of the Dalits in the Dalit Christology offered by earlier theologians. He believes that pathos falls into such a category of epistemology in Dalit theology. According to him, “Dalit theology’s epistemological premise of pathos under which Dalit Theology has worked out its Christology leaves insufficient space for critical praxis.” In this context, Rajkumar observes three major problems with the pathos model of Dalit Christology.

First, pathos epistemology in Dalit theology valorised the Dalits sufferings rather than finding solutions. Pathos or suffering becomes an uncritical category of Dalit historical consciousness. Though Nirmal had forwarded this perspective, Rajkumar understands that such an approach was common among Dalit theologians. For instance, M.E. Prabhakar

98 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 60.
100 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 115.
describes this historical consciousness of the Dalits and which is the primary experience for them in their suffering alone. “It is only the first-hand Dalit experience of suffering that reveals the unparalleled depth of pathos and misery in the historical Dalit consciousness.”

This statement has an underlying factor of projecting the pathos and misery of the Dalit community. This has also directly interconnected with the sufferings of God. It may be for this reason that Devasahayam, another Dalit theologian, presses us to move further to connect God’s struggle in the struggle of the Dalits. This struggle is “the joyous proclamation that in Jesus we have salvation, or liberation or new life, free from oppressive and dehumanising forces and structures.” In all these approaches, the suffering or the pathos of the Dalits is valorised and connected to the sufferings of God. According to Rajkumar, the pathos-based Christology helps the Dalits to understand God’s share in their sufferings but not as one that needs to be challenged and transformed.

Second, Rajkumar questions the failure of forming a new image of the God of Dalits. In order to communicate this point, he uses social and cultural theories of emic and etic, which are used in the area of linguistics. While articulating the Dalit pathos Christology Rajkumar believes that there is a tension between the emic (inside) and etic (outside) concepts, which is the issue between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ community. Rajkumar argues that the Dalit image of God should be a critical interaction with an ‘inside’ conceptualization rather than the imposed model from outside. Although the Dalits seldom used the theoretical language of emic and etic, Rajkumar takes this concept of the limitation of the ‘rhetoric of divine decent’. As in the Aryan myth, the Deuteronomic model of liberation would serve only the Aryan invasion and their powerful oppression of the Dalits and not the Dalit’s struggle to find a solution to their own emancipation.

Third, it gives a weak biblical interpretation on the knowledge of God. The biblical stories project a liberator from outside from whom the liberation of the people can be expected. Rajkumar finds a similar problem in the Dalit theology. Keeping this in mind, he writes that “we need to recognise that the exodus paradigm is incompatible with the experiences of the Dalits at several points. Firstly, the image of the ‘Victor-hood’ of God, which emerges from this paradigm is highly estranged in its conformity to Dalit experience.” Secondly, “recruiting God as an ally in suffering could be counter-productive for Dalit libertines they would merely inure the Dalits to their suffering rather than inspiring

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101 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 412.
103 Rajkumar, “Rethinking Dalit Theology from the Perspective of Dalithos,” 5-6.
104 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 61.
105 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 62.
them to transform the present situation injustice.” It is his apprehension that such a Christology offers “little space for Dalits to question injustice and discrimination.”106 The model of liberation as expected by the liberation theologians is that of an ‘outside agency’ and this helps stimulate a lethargic approach to the praxis model. The Dalits were given an idea that someone from outside would come and help them from their subjected situations. For example, the most used biblical passage is the exodus event in the Old Testament. Rajkumar rejects the appropriation of Exodus or Deuteronomist creed paradigm of God in Dalit theology. According to him, Nirmal and Devasahayam have promoted this model relying on the model of Latin American Liberation Theology where Gustavo Gutierrez uses the exodus paradigm to emphasise God’s leading hand on Israel.107

Rajkumar laments, therefore, the lack of an ethical Christ rather than a doctrinal Christ. So, he continues his position saying:

In the light of this lack of Christian moral restraints on discrimination, it is easy to understand why the Church has been ineffective in addressing the case of Dalits. On this basis it can be claimed that one of the reasons the failures of Dalit theology to impact Christian attitudes towards Dalit discrimination is due to the lack of ethical guidelines to direct people’s response to caste.108

It is the ethical values of Christian theology that can eradicate the Dalit psyche, which became immune to the historic discrimination of the Dalits. To combat the ‘caste psyche’ Rajkumar proposes a new ethical perspective of Dalit theology. Rajkumar’s above three criticisms helped him to form a new idea of Christological affirmation. Rajkumar envisions his Christology as a new reading of Dalit life through the lens of Dalithos.109

4.5.2 Dalithos: A Methodology Towards Rajkumar’s Christology

A new reading of Dalit theology is proposed by Rajkumar on the basis of the “fluid and hybrid” categories of the present Dalit identity.110 Rajkumar imagines that Dalit emancipation is possible only by appropriating a Dalithos reading, which is different from the traditional

106 Rajkumar, “‘How’ Does the Bible Mean? The Bible and the Dalit Liberation in India,” 417-18.
107 Rajkumar, “‘How’ Does the Bible Mean? The Bible and the Dalit Liberation in India,” 415.
108 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 60.
109 Dalithos meaning ‘Dalit-ethos’ is a shift from the general notion of pathos epistemology to ethological reading. “Ethos here refers to the philosophy as well as the system of values of Dalit life and culture which regulate understating of the divine, as well as community vision.” See Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, “A Dalithos Reading of a Marken Exorcism: Mark 5:1-20,” The Expository Times 118, no. 9 (2007): 428.
110 Rajkumar summarises, is “a heuristic category (that) can perform a critical function as a template and as a cursor holding together the generic and the specifics of Dalit identity in judicious balance.” See also Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, “Survival, Sub-Alternation and Subversion: The Diversity and Dialectics of Dalit Dissent-Implications for a Dalit Theology of Liberation,” Bangalore Theological Forum 41, no. 2 (2009): 135. Rajkumar calls Dalithos, known as a paradigm that contributes to recognise an all-encompassing liberation of the Dalits.
method of understanding Dalit theology. In a general note he says that “so far, the basis for theology in contemporary circles has been varied: orthodoxy (doctrine as the basis), orthopraxis (practice as and key), orthopathy (pathos or affection as the objective).” For him, the above cited methodologies neither celebrate the Dalit identity or their specifics nor overcome the fluid and hybrid approach to their problems. This produces a tension between generic and specific identities. His proposed methodology of Dalit theology can become reflexive of the basic Dalit life situation and it should be found in new ways of understanding the Dalit ethos.

Rajkumar’s criticism could be seen in the lack of ethical praxis in the Dalit theology rather than theological deliberations. Scholars like Prabhakar had done some extensive thought on the ethical view of justice in the Dalit theology prior to Rajkumar. It is important to briefly understand Prabhakar’s ethical note on Dalit theology to comprehend what Rajkumar offers differently in Dalithos. The two major words that Prabhakar uses for his ethical narrative on Dalits are ‘oppression’ and ‘liberation’. Ethically, God stands with the oppressed and liberates them from their sufferings. “Jesus Christ, the saviour, is the one who gave his life as a ransom for many and who will come again to establish God’s justice on earth and fully liberate the oppressed form of the misery of human sin and suffering.” Dalits would think of “God being concerned and caring for them as Protector and Helper and leading them out of oppression.” Prabhakar asserts that for the Indian Christian Dalits, to know Jesus Christ is to realise that the “God of Jesus Christ will save them from inhumanity, social oppression, economic exploitation and cultural subjugation,” meaning a complete ethical transformation of the society. This position is a shift from inhumanity to humanity. On an ethical ground, what the Dalits think of Jesus Christ and God’s saving act in and through him “is integrally linked with their dehumanised social existence and their hope for a future in Christ, freed from all inhumanity and injustice.” This historic and human activity does not stop the Dalit ethos from talking about its eschatological vision. The eschatological perspective in the Dalit theology had never failed in its formation. Prabhakar affirms that it is the “historical process, in their context of suffering and struggles against ‘earthly oppression’… God in Jesus Christ is the liberator in history.” This is the salvific but not praxis approach of the Dalits ethics.

112 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 405.
113 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 408.
114 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 409.
115 Prabhakar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” 405.
While Dalit theologians commonly understand the above Dalit ethical notion as a specific historical consciousness and its implication on the eschatological vision, Rajkumar’s Dalithos goes much deeper. He categorically affirms that the very process of doing Dalit theology (God-talk) “is political and practical ethics, since it is an act of ‘speaking truth to power’ from below which seeks to redefine interrelationship between different communities along more egalitarian and mutually affirming lines.”

He envisions that a Dalit theology and its God must be a process that is “quintessentially a justice-seeking and anti-exclusive theology.” In this process, God is understood as a social liberator who confirms the transformation in the socio-economic life of the Dalits. Rajkumar puts forward this concept in most of his writing. According to him a God (theology) experience and identity “anticipates and inspires the work of Dalit towards socio-economic liberation and seeks to empower Dalits through the affirmation of the subjugated and denigrated Dalit identity.”

Dalit theology, for Rajkumar, is Dalithos and it is a political activity. He articulates this claim well, saying, “it effectually exposes and ruptures the prevailing, sometimes theologically sustained, hegemony and subverts the political dividends of theology to serve the oppressed and challenge the oppressors.”

Understanding God from the perspective of praxis through political engagement is an action-oriented theology where God is the one historically involved in the struggle of the people and liberates them from their present suffering to a state of ‘full’ humanity. Thus, he summarises his thoughts as “both theological reflection and theo-political action shaped, sustained and directed by the vision of the divine reign of justice equality and peace, and is a theology which affairs the fullness of life for all.”

In this explanation of Dalithos one must note two specific words that Rajkumar uses – ‘divine reign’ or ‘fullness of life’. Though he does not expand these natures of his God in Dalithos, the theology that lies in these words is significant in his theological appropriation.

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120 Rajkumar, “Dalit Theology: The ‘Untouched’,” 146.
121 Rajkumar, “Dalit Theology: The ‘Untouched’,” 146.
122 Rajkumar, “Dalit Theology: The ‘Untouched’,” 146.
From the Dalithos methodology, he develops a Christological perspective taking over an ‘orthoethos’ perspective. This perspective is an imagination of a “new basis for the methodology for Dalit theology (Christology) – ‘orthoethos’ (location, context and orientation as primary elements), where the experiential – expressive praxis assumes primacy.” He argues that the logic behind appropriating an ethological methodology:

is simple – that the existential models that have proved serviceable to Dalit life so far should shape Dalit theology. The category Dalit should (re)shape Dalit Christology. Dalithos as a heuristic category helps us to set identity parameters for identifying the ‘Dalit’, holding both the generic and the specifics in creative tension.

Rajkumar’s Dalithos methodology aims at a more critical-praxis mode. For him, Dalit theology does not offer the necessary Christic impetus prompting a pragmatic transformation.

4.5.3 Dalit Christology: A Praxis Christology

The solution to the Dalit liberation through an ethical ground, as Rajkumar observes, has to be sourced within the biblical narratives. To get the impetus for such a movement, the healing story in the gospel helps in developing a positive Christology. With the priority of the appropriation of such healing hermeneutics among the Christian Dalits, Rajkumar hopes to seek a new paradigm of Dalit praxis for justice and identity. With this confidence he writes, “making the synoptic healing as the alternative paradigm for our constructive purpose allows sufficiently for this ethical impetus for the Dalits because primarily it opens up scope for articulating a Christological paradigm of resistance, and protest.” As a synoptic account of healing, Rajkumar primarily proposes the healing of the Leper, which becomes his vision of Dalit Christology on an ethical basis of theology.

For Rajkumar, this model of the healing of the Leper engenders a praxis Christology similar to the praxis of Jesus. The healing of the Leper story addresses the issue of caste practice based on the theory of purity and pollution. Such a Christology can delineate the practical relevance of the principles of faith, compassion, and confrontation over against a context governed by regulations imposed by an ideology of purity and pollution. Such a Christology can draw out, in other words, the implications of a Dalit Christology of liberation. In his hermeneutical position, this story brings about ‘touch’ through two
oppositional motifs: boundary-reinforcement and boundary-transcendence. Jesus uses the praxis of ‘touch’. Touch to the untouchable Dalit bodies is the primary praxis of Christology that Rajkumar offers in this thesis. Especially, the relevance to this touch is based on the Orthodox-Dalit conversation of initiates in a Christological formula. Jesus’ touch becomes more than physical, but an act that leads from untouch to touch. In the Leper narrative, the transcendent boundaries lead again to a confrontational witness and Jesus’ anger. On the other hand, even the leper transcends the boundaries. He transgresses the purity regulations and touches Jesus. In so doing, it is not an outside agency that takes the liberty of liberation, rather the Leper is empowered to be healed and to touch. Since Jesus is identified as a Leper – by breaking the social norms of touch – Jesus is not seen as an outsider but an insider. In this process, Rajkumar believes that a new model of Dalit concern has emerged from ‘pathos’ to ‘praxis’, which is the practical touch of God within the historical consciousness of Dalits. For him, this is the Christology of ‘inter-relationality’.

To push the matter further, Rajkumar understands the inter-relationship between the Dalit Christology and a ‘consciousness’ for ‘full humanness’. Rajkumar sees this in relation to the Cross and the resurrection. Dalit consciousness becomes a function of Dalitness, which is embedded with the experience of Cross and resurrection. Christology in the Dalit perspective, therefore, Rajkumar believes, is an inter-relationality between the ‘Dalit consciousness’ and the Dalit sufferings. Jesus takes the pain and pathos of the oppressed while suffering on the Cross. According to him, “the Cross and the resurrection become metaphors for the victory of Jesus over the shackles that suppress and discriminate against the suffering ones.” The preferential option for the poor, as seen in the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus is another significant identification of Dalit Christology. It notes that the Nazareth manifesto is given, not for the Dalits, but not for non-Dalits. Dalit Christology, therefore, is intrinsically connected to the idea of the servanthood by understanding God as the suffering servant and the participation of the Dalits in the same suffering to make God not an outside agency but an insider.

Although Rajkumar also upholds the truth of the suffering of the Dalits as their existing experience, his expression of Christ takes a role of insider and representing himself as a process of healing. This healing is the healing of the Dalit body and Dalit consciousness. Through his Dalithos, he significantly argues for the necessity of the ‘immanent or human’

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128 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 116.
129 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 116-20.
130 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 51.
131 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 51-52.
expression for the liberation or the identity of the Dalit life. Suggestively, he takes the political involvement of the immanent seriously.

On the other hand, how does Rajkumar understand the transcendent or divine nature of Christ? It is evident that Rajkumar has not rejected the transcendent experience of God even though he puts his effort to explain how a praxis-oriented notion of God could be an idea that brings complete liberation to the Dalit life. Moreover, his use of ‘reign of God’, ‘fullness of life’, ‘suffering of God’, and the theological impetus of the ‘Cross’ are suggestive of his implied notion of a transcendent God. In this view, it is justifiable to understand that Rajkumar’s Christological attempt was to find an inter-relationality that does not deny the immanent or human within the notion of the transcendent or divine. He does imagine this approach of Christology on an abstract or ontological level rather an ethical praxis – a biblical touch – that offers complete liberation to the Dalit life.

4.6 Conclusion

The above analysis provides a wide range of scope in understanding Christology from the Indian Dalit perspective. While consolidating the three-generation Dalit theologians the foremost position on Dalit Christology is its central premises of considering the significant move from the classical or philosophical interpretation to the contextual or immanent Christ. This radical shift in the Indian Christian theology compels us to imagine Christ from below. In this process, Christ is understood from the very Dalit experience of pathos or sufferings, by giving a preferential option for the Dalits to understand God in their own identity of servitude.

Christ’s historical events such as suffering on the Cross, the death, and the resurrection are appropriated for a balanced Dalit Christology. Unlike many other contextual theologies, the Dalit theology summarises the particularity (immanent) and the universality (transcendent) of God without much complexity, even though the immanence or humanity of God becomes its foundation. For instance, the sensitiveness of the divine and human consideration of Christology is well woven in all three generations of Dalit theologians.

When Nirmal considers the pathos epistemology as the basis for the Dalit Christology, he also offers a middle path embrace of both the divinity and humanity of Christ. This does not mean that Nirmal rejected the historical, social and economic conditions of the Dalits. Rather, he finds the fullness of Christology from the concrete historical context, though he had his own reservations on the ‘exclusive methodology of Dalit theology’. Similarly, Sathianathan Clarke furthered himself to draw attention to the immanent symbols of Dalit religions and appropriated an all-embracing divine and human discourse on God. In this sense, more than a
theological discontinuity, it was a shift of understanding God from transcendence to immanence or from purity to pathos. This is the foundation of Dalit liberation. Rajkumar, on the other hand, proposed a new lens of Daithos for reading Dalit God. His focus was more on the human participation in the praxis/ethical level for God to act in the social and ethical life of Dalits. In a strict sense, he envisioned a Christology of inter-relationality, or a biblical ‘touch’ which hopes to bring the essential category of historical human and divine characteristics of Jesus Christ.

The findings of this chapter help us to understand how the human-divine characteristics of Dalit Christology move from below. Although it emerged in the scope of the radical discontinuity to the traditional philosophical way of considering Indian Christian theology, with all its decent voices, it does not lose the original Christological category of the divine-human agreement. Unlike the transcendental emphasis of traditional Christology, the Dalit Christology offers a new lens with an emphasis on immanence, but not immanence alone. The immanent struggle of the Dalit people is projected in the Dalit Christology. When looking forward to introducing conversations with the Christology of Orthodoxy in India, these findings are significant to develop a common ground to explore the possibilities within their own tradition of Christology. To achieve this goal, the next chapter examines the central theme of Orthodox Christology in India.
5. ‘One Nature’: Transcendent and Immanent Miaphysite Christology

They (early teachers) never denounced the world created by God as deserving condemnation. Instead they believed in the all-pervading Spirit of God who inspires creatively and aspirations for all good irrespective of the borders of the visible Christian community.

K.M. George¹

The Hindus (Aryans) who accepted the Christian faith did not change their inherited world-view. In this world-view the caste system, or for that matter, untouchability, was perfectly acceptable just as slavery was justified in the West until the last century in spite of the enlightened Christian civilisation.

Jacob Parappally²

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the divine-human Christological characteristics of Dalit theology. The exclusive experience of the ‘suffering and pathos’ of the Dalit community seems to be the main stimulus of such a Christology. By drawing attention to the different liberative and inclusive aspects of the suffering and pathos, Dalit Christology offered an imagination of the immanent nature of God in Christ. It emphasises the humanity of Christ without affecting transcendence or divinity. This Christology not only challenged the philosophical theology that was the central attraction of the Indian Christian theology but also appropriated a Christology from below.

In this process, first, Dalit Christology problematized the Dalit body. The question of the polluted Dalit body and the pure Brahmanic body came under creative tension. The Dalit suffering body becomes a crucial site to understand the nature of God’s body with its potential for suffering and pathos. It is in this way that Dalit Christology epistemologically acknowledges the suffering and pathos of human beings to understand its theology. The social binary of purity and pollution played an important role to develop a theology here. This social binary or duality attaches to the purity of transcendence against the pollution of evil or immanence.

Second, against the popular Indian philosophical concept of theology based on a social binary or duality, Dalit Christology looked into a God in Christ, who suffered on the Cross,

died, and was resurrected. A theological binary of the transcendent verses immanent also maps within the discussion of Christology. When the philosophical theology ignores the inseparable identity of the immanent nature, Dalit Christology is grounded in the immanent nature of God.

As a practical attribution of this social binary into the theological life of the Dalit community, the Dalits were denied transcendence or divinity in their life. Transcendence was attached to purity and was attributed only to Brahmins descendants who are inherently pure. Dalits being seen as ‘no people’ or ‘polluted’, have no scope to achieve transcendence as per Vedic philosophical thought. Their identity of Dalit materiality or the immanent experiences exists due the polluted nature that they are created with. In this situation, no God experience is allowed for Dalits, but they are free to find their God in their material or immanent realities of life. In other words, the Dalits find their spiritual source from the immanent situations of Dalit life.

For this reason, Dalit theologians considered the Dalit pathos as an immanent God experience to the Dalit community. They understood Dalit symbols like Dalit drum, as an immanent expressions of Dalit life extending to the experience of an immanent God in Christ. Sometimes it also goes beyond the conventional approach and suggests finding the God experience from Dalit materiality. However, inherently they have not denied the transcendental experience of God but imagined transcendence within the category of immanence.

In this context, to initiate conversations with Dalit Christology, Orthodox theology must refresh its language of an immanent God, not the transcendental alone, drawing attention to the human condition. Dalit theologians have already shown their potential willingness to have conversations with the theologies around, especially with those who could share the God experience within the experience of the sufferings of the people. It is the immanent God who brings the commonness of theology in India. In short, one should have a theology that not only speaks about the transcendental God alone but also a God within the concrete life situations.

When observing Orthodox Christology, miaphysite Christology stands out with great practical potential when considering the immanent nature of God in Christ. Other than a

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3 See the discussion of Dalit exclusivism and the possibility of opening the Dalit theological conversations with other theological traditions mentioned in the third chapter.

4 ‘Miaphysite’ is a term for understanding the one-nature Christology or Monophysite. The term “miaphysite” is grammatically correct to denote one-nature. In the recent scholarship, scholars avoid the term ‘monophysite’. See Dietmar W. Winklear, “Monophysites,” in G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 586-8. The miaphysite approach of theology does not only stress the importance of the human nature of Christ, but also envisions communicating it through the liturgical and theological means
philosophical epistemology that shares thoughts from Indian philosophical or cultural identity or the euro-centric philosophical theology, Orthodoxy in India is indebted to the miaphysite Christology that speaks about a Christology that can exist only when the immanence of God (from below) is inseparable with the divinity (from above). Although Orthodox theology is highly misunderstood as a theology ‘from above’, one cannot neglect its capability to recognise theology ‘from below’. The Orthodox theology in India upholds the suffering of Christ and extends the theological thoughts through the culmination of Christ’s suffering and his resurrection as a central path for Christology. It is the suffering and the resurrection that carries the inner logic of the immanent and transcendent nature of God in Christ as at no time are ‘Christ events’ separate from the logic of the union of the transcendent-immanent.

The theological reason for setting these respective Dalit and Orthodox Christologies into conversation lies in the appropriation of the ‘suffering body’ of Christ. This theological language of the ‘suffering’ of the people and ‘suffering on the Cross’ can stimulate a conversation between these two traditions. The central theme of miaphysite Christology rests on the confession of Christ putting on or clothing (\(l\)-besh) a human body by identifying the bodies of human suffering. God putting on the human body raises two issues: first, recognising Christ’s body as a fully human body except for sin and second, the non-duality of Christ’s body. These two important theological factors will help us to initiate discourses with the Dalit theology, which emphasises similar concerns in the Dalit Christology claiming a Christology that renounces binary or division in the Christological plans.

However, Indian Orthodoxy faces the criticism that it emphasises the transcendental understanding of God over the immanent one. This criticism reduced the immanent category of God in Orthodox Christology. In this view, a reinterpretation of the miaphysite Christology is necessary to understand the inner possibilities of such Christology in the Indian context. This can accomplish, on the one hand, a converging theological space with

\[5\] As discussed in the previous chapter, a few exceptions of theologians, focusing on the margins of the Indian society cannot be ignored in the Indian Christian theological thinking. In the Orthodox and other theological traditions, a few examples of this exceptions are: Paulose Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence, the Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa* (Ca 330 to 395 a.d.) (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988), Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, *The Theology of a Classless Society* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1979), M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Crucial Issues of the Theology of Mission in the Contemporary India* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1971). However, the positive affirmation to these theologians could be they methodologically retained the category of ‘poor and the downtrodden’ in theology but have not specifically engaged their theology from the Dalit perspective. In the Indian context, this says a lot. If it is from the Orthodoxy in the Indian context, caste becomes more political to these theologians. Discarding their dominant caste identity is nearly impossible for them and their theology remains in the vast category of ‘poor’, but not particularly the Dalits, in their language, the untouchables.

the contextual theologies, and, on the other hand, a method of reconciling initiatives with those who are neglected, distanced or untouched. This process would enable both communities to come together to celebrate the common theological tasks in India and to move forward in setting the goals of learning from each other for the liberation of the communities who continue to be in the margins of society.

To deepen the nuances of Orthodox claims, this chapter investigates miaphysite Christology with special attention to the immanent nature of Christ and Christ’s body with its inseparable one nature – the divine and the human – to engage with Dalit Christology in India. It also focuses how the ‘suffering of Christ’ is not only appropriated as a theological notion but liturgically used to affirm the humanity of Christ within the social space of human suffering. Since there are huge volume of literature available on miaphysite Christology, this chapter examines the route of one nature of Christology of Severus of Antioch, a key figure in the miaphysite Christology and a few other miaphysite theologians in this school of thought. Before we explore Severus, the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria, to whom Severus is heavily indebted for his understanding of Christology is also examined.

5.2 Miaphystie Christology in India: An Introductory Note

It is believed that miaphysite Christology is one of the earliest Christological traditions that Indian Christianity experienced. Though it did not produce any indigenous form, many identified the creative latitudes and the “ever-burning” characteristics of this theology. For this “ever-burning” theology, R.H.S. Boyd gives credit to Severus of Antioch as the main proponent. Boyd comments that the Indian miaphysite theology of Severus shines a particular light on Indian Christian theological tradition. It is true that other than the Chalcedon formula of Christology followed by the Catholic and Protestant traditions, miaphysite Christology


also offers an opportunity to critically delve into the complexities of the social margins in India though it has not done much along this line. Severus’s Christological formulation is crucial to an Indian theological student to be able to interact with immanent realities of the Dalit life.

One of the farsighted aspects of Severus is that when he developed his Christology, he did not reduce the human aspect of Christ. This means that Severus was concerned with the need to emphasise the immanent Christ. Against the Chalcedonian term ‘in two natures’, Severus put forward the ‘one-nature’ Christology where he emphasised the importance of the humanity of Christ. When considering the ‘one nature’, for him, it diffuses the duality. According to Severus, the humanity or immanent nature of God never separates intellectually (en theoria) from the divinity at any time. As Pauline Allan suggests, the duality of the natures disappears with the union as Severus envisions the Christology. It is this hypostatic becoming of humanity of God the Son; one-nature in humanity and divinity of God. Severus received his Christological impetus from Cyril of Alexandria (370-444), who empathetically looked into the Chalcedon and non-Chalcedon Christological formula.

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12 Brock, Fitzgerald, Two Early Lives of Severos, 9.
13 Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 34.
15 Though Cyril is honoured by both the Chalcedonians and non-chalcedonians, it is true that the council of Chalcedon changed the entire climate of Christian history in 451. The vertical divisions of the Chalcedon council brought a new face in the Christian belief system. The council broke into two groups the Chalcedonians or Malachite/dyophysites and non-Chalcedonians or Monophysites who generated their own religious and political identities. Both accused each other of heresy. V.C. Samuel, The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined: A Historical and Theological Survey (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1977), 89-122. The shift in the writings of the fathers on each side has focused on legitimising their expression of faith countering the heretical position of the Other. With the Roman political power, the Chalcedonians achieved an upper hand in their claim. In this process, the non-Chalcedonians were treated as spiritually lower, socially excluded, and ecclesiastically heretical. In short, the name monophysites is an attributed name to those who did not accept the diaphysite Christology. There was, of course, no “going over to the monophysites”, because the category “monophysite” was one artificiality created by the Byzantine Church. The Asians and Africans knew their Christology, and advanced no doctrine of one physis, which means only (one) nature, but taught in mia physis, meaning one single (united) nature. They do not use persona to define Christ using hypostasis – meaning (substance) or
5.3 Cyril of Alexandria: Beacon to Severus’ Immanent Nature

The need for Severus to turn to Cyril was primarily to reject the Diaphysite, the Nestorian, and the Eutychian Christologies, which he believed to be heretical. By taking a miaphysite Christological view, Severus seeks Cyril’s help to understand the foundational beliefs of ‘one nature’ Christology.\textsuperscript{16} Frederic Alpi, a Severian scholar affirms that:

\begin{quote}
In the name of fidelity to the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria (370-444), he [Severus] excluded all those who asserted the two natures of Christ after the union, anathemizing not only Nestorius (opposed by Cyril at Ephesus in 431) and Eutyches (condemned at Chalcedon in 451), but also Chalcedon itself, for he considered the doctrine of “dyophysitism” of this latter council as an hypocritical revival of the Nestorian heresy.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The Chalcedon council’s discarding “either Alexandrian or Antiochian thinking, and so to restrict how an understanding of Christ was expressed” could not succeed.\textsuperscript{18} On the other


\textsuperscript{17} Alpi, “Severus of Antioch and the Eastern,” 297-98.

\textsuperscript{18} Torrance, “Paradigm Change in Sixth-Century Christology,” 277. The term ‘Antiochian School’ was heavily misunderstood by the Western Church as heretical due to some common heretical leaders who had a close connection to the Antiochian school of theology. For instance, the danger of overemphasising the humanity of Christ or the divinity of Christ happened in the same school and was always questioned, rejected or anathematised by the doctors or the synods of the Antiochian School. If we think about Nestorius and Theodore Christology, it can be called a high Christology. The positions and teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Diodore, Nestorius within the Antiochian School created the notion of heterodoxical and canonical positions. Thus, one cannot fully claim that the Antiochian School was always canonical; for instance, the theologies of Theophilos, Paul of Samosata, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Diodore, Nestorius, from Antioch. These figures were questioned for not taking the humanity seriously, but also for not balancing both the divinity and humanity of Jesus. See V.C. Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church,” \textit{Greek Orthodox Theological Review} 13 (1968): 152-164. However, this point, the discussion of humanity was always serious in the Syrian Orthodox tradition. In most cases, scholars from both Western and Eastern schools, uncritically use the term ‘Antiochian school’ coupled with the non-Chalcedonian theology. Moss, \textit{Incorruptible Bodies}, 46-47. E. Glenn Hinson, \textit{The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages} (Nashville, NA: Abingdon Press, 1996), 310-25. For a modern Western reader, we must emphasise the fact that the Antiochian school was generally understood as a combination of both the Nestorian and non-Nestorian schools. For instance, E. Glenn Hinson, a Western historical theologian misunderstands it. Hinson, \textit{The Early Church}, 312.
hand, the Antiochian and Alexandrian schools continued the legacy of their Christological position. Cyril considers as the authority in the Alexandrian Christology and Severus takes it up through Antiochian tradition.

Some Scholars debate Severus’ influence on Cyril. Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler believe that Severus’ sole influence was from Cyril. However, Pauline Allen, another Severian scholar, opines that Severus was more heavily influenced by John Chrysostom. However, Severus’ deep obligation to Cyril when developing his miaphysite Christology cannot be ignored. According to Bishop Suriel, Severus impressively synthesised the Antiochian and the Cyrillic Alexandrian Christology concerning the incarnation of Logos. Like Suriel, Iain R. Torrance, another scholar of Severus, also testifies to Severus’ theological allegiance to Cyril of Alexandria. However, Cyril’s position on Christ’s humanity depicts Severus’ Cyrilian influence. Tadros Y. Malaty, an Orthodox theologian observes how this Christological perspective of Cyril vividly demonstrates the importance of Christ’s humanity. For Severus, in Christ, “hunger and all other human and physical disabilities were united and made His own by God and Son in His incarnate state.” Christ identifying with the common humanhood was not much appreciated.

Paradoxically, Cyril’s theology was accepted by both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian groups. Cyril’s context of Nestorius and Theodorus forced him to imagine a Christology to which both the Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians took a similar approach, though the expression of the language was different. The difference that Cyril expressed in his Christology was different to that of the Chalcedonian view. He learned a sharper vocabulary of the unity of nature of Christ as ‘one nature of God the Word incarnate’, which was in one


19 The school of Antioch understood the significance of the humanity of God through the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem from the early fourth century as unaffected with Hellenistic thoughts. The theological position of Christ in the Antiochian during this period was expressed in the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem the Syrian. They propose a simple God-human Christology without any Hellenistic or Alexandrian philosophical model of Christ. Barsoum, History of Syriac Literature and Sciences, 77-80.

20 Among the fathers, for Severus, there was no higher authority than Cyril. Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, Christ in Christian Tradition: Vol. 2, From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604) Part. 2, the Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century, trans. John Cawte and Pauline Allen (London: Mowbray, 1995), 21.


24 Tadros Y. Malaty, Christology: According to the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1986), 4.


26 However, non-Chalcedonian argue that the Chalcedonies Christology is closer to the Nestorianism.
way difficult to accept in the Chalcedonian camps. Iain Torrence’s study of this topic affirms that Cyril was accepted in both the camps as their true teacher probably because of his theological response to the common heretical teaching of Nestorius, Theodorius, and Apollinarian Logos-sarx milieu. From the accusation of the overemphasis of the humanity of Christ by Nestorius, a clarity in the ‘immanence’ of Christ by Cyril gives the right sign to understand even Severus’ Christology. However, Severus made use of his predecessors, particularly Cyril to whom he is mostly indebted for his Christology.

Severus’ doctrine of Christology is considered as the truth faith (orthodox) by many miaphysite schools of churches in the Eastern province, including the Coptic church, in the sixth century. Operating on this claim, the miaphysites, especially the Antiochian school, rooted their Christological position on the emphasis of an inseparable union of the divinity and the humanity in Christ with careful handling of the humanity of Christ. Differently stated, the Antiochian School of theology has never departed from the significance of the theology from ‘below’ (humanity) or ‘above’ (divinity). God’s immanent presence and close link to the human life is promoted through this theology. This is, as V.C. Samuel suggests:

…since the one Christ is one nature and hypostasis of God the Word incarnate from the Godhead and manhood. It necessarily follows that the same is known at once as consubstantial with the father as to Godhead and consubstantial with us as to manhood. The same is the Son of God and Son of man. He is not, therefore, two sons, but he is the one and the same son.

Before we move to the discussion of Severus’ concept of the immanence of Christ, therefore, how Cyril took a serious turn to the immanence of God is a topic of interest.

5.3.1 Nestorius’ Christ and Cyril’s Reaction: Immanent/Human Connection with Mary

Nestorianism though is a polemic teaching that opposes the notion of a hypostatic union of the two natures (humanity and divinity) of Jesus Christ. In this regard, Nestorius’ major

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28 While creating a non-Chalcedonian character of an ecclesiology in Egypt, Syrian and in Armenia with various political reasons, “yet the true battle in the minds of the church leaders was truly on the ground of theology and faith.” Malaty, Christology: According to the Non-Chalcedonian, 3. Many non-Chalcedonian Orthodox leaders view that this new movement began with purely political reasons. It is not true. According to Aloys Grilmeier “It was only under constant pressure from the emperor Marcian that the Fathers of Chalcedon agreed to draw up a new formula of belief,” Grilmeier:1975, vol.1, 543. However, “nobody can ignore the disadvantages of the combined marriage that occurs between politics and religion.” Malaty, Christology: According to the Non-Chalcedonian, 3.

29 All of these expressions are made in their liturgical writings. See Ignatius Patriarch Zakka, “Doctrine of One Nature in the Syrian Rites,” The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 13, no. 2 (1968): 309-315.

argument on Christ was built upon a duality, to which he appropriated the nature of Christ on the basis of Mary, the mother of Christ. Cyril’s refutation in this regard was based on the term *Theotokos* (Mother of God).\textsuperscript{31} For Nestorius, Cyril’s theology on *Theotokos* was unacceptable and he did not intend to give an explanation about how God became human or the role of the ‘transcendent’ in this process. His aim was to discuss how the human partnership is important in this process and liked the term *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ). According to Nestorius, Nicaean Christology is an overemphasised human partnership of Christ. Even though Cyril did not deny the human part in the Christology, he was not ready to overemphasise either the transcendent or the immanent.

In one of the early books about Nestorius’ theology, Bethune-Baker gives a very comprehensive study of the Nestorian controversy from the point of view of Nestorius. Baker and J.F. Bethune affirm that the controversy was precipitated by Nestorius’ protest against the use of the term *Theotokos*.\textsuperscript{32} *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, supposedly written by Nestorius brings out Nestorius’ doctrinal position on Christology.\textsuperscript{33} According to Nestorius, Cyril’s theology seems to be unorthodox, if not Arianism, Docetism or Apollinarianism. He believes that Cyril manipulated the Nicene faith of Sonship and Lordship. To Nestorius, dealing the nature of Christ out of the Nicene formula would lead to a “danger of corruption and of confusion.”\textsuperscript{34}

For Nestorius two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, “One Lord Jesus Christ consubstantial with the Father, none other but one and the same who is one *prosopon* of the two natures: of divinity and of the humanity” is a confused expression of Christology.\textsuperscript{35} Nestorius asks “how then sayest thou, O calumniator, that we have found that the holy fathers thought thus and that they thus were confident in calling the holy virgin the mother of God. Thus, we say that he both suffered and rose?”\textsuperscript{36} Nestorius connects the two aspects of Mother Mary and the Christological doctrines in his theological engagement. When one calls Mary the Mother of God, Nestorius refutes that the fullness of humanity and Christ’s consubstantial nature to God would be jeopardised. For Nestorius:

\textsuperscript{31} ‘Theotokos’, meaning mother of God, the name attributed to Mary. To Nestorius, Mary can be understood only as Christotokos, or Christ’s mother. These terms, respectively Theotokos to Severus and Christotokos to Nestorius influenced them and became foundational in creating their Christology.
\textsuperscript{32} Bethune-Baker, J.F. *Nestorius and His Teaching: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence, With Special Reference to the Newly Recovered Apology of Nestorius (the Bazaar of Heraclides)* (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), 42.
\textsuperscript{33} This book titled Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides is an English translation by G.R. Driver and Leonard Hodgson originally from Syriac version. It is believed that Nestorius wrote this work when he was in exile. Because he is considered a heretic, his books were ordered to be burned. G.R. Driver and Leonard Hodgson, (trans.), *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides; Newly Translate from Syriac and Edited with an Introduction, Notes, & Appendices* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), iv-xii.
\textsuperscript{34} Driver and Hodgson, *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides*, 141-42.
\textsuperscript{36} Driver and Hodgson, *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides*, 149.
Since the Son is man and God, it says that God sent his Son and he was born of a woman (Gal. 4.4); and therein though sees that the name is put which indicates both the natures. Thou callest [him] Son according to the birth from the blessed Virgin, for the Virgin Mother of Christ bore the Son of God. But since the Son of God is twofold in nature, she bares not the Son of God, but she bares the humanity, which is the Son because of the Son who is united thereto.\(^37\)

Nestorius understands the natures of Christ as two separate identities. Mary can bear only the human Jesus but not the divine Jesus. For Nestorius, the divinity of Christ is attached or united later and therefore saluting Mary as Mother of God is heresy. As Lionel R. Wickham puts it, “what Nestorius believed is that the Incarnation is to be explained as a union of wills – the will of God the Son and the will of the human being.”\(^38\)

Nestorius contests Cyril’s non-historic arguments, leading him to continue that Cyril’s ‘hypostatic union’ is unscriptural, unorthodox, destructive of true religion, and unintelligible – unscriptural because it ignores the scriptural distinction between the use of the words ‘Logos’ and ‘Christ’.\(^39\) Nestorius makes his point clear that “by things such as these we confess that Christ is God and man, for of them was born in flesh Christ, who is God above all. When you call Mary the Mother of Christ, [Christ] by union and in separate, you speak of the one and of the one other in the sonship.”\(^40\) Nestorius is scared that if Mary is saluted as Mother of God, then what about the full humanity of Christ and how do we understand the full humanity of Christ in relation to Mary as mother of God? This was a serious Christological problem for Cyril as Cyril conceives Christ’s natures differently than Nestorius.

5.3.2 Cyril’s One-Nature Christ and Importance of Humanity

Cyril believed that Christ’s humanity through Mary itself is the basis of his divinity. For him, the reversal will risk the economy of God in Christ. It is not as two separate entities but one nature of God in which his humanity and divinity are inseparably joined without giving any space for dual thinking. It is Cyril’s use of *mia* (one) and *physis* (nature) that makes the difference from Nestorius. More than finding Cyril’s approach from the point of view of Chalcedon, John McGuckin argues that:

Cyril is happy to accept the notion of ‘two natures’ but feels that this needs qualification if it is to voice a tendency towards the kind of separatism that has been advocated by Nestorius. He wishes to speak of a concurrence to unity ‘from two natures’ but does not posit a union that abides ‘in two natures’. For Cyril, to abide in two natures means to

\(^{37}\) Driver and Hodgson, *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides*, 188.

\(^{38}\) Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria: Selected Letters*, xxxiii.


abide in an ‘un-united’ condition that can only be theoretically applied before the incarnation takes place; the incarnation itself is the resolution to union of the two natures.\footnote{41}{John A. McGuckin, \textit{St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy, Its History, Theology, and Texts} (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 355, n.6.}

Cyril disagrees with the idea of ‘union’, even with Nestorius. Cyril’s major concern is with the question of God incarnate (or in his words ‘Word incarnate’) and its nature. According to Cyril this is to be understood, first, in the union of natures and its implication in view of the ‘Word’ or ‘divine’; and second, its corresponding relation to Mary. Both of these implications are the refuting points of Nestorius, to which Cyril had to respond from the Orthodox or true faith point of view.

Cyril’s Christology, as discussed, pushes on the paradox of Incarnation: the infinite has become finite, the impassable passible, the divine human, opines O’Keefe. For Cyril, the Antiochenes (Nestorius) feared the implications of the Scriptures, preferring their philosophical commitment to the plain sense of the narrative. Oddly, Cyril, who as an Alexandrian is supposed to be more “allegorical” in his interpretations, in this instance is more “literal.”\footnote{42}{O’Keefe, “Impassible Suffering?” 58.}

Cyril refuted Nestorius’ allegation that he reduces the divinity of Christ by attributing Mary into the Divinity of God, ignoring the humanness of Mary. On the other hand, Cyril considered Nestorius’ overemphasis of humanity and the reduction of divinity more problematic. For Cyril, reducing the divinity cannot have an Orthodox Christology.

Cyril affirms that:

\begin{quote}
The Word substantially united to himself flesh, endowed with life and reason, in a manner mysterious and inconceivable, and became man, and was called ‘Son of Man’ uniting it substantially, not merely by way of divine favour or good will, yet neither with the assumption merely of an outward appearance, and that though natures joined together to form a real unity are different, it is one Christ and Son coming from them—not implying that the difference between the natures was abolished through their union but that instead Godhead and manhood [sic] have given us the one Lord, Christ and Son by their mysterious an inexpressible unification.\footnote{43}{Wickham, \textit{Cyril of Alexandria: Selected Letters}, 5-7.}
\end{quote}

Cyril tries to avoid the complication between the Son of Man and Son of God or the divine through the expression of ‘mysterious’ process. The establishment of Godhead and humanhood is less important to Nestorius, but for Cyril, the nature of humanity or humanhood takes a disturbing turn when humanhood suffers when it is equally the Word the God.
Cyril had to explain it well for Nestorius. Responding to Nestorius’ interpretation of the Nicene faith in his second letter, Cyril reminds him that the most important words that we must remember are “word of God being incarnate and being made man.” Cyril’s main issue here with Nestorius is that “we do not mean that the nature of the Word was changed and made flesh or, on the other hand that he was transformed into a complete man consisting of soul and body.” Keeping this in view, Cyril writes his twelfth anathema in his third letter to Nestorius. It reads: “whoever does not acknowledge God’s Word as having suffered in flesh, been crucified in flesh, tasted death in flesh and been made first-born from the dead because as God he is Life and life-giving, shall be anathema.” Cyril emphatically argued for his points on God as he is life and life giving and also sides with the humanity of the whole human being. In turn, with this position, Cyril was criticised for his extravagance for “diminishing” the divinity of Christ or does not directly incorporate Christ into the human.

In short, Cyril’s Christological position on the humanity or immanence of Christ leads to the “one nature” Christology. As W.H.C. Frend observes, the ‘one nature’ of divinity and humanity does not reduce either the ‘high’ or ‘low’, meaning the transcendental or immanent scheme of God. Instead, “if the Godhead existed from all eternity it’s becoming flesh in no way altered it. In assuming humanity and so becoming consubstantial with man [sic] as he was with God, Christ reminds the one physis as he had been before.” In Frend’s theological view, the duality can obliterate the foundation of the economy of God. So, God becoming consubstantial with human, and humanity, which does not deviate from the divine plan, necessitates to fulfilment of the economy of God, which is attained with equal emphasis on the ‘humanity’ or ‘immanence’ of God. The absence of immanence in God can reject the immanent experiments of the human, especially the people who live in the context of suffering and pain.

5.4 Severus’ One-Nature Christology: Humanisation of God

When Severus developed his Christology, he held Cyril’s position. However, he pushed Cyril’s Christology further by clarifying the humanity of Christ and the suffering of God. This aspect of Christology stretches towards the suffering of humanity and particularly the suffering of the people at the margins of the society. To expand Severus’ Christology within

44 Wickham, Cyril of Alexandria: Selected Letters, 5
45 Wickham, Cyril of Alexandria: Selected Letters, 5.
46 Wickham, Cyril of Alexandria: Selected Letters, 33.
the Indian context of ‘pathos of the Dalits’ one must know how he appropriated his Christological confession into a practical mode of understanding Christ.

Essentially, Severus followed a balanced vision of the transcendental and immanent nature of God in Christ but clarified the practical nuances of the humanity of Christ. He begins to address God with a transcendental note that God is “unspeakable and invisible Mysteries, who has the hidden treasures of knowledge and wisdom.” Nonetheless, he does not constrain his thoughts with the transcendental understanding only, rather he continues to say that “God became everything like us, body, and mind and completely united with Adam.” The Chalcedon context and the personal life thereafter helped him to develop an immanent Christology. Differently stated, to refute his Christological thought from the time of Chalcedon, he developed his own voice of an immanent God in Christ.

For Severus, accepting the Chalcedon formulas was extremely difficult on various grounds. For him the Chalcedon division was based not only on politics or culture but also heavily upon the theological, particularly Christological, issues. The roots of the dispute lie in two different understandings of the term ‘nature’ (physis): to supporters of Chalcedon’s diaphysite formula, physis was closer to ousia, ‘essence, being,’ whereas the miaphysites, insisted that the incarnate Christ was one nature. Severus insists that, from a miaphysite point of view, the Chalcedon definition was Nestorian, implying that the Son of God and the Son of Mary were separate subjects. Severus insisted that we should not “attribute the acts of the manhood [sic] only to the human nature, and impute again those of the Godhead separately to God the Word, but they recognise the difference only, not admitting a division: for the principle of union does not admit of division.” Severus’ notion of an undivided nature of Christ, as he quotes from Cyril, is:

…for between Godhead and manhood [sic] I also allow that there is great distinction and distance. For the things which have been named on the principle of manner of existence are clearly different, and in no point like one another. But, when the mystery in Christ is introduced among us, the principle of union is not oblivious of difference, but rejects division, not by mixing or commingling the natures with one another, but that, after the Word of God has partaken of flesh and blood, he is even so understood and named as one Son.

49 Samuel Yesu Athanasius, Konatt Mathen, and Kuriakose Corepiscopa, eds. Trilingual Eucharist Service Book (Cheeranchira, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2008), 444.
50 Athanasius, Mathen, and Corepiscopa, Trilingual Eucharist Service Book, 448.
51 Brock, Fitzgerald, Two Early Lives of Severos, 9.
In this view, there is no space for the division of natures. However, the underlying factor of division has to be seen on the basis of how the God-human relationship is set and is maintained differently in the council. The dyophysitism demarcates the God and human in Christ as two, not one. With this, Severus finds serious problems. It manipulates the properties of the body of Christ.

In his letter to Oecumenius, Severus explains the properties and operations of the (incarnated) body of Christ. According to Severus:

God the flesh does not renounce its existence as flesh, even if it has become God’s flesh, nor has the Word departed from his nature, even if he has been hypostatically united to flesh which possesses a rational and intelligent soul: but the difference also is preserved, and the propriety in the form of natural characteristics of the natures of which Emmanuel consists, since the flesh was not converted into the nature of the Word, nor was the Word changed into flesh.\(^{54}\)

Christ’s body cannot be understood as separate from his divine nature. When one thinks about the body as separate from the ‘divine plan’, the body becomes separate from the divine nature of God. Again, quoting Cyril, Severus speaks about the union of natures in his letter to Valerian Bishop of Iconium. According to Cyril:

…the Word, being God partook of blood and flesh like us, in order that he may be known to be God who was humanised, and who took our flesh, and made this his, because, as the man who was composed of soul and body is known to be one, so also now he is acknowledged to be one Son and Lord. For one nature and hypostasis of a man is acknowledged, though he is known to be made of diverse and heterogeneous element: for the body is truly different in nature from the soul; but it belongs to it, and with it makes up the hypostasis of the one man.\(^{55}\)

In this formula, when Christ is understood as ‘one nature’, divinity does not diminish in humanity as the human body consists of the soul. When the resurrection of Christ’s human body takes place, the nature of the glorious body does not lose its composition. Severus says that “accordingly the flesh remained flesh, even after the God-befitting Resurrection and Ascension, but adorned with divine and ineffable glory, and with all the excellences that befit God; and it is divine as something that is the body of God.”\(^{56}\) Severus develops this concept by referring to the flesh and its glorious nature as to communicate the inseparable unity of divinity and humanity.

When emphasising the need for an immanent Christ, one must know how Severus contributed to the concept of the union of divinity and humanity takes place. In his letter to


the clergy and magistrate Emesa,\textsuperscript{57} he explains how the union of divine and human nature ensued:

‘The divinity of the Word did not take anything into its essence (\textit{ousia}) that was not its by nature’, but ‘from the unmixed union of the incarnation, and the composition out of two elements, the Godhead and the manhood [sic], Emmanuel should be made up, who in one \textit{hypostasis} ineffably composite; not simple but composite; as the soul of a man [sic] like us, which by nature is bodiless and rational, which is naturally intertwined with the body, remains in this supra sensual and bodiless nature, but by reason of its composition with the body makes up one composite animal, man [sic].’ The assumption of the body made no addition to the essence (\textit{ousia}) of the soul, nor did the assumption of flesh make any difference to the nature of the Word.\textsuperscript{58}

In this union, Severus carefully helps us to understand the significance of the body and its economy within the process of Incarnation. He often calls this ‘humanisation’(\textit{met-barnosho-nutho}).\textsuperscript{59}

In fact, Severus is delighted to use the word ‘humanisation’ for the purpose of the economy of God. Keeping this meaning in mind Severus uses the term ‘humanisation’ several times in his Cathedral homilies. For instance, quoting Gregory the theologian’s sermon on the day of Passover, Severus subscribes the idea of the ‘humanisation’ of God to a process of the combination of divine-human union in view of the Trinitarian concept. “For the whole of the saving Humanisation (\textit{met-barnosho-nutho}) has this effect, that the mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed to us, although you speak of the birth in flesh, or of the Cross or of the burial, or of the Resurrection (\textit{qumtho}) from among the dead, dividing the Humanisation into many elements.”\textsuperscript{60} Humanisation for Severus is not a process that is entangled only within the space of the human body. Since the body cannot separate the divineness, humanisation takes its meaning within the ‘one-nature’ Christology. Humanisation is the union of divineness in humanness. It upholds the economy of God within the space of humanhood. Thus, his primary concern of stressing the ‘unity in Christ’ had now taken shape.

\textsuperscript{57} Brooks, \textit{A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch}, 222.
\textsuperscript{58} Brooks, \textit{A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch}, 229-30.
\textsuperscript{59} Severus uses the term humanisation to understand God’s activity among humanity. Severus explains this idea in many of his letters. See Brooks, \textit{A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch},175-342. The concept of humanisation is also one of the major themes of M.M. Thomas in the Indian context. If M.M. Thomas’s view on humanisation is generally stated, one should also see what he speaks about salvation. For him, salvation is a process of ‘the spiritual inwardness of humanisation’. On the other hand, humanisation is the outward expression of salvation. According to him, salvation is spiritual and eschatological, and humanisation is physical and historical. See Thomas, \textit{Salvation and Humanisation}.
\textsuperscript{60} Brooks, \textit{A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch}, 221.
5.5 A ‘Royal Road’ Christology: An Immanent and Transcendent Approach

Miaphysite Christology understands immanence within the plan of transcendence. Severus developed this idea by proposing a ‘unity in Christ’ or an ‘inclusive’ approach to Christology. Severus’ letter, “Of the same to Photins and Andrew the Presbyters 519–38 and archimandrites of the holy cloisters in Caria,” details the importance of divinity and humanity of Christ in relation. Though his primary interest in this letter is to express his anger against accepting ordination from the leaders of the Nestorian or Diaphysite school, here Severus tries to clarify his Christological position in a clear manner. His Christology envisions a middle path of the divinity and humanity of Christ, which neither overemphasises divinity nor humanity.

In his letter to Musonius and Alexander Vindices of Anazarba, Severus explains his view on the ‘middle path’ or ‘royal road’. Through the concept of the ‘royal road’, he intends for an end to schisms and a right understanding of Christology for the unity and embrace of the churches. Two other major documents, which clearly show Severus’ Christological concept of ‘royal road’ or ‘middle path’ are, first, the Patrologia Orientalis published work of *Vei de Severe, Par jean Superior Du Monastere De Beith Aphthonia* translated from Syriac to French by M. A. Kungener and, second, the letters of Severus published as a compilation (vol. 2, part 1) by E.V. Brooks (translated work from Syriac to English) *The Sixth Book of the Selected Letters of Severus, Patriarch of Antioch: In the Syriac Version of Athanasius of Nisibis*. John of Aphtonia concentrates on the doctrinal quotes of Severus whereas the selected letters are pastoral exposition on faith issues. To various questions of Bishops, Priests, and the laity of his ecclesiastical area, Severus brings the idea of ‘royal road’ whenever the answers are connected to his Christological position or to the doctrinal, ecclesiastical or sacramental issues.

Severus advocates a belief in the divine and human nature of Christ without overstating either; by terming the position as ‘middle path’, as explained by John of Aphtonia, Severus’s idea of the middle path is all about moving away from the “two equally impious pitfalls, to follow the ‘royal road’ and to confess the Unique Nature – [unique] from two – from God the Incarnate Word (*whad kyono men trein daloho meltho dambasan nawde*).” Elsewhere Severus also explains what it means to travel on the ‘royal road’. Severus elaborates on this

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idea in a Letter to Photins and Andrezy, the presbyters. Severus takes the term ‘royal road’ from the biblical text. Severus explains that doctrinally one must “walk in the royal road,” as the concept of royal road explained in Numbers 20:17. Not to fall into the right or left. He emphasises not to lean or emphasise on one side of either to the ‘divinity’ or ‘humanity’ of Christ alone. It means that directing only to the divinity or humanity of God leads one to the pit of unorthodoxy. In this view, the immanent is closely merged within transcendence from the very beginning. However, as a practical explanation, ‘royal road’ stands for explaining the immanent God through the image of justice.

For example, the ‘royal road’ is also connected with the idea of ‘justice’, if one understands it through the biblical teachings. Severus quotes the Deuteronomic text to establish the relation between the ‘royal road’ and ‘justice’. He writes:

…for this reason also the text of the law commands that he pursues after justice shall pursue it justly: (Deuteronomy 14:20) that is, know the principle of justice and be instructed in them when you pursue that which is just; and be free from all passion, and be in the respect a just seeker of justice, and restrain yourself on all sides, and stand within the bounds of justice…Whence also the wise Koheleth, or rather the teachers of wisdom (for the true Koheleth is Christ, the head of the church and the wisdom and the sublime and substantial power of God and the Father), checking excess, even if directed to the right side, gives admonition, saying, ‘Be not very righteous nor contrive superfluous wisdom, lest through be astonished.’ (Ecclesiastical 7:17)"

This explanation of Severus validates the human expression of ‘royal road’ through a Christological approach, connecting to the question of the practice of justice. Jesus Christ, being the real wisdom, justly maintains natures not turning on right or left but rather to the straight road of the unity of both the divine and human nature of Christ with an embodiment of justice everywhere. Categorically, Severus advises not to turn either left or right, but only to move straight on the ‘royal road’ so as not to be involved in heretical teaching. He writes that as

these things having passed in order (to speak with the permission of God), we have now drawn up a Syndal letter to the God-loving archbishop of the city of the Alexandrines

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65 In this letter, both Photins and Andrezy ask many ecclesial and doctrinal questions but the question that he answers here is connected with the Christological controversy of Nestorius and Chalcedon. Photins and Andrezy ask whether it is lawful to accept the divine mysteries of a Priest who changed his allegiance from Nestorian or Chalcedonian faith to us. To this question, at the outset Severus instruct them to ask the priest to renounce the doctrines of Nestorius and Chalcedon in writing. And then he explains the doctrinal implication of such an act. Brooks, The Sixth Book of the Selected Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch, 179-94.

66 The story in Numbers 20:17, where Moses advises the Israelites how they have to enter into a city called Kadesh. According to Moses, “Let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King’s Highway (royal road); we will turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we pass through your borders.” The Orthodox Study Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 188.

John, inviting him to unanimity and pure communion. And we will write the epistles in the same way to others also, keeping everywhere to the ‘royal road’ and not turning aside to the right or the left, guided as we are by the great love of Him who is the guide and leader along this road.\(^{68}\)

Severus’ continuous advocacy in this regard directed towards the significance of comprehending the divinity and humanity of Christ without any reduction. He understood Christ’s body and the divine nature without any confusion and explained it as one nature. As discussed, his practical idea of the ‘royal road’ with justice directly connects to the question of Christ’s body. Theologically, the justice on human body in integrally related to the justice of Christ’s body. This raises the issue of whether the body of Christ needs to be upheld on the basis of justice, if the body is an incorruptible one. The following section details Severus’ view on the corruptible or incorruptible body of Christ.

### 5.6 Sufferings: Julian’s Incorruptible Body of Christ and Severus’ Corruptible Body

In the Christological debate, overemphasising the ‘transcendental’ or ‘divine’ position was Nestprois’ problem alone, but some anti-Chalcedonian voices also raised a similar concern. Julian of Halicarnassus, one of the anti-Chalcedonian Bishops, who fled from Antioch along with Severus raised a Christological controversy that “the body of Christ, even before the resurrection, was ‘uncorrupted’ and ‘incorruptible’,\(^{69}\) which centrally argued the significance of Christ’s transcendence alone. Julian vigorously argued against Severus’ teaching that “Christ had a flesh that was the same as ours in essence (\textit{homoousios}).\(^{70}\) Though Julian and Severus retained a good friendship, Severus could not accept Julian’s theory of the incorruptibility of Christ’s body.

For Severus, Julian’s teachings were heretical as he professed a kind of uncreated flesh or uncreated Logos condensed in the incarnation to flesh ‘as water solidifies to ice’.\(^{71}\) As Grillmeier opines, Julian’s argument seems to be a direct threat to the “Alexandrian-Cyrillian-Severian tradition.\(^{72}\) Even though Severus did not convince Julian, his very polemic response to Julian helped him to develop a new perspective on the idea of the body of Christ, which helped Severus appear distinct from many other early theologians in the Christian faith.\(^{73}\)

\(^{68}\) Brooks, \textit{The Sixth Book of the Selected Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch}, 88.


\(^{71}\) Grillmeier and Hainthaler, \textit{Christ in Christian Tradition}, 81.


\(^{73}\) At the beginning, Severus and his parties were not succeeding in the warfare with Julian of Halicarnassus. However, the protracted, vehement and voluminous movement (\textit{aphthartodocetism}) continued between the two
Julian begins his arguments against Severus through his first three letters. For him, because of the very conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb, Jesus was incorruptible. Further, by disguising himself, Julian sent a few refuting questions to Severus. His first question reads: “someone appeared, calling ‘the body of our Lord corruptible’ even while they follow St. Cyril (of Alexandria).” He quotes Cyril that “after the resurrection, the body that suffered (hash) was without human pain (curhone noshoye) and henceforth it was incorruptible (la-meth-hab-lono).” Julian argued that those who do not follow Cyril believe the corruptibility of the body of Christ even before the resurrection. Julian believed that the body of Christ was always a glorified body. For this reason, Julian’s requests a definite answer from Severus to his question of “how the glorified body of Christ can be corruptible.”

In his reply to Julian, Severus advised him not to aggravate doctrinal issues within the non-Chalcedonian camp. His first and second replies to Julian were to settle the issues considering the negative impact they could create in refuting the diaphysite Christology. Severus wrote:

> do not give credit to people who are not credible or permitted for the interpretation (saying or Word), which can create a quick controversy about the enquiry with you in this matter and because, you are allowing the matter/controversy with each other. No matter how much loving it is, the controversy will not escape from the frame of the scheme. Write to me what is seems good to you.

Severus’ anxiety over continuing this argument is visible in his words. He wanted to stop such quarrelling with immediate effect. However, Julian was not satisfied with these answers and waited for a more polemic reply from Severus.

Severus’ replies were not defensive or definite. Rather Severus advised Julian to be calm and also advised him of the danger of making such an issue within the church when the

exiled bishops during the period from 520 A.D. to 527 A.D. Their influence did not continue particularly in Egypt and Armenia. Later, Severus was condemned by Julian and party being accused as an ‘acephalist,’ a Eutychian and a Manicaean, of performing uncanonical baptism, of holding unlawful assemblies, and of having been a pagan. Allen and Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, 28-29. In this unsolved issue, Julian had proof-texts with Apollinarianism whereas Severus strictly followed the genuine works of Athanasius and Cyril. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 263.

Julian-Severus’ polemic conversations have been edited by A. Sanda and printed by Georgias Press titled *Severi Antiulianistica*. A. Sanda, (trans.) *Sever Antiulianistica*, (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011). Two sections of those conversations used in this research are: first, the polemic letters (Tomus) of Julian, arguing about Christ’s body, which he believes was physically incorruptible (aphthartos/ la-meth-hab-lana) from the incarnation; and second, Julian’s eight “refutation on heretic enquiry” that Severus calls an Orthodox response clarifying how he deals with the corruptible–incorruptible issue. These conversations are significant for understanding how the miaphystic Christological thought interpreted the body of Christ and its immanent implications.


church faced difficulties to respond to the heretic teachings from outside. Severus repeatedly said that he had consulted with fathers of faith and that they followed the same views.\(^78\)

Julian seemed to be more aggressive and not satisfied with Severus’ reply. In his second and third letters, Julian declares Severus’ teaching to be heretical. In fact, Julian wants a theological and biblical reference from Severus. In these letters Julian writes “he (Christ) took up our sins and in his body on the wood when he died, he died for our sins”\(^79\) and then “how can God be incorruptible in a corruptible body?”\(^80\) Julian’s central argument seems to be that Christ’s body can only be incorruptible in the nature if the economy of Christ is to be fulfilled. He disagreed that a corrupt body can save a person from sin or a corrupt nature.

Finally, in his reply to Julian’s second letter, Severus writes polemically to Julian with all its theological contents. To substantiate his argument, he obtains support from Cyril. Severus writes, according to Cyril, “Christ suffers humanly in the flesh as human, he was impassable divinely as God.”\(^81\) Severus explains the same by exhorting that when one says that Christ is passible, mortal and corruptible, it means “the body that it was taken from nature passible, mortal and corruptible. This is the human race (nature). Incorruptible is that the immortal and impassable through (byath) the resurrection – reflects divine race (nature).”\(^82\)

None of these answers satisfied Julian. He continued his position that Christ’s body could not be corruptible even before his resurrection. Julian misunderstood Severus as he reduces his Christological position to the humanity of Christ, similar to Eutyches or Nestorianism. On the other hand, Julian’s attribution of incorruptibility to the body of Christ during his earthly presence drove him to his own pit of heretics. As Allen and Hayward mentioned, Julian’s thesis of the incorruptibility of the body of Christ rejected both anti-Chalcedonians and pro-Chalcedonians considering its closeness to the Eutychianism and the Docetism.\(^83\) Julian misconstrues Christ’s sufferings as divine suffering within the incorruptible body.

Julian shares his apprehension on the category of ‘suffering’ and its impossibility for an ‘incorruptible’ status in the third chapter of *Adversus Apologia Juliani*. For Julian, the suffering of Christ was not something real. He writes:

\[…\text{what do you know from us, who (as the teacher said) rightly acknowledge that Christ, in a body suffering like ours, voluntarily endured the trial of innocent sufferings – you, who have blasphemyously declared in the manner of your own folly that he suffered and died inasmuch as he was subjected to the debts arising from his own sins, and not rather on behalf of the}\]

\(^{80}\) Sanda, *Severi Antiulianistica*, 15.
\(^{81}\) Sanda, *Severi Antiulianistica*, 29.
\(^{83}\) Allen and Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, 28.
human race did he himself offer the sacrifice and offering to God, even to the Father, as Paul says? (cf. Heb 5:1; 9:14).ucion.

While saying this, Julian has confused with ‘human sin’ and Christ’s suffering. He does not allow Christ to ‘suffer’ in a way that sees ‘human suffering’ as a consequence of ‘sin’. However, he does not reject the ‘real suffering’ that Jesus had undergone during his humanisation on earth. He clarifies this through the idea that Jesus had suffered voluntarily as he is God. Julian states that “inincorruptibility was constantly present with the passible body of our Lord, even when he was suffering voluntarily on behalf of others.” For Julian, this answer to Christ’s suffering as “on behalf of us” echoes throughout his writings.

In his heretical refutation to Severus, he repeats the same question. His fourth heretical inquiry reads as follows:

...concerning this, not to say the body our Lord passible and mortal as by compulsion and by this corruptible and subjected to natural and unforeseen events. To confess that willingly and truly he tolerated (bore) the salvation suffering (passion) on our behalf and givar of life, death. While by these he did not separate (depart), from impassibility and immortality, but by these he led to impassibility and immortality according to the scripture and holy father.

His idea that Jesus cannot identify with the ‘suffering’ of human beings is clear. As seen earlier, Julian’s position on Christ’s suffering is fundamentally based on his notion of ‘sin’: that which corrupts the ‘essence’ of human beings. He again repeats the argument in his sixth heretic inquiry, which reads: “concerning that not to name (say) the passions of our Lord causers (source) of corruption, or his death corrupter (defiler), but salvation passions. Therefore, we shall confess the life-giving death according to the divine books and holy fathers.” For him, Jesus suffering on the Cross cannot be identified as a human suffering.

On the other hand, Severus takes a totally different tenet to discuss Christ’s suffering. Severus’ position on this idea can be seen from Julian’s own quote from Severus elsewhere. In Adversus apologia Juliani, we see how Julian misinterprets Severus’ reply. Thus, Severus says in his reply to Julian’s earlier question on passible sufferings, “we do not affirm him as consubstantial with us in respect of passible, but in respect of identity of substance; insofar as he is impassable and incorruptible, he is consubstantial with us in respect of identity of substance.” When Julian quotes Severus, one must know that Severus was clear in his stand on Jesus’ suffering as the part of an ‘identity of substance’. This is very clear when Severus

Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 99.
Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 100.
Sanda, Severi Antiiulianistica, 208.
Sanda, Severi Antiiulianistica, 212-13.
Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 100.
tries to answer Julian’s refutation. To answer Julian’s sixth, Severus again clarifies his position and the heretical position:

This inquiry also waves a weapon of fight against God and against the sayings of the fathers and the inspired books (spoken by the spirit). The word of God that (incarnated) took a flesh that is capable and accepting to suffer changed the sufferings which naturally cause corruption, these (sufferings) which are free from sin, and the death which he endured willingly to incorruptibility. He turned (blunted) them because he truly suffered not because he did not suffer. So, this is that he will suffer in expectation (msabronootho) /in supposition (masbronootho) as they dream those of illusion saying: the body is immortal (lo moyutho) and impassible (lo hosoosho), they falsely preach the death and suffering. As not to declare that he received and endured our death in the flesh, but to seem (consider) that he died and suffered as supposed in a vision.89

For Severus the suffering of Jesus was real, and it was nothing but an ‘identity of substance’ of God with human. It cannot be understood as a phantasy. Finally, he had to resolve the problem of how the Saviour could truly ‘suffer’ as a human? His solution to this question is that “while there was no confusion of properties between Word and flesh a synthesis of the two took place.”90 Here, Severus postulates over the intrinsic relation of God’s immanent nature in Christ and offers this argument by explaining Christ’s suffering in view of Trinity. He said that ‘one of the Trinity indeed suffered for us’. This elucidates his interest in negotiating the connection between the humanity and the suffering of Christ.

However, Severus explains his position clearly to Julian. Severus continues saying that “Christ did not have a sinful flesh but a similar one to our sinful flesh. Then without sin he had same as our nature. This is known as the nature of flesh was not evil.” (d-lo itaho beesho kyone d-besro).91 Severus continues:

…after the death of Jesus, he raised the flesh and made it immortal. From the time of his union with the flesh, not because he was able to make the flesh incorruptible, impassable, immortal, but he ‘struggled justly (not with his power) with death’ (nethkatash) on behalf of human victory. That in the flesh, which is passible, corruptible, mortal we ‘struggle against death’ (nethkatash) and thus with the resurrection we consume the death.92

Severus’ attitude towards ‘flesh’ as inherently not a medium of evil is given greater significance in this discussion. Severus not only proposes the immanent possibilities of Christ’s body but also equally emphasises the transcendental body within the plan of ‘human flesh’. He reserves the possibility of the incorruptibility of Christ’s body for only after the resurrection of Christ.

89 Sanda, Severi Antiulianistica, 212-13.
91 Sanda, Severi Antiulianistica, 80.
92 Sanda, Severi Antiulianistica, 82.
5.7 Severus Verses Julian: Human Sin and Corruptibility

In the modern period, Rene Draguet’s study on Julian in 1924 seems to be a divisive contribution to understand the fundamental differences between Julian and Severus and the importance of Severus’ Christological contributions. Draguet believes that the central differences between Julian and Severus are their varied understanding of human sin. More than Severus, this affected Julian’s understanding of Christ. Julian’s notion of human sin was closer to the Western notion of original sin. Robert P. Casey supports Draguet’s position and sees the Greek influence in this type of theological thinking. It should be noted that the Greek fathers had a different idea about ‘sin’ other than the original sin, which is the continuation of the sin of Adam. In this view, Casey writes, “it may at first sight seem strange that even a fundamental difference in the conception of original sin should have provoked so violently apparently for a remote question of the corruptibility (αφθαρσια – tharsia) of Christ’s body.”

Further, it is the special terminology by which Julian wanted to express the complete independence of Christ in relation to the sin of nature. Julian uses the word φθορα (thora) to denote sin in three different ways. These are individual sin, conscious sin, and physical sin. Julian understands corruption (φθορα) and sin in a confusing manner. Casey consolidated Julian on this confusion and he writes that in Julian’s view Adam’s fall had resulted not only in weakening and corrupting the human nature in which his descendants shared, but also in transmitting to it the taint of guilt and blame of which this corruption was the outward and visible sign. In human nature, the idea of the ‘corrupt’ is sin, and to say that Christ’s body was ‘corruptible’ was the equivalent in attributing Christ a shared of the sins of Adam. With such a view of ‘corrupt’ Julian’s most pressing quest was to find a way of removing Christ

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94 According to Draguet, the controversy between Severus and Julian takes place to a great extent as a result their different understanding on the issue of human sin. Draguet, Julien D’halicarnasse, 105, 258.
95 Casey, by drawing attention to Draguet’s study on Julian suggests that “the centre of the gravity in Julian’s system is to be found in his theology of original sin, which was so radically different from that of contemporary Greek Orthodoxy that the effect of its implication produced far-reaching disagreements with the traditional Greek view.” Casey, “Julian of Halicarnassus,” 211.
96 Casey, “Julian of Halicarnassus,” 211.
97 Casey, “Julian of Halicarnassus,” 211.
98 Draguet, Julien D’halicarnasse, 258.
99 Draguet, Julien D’halicarnasse, 258.
from the sphere of this guilt without violating the principle of consubstantiality. If one argues that Jesus underwent corruption, according to Julian, Jesus also should have equally undergone original sin. It means, for Julian, corruption and original sin are synonyms of each other.

To push the matter further, Casey helps with some tips. Corruption (φθορα) consisted of natural human weaknesses, such as hunger, thirst, pain, and death. Christ assumes such a complete human nature and Christ redeemed us. Here, the economy of Christ is described not on the concept of original sin. On the other hand, Julian interprets human sin closer to Augustine and Christ is incorruptible to save human beings from their original sin. Casey clarifies this by saying that Julian could have held a similar position to Augustine, which explains the relation of original sin transmitted through “the sexual satisfaction in the perpetuation of the human race.” It should be noted that with this theological opposition to Julian, miaphysite Christology, which owes a great deal to Severus, deviates from the Western thought of Augustine.

Severus’ notion of corruption is explained as the human body’s natural infirmities of suffering. Thus, he emphasised the all-natural infirmities of the suffering of Christ as a means of corruption. Except for being physically unable to sin, Christ’s body was subject to all the same passions and physical weaknesses as other humans. Only after his resurrection did Christ’s body become incorruptible. In his book, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity*, Yonatan Moss uncovers these arguments by examining a few other polemic writings of Severus and Julian. Moss explains how Severus understands the idea of corruptibility. He writes that “Severus thought that during his life on earth Christ had a corruptible (phthartos/methablana) body. Except being physically unable to sin, Christ’s body was subject to all the same passions and physical weaknesses as other humans. Only from his resurrection did Christ’s body become incorruptible.” By underscoring the human infirmities and immanent characteristics, Severus maintains his balanced position of Christ as both divine and human in nature. Connecting all the natural infirmities of the suffering of Christ with the human body consoles the suffering and the pain of the human bodies. This suffering and pain in the immanent body stands as a united divine nature of Christ as the miaphysite Christology consolidates its argument. As a concluding

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100 Casey, “Julian of Halicarnassus,” 211.
101 Casey, “Julian of Halicarnassus,” 211.
102 Casey, “Julian of Halicarnassus,” 212.
103 Severus writes “After the resurrection, he (incarnate one) came in while the doors are shut and appeared to the disciples in the house; whom he also allowed to touch him, showing that his flesh was tangible and solid, and of one essence (οὐσία) with us and was also superior to corruption: and thereby he subverted the theory of phantasy.” See Brooks, *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch: From Numerous Syriac Manuscripts*, 183-84.
note here, Tadros Y. Malaty’s explanation on the non-Chalcedonian Christology reads: “Godhead and manhood [sic] are united in such a way that properties of divinity and humanity are not lost, nor confused or mixed.” He (Christ) took himself as a real and perfect manhood [sic], and not a supernatural one.”

5.8 Beyond Cyril: Christ’s Personhood and Consubstantiality with Human Suffering

In his Christological formula, Severus is convinced of the importance of Christ’s immanence. For him, the need to identify the human body with the sufferings of Christ is significant. He believes that the economy of God is not accomplished in its fullness if one reduces the significance of Christ’s suffering. The immanent nature of Christ and the economy of God are closely linked to Severus’ understanding of Christ. This could be the reason why Severus expressed the induction of the suffering of Christ in the Christological plan through the formula of theopaschite (one among the Trinity suffered).

Severus’ theopaschite formula becomes a touchstone of true faith. Though Severus adopted this phrase from Cyril, he felt that Cyril used this term very casually. In his treatise addressed to Emperor Theodosius II, Cyril explains the necessity of confessing the human weakness of Christ before the resurrection. Severus’ clear position in interpreting Christ’s human body resembling the nature of human but without sin finds momentum in his later theological engagements. This is mostly expressed in terms of the suffering of the humanhood of Christ. In doing so, Severus wanted to take this idea further.

When addressing the Christological appraisal of Severus with special reference to the ‘humanhood’ of Christ, Samuel affirms that Severus of Antioch “is a more thoroughgoing and outstanding interpreter of Cyril of Alexandria.” Grillmeier goes one step further than Samuel and commented that in his Christological treatises, Severus had gone beyond Cyril. Having understood Cyril’s strong and emphatic approach to the unity of nature, it is true that often Cyril finds some concerns about the humanity of Christ and in W.H.C. Frend’s words Cyril “failed to elucidate it.” In so doing, Cyril was not compromising his theory of the ‘unity of nature formula’ but stumbles when exploring some of the human conditions of Jesus Christ. From this point we see that Severus adds more to Cyril’s thoughts on the ‘human conditions’ of Jesus Christ and thereby goes beyond Cyril. More substantially, Severus argues elsewhere that Christ’s human voluntary passions were for “displaying the humanisation truly

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105 Malaty, Christology: According to the Non-Chalcedonian, 6.
108 Grillmeier and Hainthaler, Christ in Christian Tradition, 83.
and without phantasy” (φαντασία).\textsuperscript{110} The human life of Christ was emphasised and was promoted in his theology. Grillmeier explains Severus’ position as “the more the humanity of Christ appeared as vibrating with divine powers, the more the substantial unity in Christ was shown” with the view that the divine nature takes human potencies.\textsuperscript{111}

Severus’ position on Christ’s immanence is its resembling connection to the entire human flesh. The humanness of God, without reducing the divineness, affirms that the human body is inherently not evil. Here, the incarnation of Christ, for Severus, is not a confusion, not a mixture, but a “partaking” or “participating” in flesh and blood.\textsuperscript{112} This partaking and participation is held within the site of the entire human body.

Focussing the ‘humanness’ in the nature of God lifts the divine composite of Severian Christology. Samuel and Frend help us to consolidate Severus’ Christological position. Samuel notes that Severus’ Christological positions are relevant to the discussion of human social conditions in the world. As Samuel summaries, “Christ’s manhood [sic] was individuated manhood [sic], fully like and continuous with our manhood [sic], with the only exception that He was absolutely sinless.”\textsuperscript{113} Severus affirms this composite nature of the union between the divinity and humanity of Christ. According to Severus the humankind of Christ was individuated only in a hypostatic union with God the Son, the humankind continued in perfection and reality in its union with God the Son and the union did not lead the humankind to a state of confusion or mixture with the Godhead. Godhead and humankind were there in Christ with their respective properties.\textsuperscript{114} He continues to explain how perfect and real this union is in its relation to the common human life. Severus writes, as

> the manhood [sic] of Christ was real, perfect and dynamic in the union” and while opposing Julian of Halicarnassus for teaching that the manhood [sic] of Christ was the manhood [sic] of Adam before the fall, Severus insisted that Christ’s manhood [sic] was real to our manhood [sic]. Thus, even though Christ was sinless, He was essentially related to men and women living in the world of time and space with an exception to be noted that we are subjected to sin and the union on God and man [sic] would not be turning to the union of Godhead and manhood [sic] in Christ but is possible for human to grow in his/her apprehension of God.\textsuperscript{115}

For Severus, the humanity of Christ resembled our own. This takes us to the first concern of taking human body in the divine communion, as the ‘one-nature’ of Christ is already made into a union between the Godhead (divinity) and humanhood (humanity) of Christ.

\textsuperscript{110} Brooks, A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch: From Numerous Syriac Manuscripts, 185.
\textsuperscript{111} Grillmeier and Hainthaler, Christ in Christian Tradition, 84.
\textsuperscript{112} Cited in Torrance, “Paradigm Change in Sixth-Century Christology,” 281.
\textsuperscript{113} Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ,” 159.
\textsuperscript{114} Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ,” 159.
\textsuperscript{115} Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ,” 159-60.
5.9 Conclusion

Severus’ interpretation of Christ’s body provides an inclusive perspective to miaphysite Christology. First, by connecting Christ’s suffering with human suffering, Severian Christology helps us to relate to the contemporary context of human suffering. This is possible due to the scope of Christ’s body for a reflexive relation with the entire humanity. One merit of Severian Christology is its capacity to be translated into the Indian context of marginality. Orthodox theology, drawing on the richness of its own Christological tradition, is to embrace the social context of suffering and pathos in India.

Second, it opens the Dalit discussion with miaphysite Christology. The embrace of the human and divine nature of Christ without any confusion provides an equal embrace between the miaphysite Christology and the Dalit Christology. Since the body of Christ, which is constituted with an inseparable unity of both divinity and humanity, resembles the common human body, it cannot reject the inseparable unity and divinity embedded in the human body. In this way, even the Dalit body is inherently divine. This is not a Christian attribution or an offering to the Dalits, rather it is the fundamental fabrics of Dalit body, if we appropriate Severian Christology into the Dalit context. With this view, on the one hand, the notion of the inherent divine characteristics of the Dalit body rejects any attribution of caste hierarchy based on the theory of purity and pollution. According to this social interpretation of the miaphysite Christology, neither the purity nor the pollution determines the society or social body of human, rather the practical emphasis of the humanisation of Christ establishes the social life through an embrace of both the Orthodox and the Dalit communities.

Third and final, for Severus, the ‘humanhood’ or ‘humanity’ is a category within the ‘Godhead’ or ‘divinity” of Christ as he explains the need for the ‘royal road’ concept. This means that the body of humanity that looks like the common body – even in the condition of suffering, pain, and other human experience – entwines with the divine nature of Christ because Christ’s suffering was an ‘identity in essence’. More emphasis on either side could disrupt the fundamental Christological plan of miaphysite thoughts. The Severian ‘middle way’—like Nirmal’s ‘middle path’—envisions an embrace between transcendence and immanence without confusion. It can provide the Dalit body and Orthodox body with an experience of reconciling embrace.

Though the humanhood of Christ has this prophetic edge in miaphysite Christology, it failed to materialise in the Indian social context. This is the challenge of miaphysite Christology in India. However, this Christology cannot go further in the Indian context without social integration of the ‘immanence of God’. In other words, the emphasis on
‘immanence’ in this Christology needs to be seen as a direct call towards a balanced doctrinal confession of Christ. For Orthodoxy, this takes a new perspective of conversation in India, not among the category of ‘above’ alone but also ‘from below’. This conversation must aim not only just for a theological exercise, but also for a practical embrace between the communities of all social categories by moving one step further and envisioning a reconciling missional characteristic of the church. The next chapter examines these possibilities, constructing the converging theological spaces for an initiation of ‘embrace’, or ‘touch’, which is the Christological metaphor of reconciliation.
6. Christ’s Embrace, Reconciliation, and Mission as Liturgy in the Liturgy

The eucharist is the paramount acting out of the mystery of incarnation that aims at redemption and salvation that are affected by the Eucharistic Lord in the history, both forward and backward. Divine incarnation was the deeper most divine-human reciprocity.

Thomas Kollamparampil

God calls us to join God’s mission with the people at the margins and offers to the world a prophetic vision of new earth and new heaven. Church’s mission begins with a turn towards the margins (repentance) and finds its meaning in its solidarity with the margins (discipleship) and imagines a future of the emancipated creation (hope).

Joseph Prabhakar Dayam

6.1 Introduction

References to Dalit Christology and Orthodox Christology in India share a common theological interest in the ‘suffering’ of Christ’s body and its ‘social’ or ‘theological’ embodiment. For Dalits, it is the ‘body’ through which ‘material suffering’ is assumed and it is the same body that becomes a resource to know the Dalit God in Jesus Christ. The Dalit body, which is within the social context is seen as a major site of pollution, suffering, and rejection, now identifies with the sufferings of Christ’s body. This idea becomes a resource for Dalit liberation. The material body of Christ turns out to be the source for deliverance from their experience of brokenness and sufferings.

In terms of Orthodox theology, the miaphysite or ‘one nature’ Christology imagines Christ’s body as a site of the inseparable combination or union of both the transcendental and immanent category of Christ. But this union does not reduce the scope of understanding the ‘suffering body of Christ’ or its corresponding relation to the human body. The point of departure of miaphysite Christology is Christ who is God in transcendence. This same God by putting on a human body (immanence) embraces humanity and inseparably remains both transcendent and immanent in Jesus Christ. This central aspect of miaphysite Christology – God’s choice of the nature of the body that God takes on – enhances the perception of human

suffering. As Severus defined it, this body is taken from the body of Mary, representing the entire human body. Further, this human body is combined with the divine nature of God and that cannot be divided. In this Christological assumption, the concept of the body that God puts on raises two major concerns: first, the materiality of the body; second, the social nature of the body.

First, in the Indian context of a duality or caste binary based on purity and pollution, the emancipation of the polluted body is necessary to achieve an all-encompassing liberation of the Dalit community. The ‘one nature’ Christology annuls any such duality by imagining that the divineness in the human body of Christ is inseparable from the common human body with which Jesus identified himself. Severus’ argument on the ‘corruptible and incorruptible’ body of Christ and the significance of the nature of suffering on the Cross, elaborated in the previous chapter, indicates the contemporary significance of this miaphysite Christological position. This is closely connected to the following point.

Second, the miaphysite position, that ‘Christ [is] as the same substance with us but without any sin’ opens the possibility of extending the same substance (inseparably united) to all of humanity. Severus’ position of Christ’s human body in its likeness to the common sufferings of humanity is suggestive of an understanding of the social nature of Christ’s body. Christ’s economy is fulfilled only when Christ’s body is appropriated in view of the human body.

For Orthodoxy in India, this interpretation of the humanity of Christ challenges their own malpractice in relation to the Dalit body and with the social body of the margins. The historic distance that the church continues to keep from the Dalit community needs to be re-examined on the basis of its Christology. Doing so directs this communion to celebrate the Christological commonalities and so to initiate a reconciling ‘embrace or kiss of peace’ between the Dalit and Orthodox communities. In the discussion of ‘liturgy and mission’, ‘embrace’ as an Orthodox liturgical and Christological metaphor aims for reconciliation.

As a Christological category, the kiss of peace assumes the divinity and humanity of Christ, and this extends to the people gathered inside. And, as the liturgy demands the inclusion of those from outside, this same embrace includes the people inside and outside. To appropriate this theological view into a practical form, the ‘embrace’ stands not only as a metaphor of ritual exchange of peace between the worshippers, but also offers a practical act of reconciliation with all people—the Other or the material and the social world of social margins. It takes an action of ‘touch’ and in so doing fulfils the heart of the liturgical celebration. On the one hand, the embrace or kiss of peace satisfies the Christological plan in bringing people of different sectors together and symbolically celebrates plurality by being reconciled through the exchange of peace. On the other hand, the ‘touch’ in the embrace or
kiss of peace resembles the embrace of Christ and obliterates all binaries – untouchability – and directs the faithful towards a movement of social embrace. Having elaborated the Christological and practical plan of embrace, the question that remains: can the Orthodox community ‘touch’ or ‘embrace’ the Dalit community as an expression of its own necessary and historic theological commitments?

This chapter will examine the possibilities of a Dalit-Orthodox ‘embrace or kiss of peace’ in the view of miaphysite Christology – an inseparable embrace of divinity (transcendence) and humanity (immanence) and its liturgical expression in the ‘embrace or kiss of peace’. To accomplish this goal, the following pays attention to four early liturgical commentators of the miaphysite tradition: Jacob, Bishop of Edessa (c.633-d.708); George, the Bishop of Arabs (d.725); Moses Bar Kepha (813-903); and Dionysius Bar Salibi (c.1171).

6.2 Touch to the Untouched: The Dalit and Orthodox Christological Act

Touch or embrace is an ambiguous metaphor in many religious and cultural traditions. In the Indian context, a touch or embrace between the dominant and the Dalit caste is a political act. In the theological view, it can be understood as a political act of God. In the midst of the practice of untouchability, the activity of touch is a method of God’s interference of political resistance. It goes beyond every norm or condition that society attributes to the human body. This touch enables the acceptance of the materiality of the human body with the human body of God in Christ. As the body of Christ is the site of the unification the transcendent and immanent, the act of God in Christ continues through the actual touch practiced not only in the liturgical space but also in the social space.

Before engaging the Orthodox theological vision of touch or embrace, it is necessary to revisit how the Dalits understand the transcendence in the Dalit material body. If Y.T. Vinayraj’s critical evaluation in this regard is taken seriously, the Western theological tradition with its emphasis on God “becoming flesh” interpreted the Dalit body as ‘sacred’ body. Vinayraj calls it as “offered transcendence” through the sacramental theologies. He feels that all the Christian tradition follows the same approach of ‘offering transcendence’ to the Dalit body. His contention is that as a body exists outside the plan of God so it does not carry transcendence. But, in the previous chapter, with help from Severus, I argued that the

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3 Although she does not use the word ‘political’ in her explanation of the theology of touch, Mayra Rivera, explores the political view of transcendence and touch within the postcolonial discussion of transcendence and ‘the Other’ in her book *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 57-62.


5 As mentioned in the chapters two and three, the Vedic theology believes that the Dalit body is constituted outside the image of God’s body; therefore, the Dalit body does not qualify as divine.

miaphysite Christology offers an ‘inherent transcendence’ to any material body, equal and real within the plan of the divine one.⁷

In miaphysite Christology, the notion of the human body, which exists within the plan of the transcendental body, does not carry any dichotomy.⁸ ‘Offered transcendence’ presumably assumes a location of a non-divine body in the principle of the dichotomy of duality. Miaphysite Christology, by contrast, does not imagine ‘any’ human body without transcendence. So theologically, in Orthodoxy, the Dalit body is also a body of the ‘inherently transcendent’. In this sense, the purity or holiness attributed to the notion of the transcendence of God applies not only to God but also to the human body. Here, purity cannot be understood as an idea opposite to pollution. Orthodoxy provides its Christology within the Dalit context not to solve the problem of the ‘offered’ divineness of the Dalit body. Rather it is an affirmation of the Christological transcendence within the all-human body. In Orthodoxy, the root of this argument is also based on its theological position on the ‘matter’ or ‘material’ similar to how it is developed within Dalit theology.

Experiencing God through the epistemology of materiality, Dalit theologians like Nirmal and Vinayraj help the miaphysite theologians reconsider their own theology by affirming the materiality of God. Miaphysite theologians like Mor Gregorios Paulose and K. M. George realize the importance of the Buddhist philosophy, but not the Buddhist material turn. Dalit theologians are concerned about the material aspect of the Lokayata philosophy of the Buddhist tradition seeking the probability of the notion of transcendence within the material reality. For this reason, Dalit theology faces criticism for turning to ‘secular humanism’ rather than affirming the transcendence of the cosmic divine experience. Vinayraj disapproves of this argument because of his conviction that the transcendent reality alone does not satisfactorily combat the social discrimination of the Dalits. However, Vinayraj maintains that the Dalits find transcendence within the existence of materialism.⁹

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⁷ It is true that in Indian theological appropriations, generally the Catholic and Protestant (both share the Chalcedon Christology) are taken seriously. The potential of miaphysite Christology in the Indian context is not much deliberated in view of the issues of social marginality.

⁸ Julian of Halicarnassus diminished Christ’s suffering on humanity (materiality) and its corresponding relation of ‘same substance with us.’ All of the non-Chalcedonian leaders affirmed that in his incarnation, God the Son united himself completely into humanity with a rational soul and became the same substance as us, that he endured in reality blameless passions of the body and the soul, and that there was no confusion or mixture of the nature in him. See V.C. Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church,” Greek Orthodox Theological Review 13 (1968): 46.

⁹ Vinayraj proposes a “theology of God that affirms the embodied transcendence of Dalit body based on Lokayata.” Vinayraj, Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy, 7.
6.3 The Orthodox Concept of The Material: Some Miaphysite Voices

Before we discuss the concept of ‘matter’ or ‘material’ in the miaphysite tradition, a brief recollection of matter and Dalit theology is warranted. The Lokayata, the material philosophy, rejects the Vedic and Vedic ritualism, and the Hindu philosophical school considers Lokayata as an heretical or an anti-Orthodox Hindu religious tradition. However, the hidden potentialities of its ‘matter’ in terms of its scope of transcendence have been argued by Nirmal who took the position of Madhyameeka (middle path) that maintains both the transcendent and immanent scope of Lokayata or material philosophy.

Vinayraj explains it in a subtler way. For him, Lokayata “neither negates God, as in atheism, nor affirms God, as in theism.” This position he calls the ‘third way’. As he draws attention to the Dalit body in relation to Lokayata, he elaborates it with an “internal transcendentability of the Dalit body.” This position is more to explore the material reality, not just on a philosophical level but rather to find the Dalit liberation through the knowledge of the material. Material is the way in which the Dalits have to struggle for liberation.

When it comes to the question of ‘matter’ for Orthodoxy, Mor Gregorius enlightens us to understand it through Gnostic philosophy. For Gnostics, “matter is evil, and God cannot be linked to it.” The Gnostics deny the importance to the material world. Many early teachers of the church opposed this teaching. Irenaeus, one of the significant figures who wrote against Gnostic teachings expressly attacks the three Christian Gnostics – Basilides, Valentines and Marcion “all of whom sought to deny the material aspects of Christ and to spiritualize, interiorize, individualise Him.” This also led to a controversy over the materiality of the sacraments. Since the source of the sacramental material is from the world, the sacraments are also considered to be evil.

For the Gnostics, the divine aspect remains only with the soul. For this reason, Mor Gregorius attributes Gnostic theology to the Hindu philosophy of identifying God within as: Aham Bramhasmi (God is within). According to him, “the solitary path of Gnosticism has historical relations with the Asian tradition particularly with the Hindu tradition of finding God as the true being of one own self.” Probably, it connects the concept of the individual

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12 Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 106.
soul or finding God in oneself as in Gnosticism or Hinduism. If Mor Gregorius’ argument is true, then by departing from the Western notion of Christology, or the Hindu philosophical notion of theology, Dalit theology moves towards the experience of God through the struggles of the ‘community’ but not individuals. However, as Mor Gregorius affirms, the significance of ‘matter’ lies in the Christological plan of the utilization of the ‘matter’. He writes that, “Christ by inseparably uniting a body to himself, incorporates the creation in a new, more intimate, more integral, way into his own body.”18

The issue of ‘matter’ is not an unfamiliar subject to the miaphysite Christological debates from early centuries. According to Severus of Antioch, the material comes within the scheme of transcendental reality. The material body, by extension, cannot function far from transcendental knowledge. In one of his letters to Caesaria the Hypatissa, Severus writes about the relation between the material and the divine intervention:

But God, the Maker of all and perfect in craftsmanship, both brought the material of everybody from that which did not exist and added the from; and, if you speak of fire or of earth, or of air or of what, or of the sky and the sun and the moon and the other stars, he both formed the material of all of them out of non-existent things, and the form was devised for them in different ways at the moment that they came into being, and he is both the Maker and the adorner of the shapeless material of the bodies, in that he differentiated it into the various forms of bodies.19

That the material body also includes the Dalit body is given a different interpretation in these theological suppositions. According to Severus, the material that constitutes the body is not free from transcendental touch. This carries two implications. First, the Dalit body or the body of the margins, which is like any other material body, cannot be a material of ‘social Othering’ or ‘social marginality’. Thus, the Dalit body is naturally transcendent irrespective of cultural, social, economic religious or gender backgrounds. This is what ‘inherent transcendence’ does with every human body. Second, whether the Brahmanical hermeneutics accept the Dalit body as part of the transcendental body or not, for Severian theology, the Dalit body is inseparably a part of the transcendental scheme without forsaking its immanent reality.

For Severus, this appears not simply at an abstracted theological level— it is drawn into the life of Orthodox liturgy. In his study on Severus and Julian, Yonatan Moss argues that

Severus intertwined ‘Christ’s body’ as both passible and impassable.20 For Severus, Christ’s body was a Eucharistic body, and he argued as such with Julian in one of his letters:

He (Christ) was divine and He changed all of himself, who suffered for you and grants salvation to all of you. When He dissolves all the condemnation of the sin, Impassable in divine and passible in body (fagaro) and therefore, it is without any distinction.21

Liturgically, a passible body is also attached to the Eucharistic bread (fagaro). It is connected to the understanding of the nature of Christ’s body. The incorruptible/corruptible body of Christ has a direct liturgical and ecclesial implication. The metaphors within the liturgy demonstrate this Christological reality. For example, the kiss of peace in the liturgy is a visible expression of God’s love and peace and is exchanged in the material reality of embrace or touch. This explains God’s passible (material) and impassable (divine) intervention within the life of humankind. Invariably, by connecting the matter to the Eucharistic body even with the material act of an embrace shows the Christ event through the liturgical celebration. This expands not only within the ecclesial community by to the cosmic gathering of the church. K. M. George discusses the scope of this cosmic space of the eucharistic matter. For him, when “we celebrate [the eucharist] with all that is created by God, both animate and inanimate, visible and invisible, material, and spiritual”22 it is also a turning to the positive space of the ‘matter’.

This theological affirmation is what opened the possibility of discussing God’s body with a miaphysite position. V.C. Samuel affirms this move to identify God’s body with the body of humankind, except for sin. Such a position, due to the inseparability of two natures, does not detract from the transcendental nature of Incarnation into the material world. Because ‘matter’ provides a space to engage the ‘transcendental’ within the scheme of the ‘immanent’, the miaphysite theology of incarnation avoids the binary of ‘transcendence’ and the ‘immanent Other.’ The matter itself allows miaphysite theology to engage in the ‘touch’ with the divine Dalit body, which is essentially a space that provides the counterpart of ‘touch’ with the dominant body. So, the embrace or touch is not imagined as transcendence alone; it is with both transcendence and immanence or divine and human.

Ignoring the inter-relationality of the passible (material) and impassable (divine) creates crucial issues in the life of the church. The suffering world (material) requires the church’s

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attention to a reconciling spirit within the material and divine aspects of cosmic creation. Two Orthodox voices, namely Pantelis Kalaitzidis representing Orthodoxy in general and Mor. Geeverghese Coorilose from India, demonstrate the need for the church’s reconciliation in today’s world of brokenness and division. It is here that the material expression of reconciliation demands social expression. No church can turn from its fundamental mission of social healing through a reconciling act. In this context of the brokenness of the Dalits, such healing could begin with a social embrace or touch. After listening to the voices of Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Mor Geeverghese Coorilose, we will explore the Christological plan for a social embrace or touch as envisioned by the early teachers of the church.

6.4 Can Orthodoxy Think Immanence? Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Mor Geeverghese Coorilose

When describing the Orthodox church’s approach to the social aspect, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, a Greek Orthodox theologian, believes that Orthodox churches still suffer from keeping themselves aloof from their social milieus. According to him, Orthodoxy maintains “a kind of inertia with regard to participating in history and the socio-cultural context.” Kalaitzidis is convinced that “without a creative and critical relationship with the past and the present of history as well as with culture… [Orthodoxy is] unable to engage in serious theological reflection and to participate equally and creatively in the contemporary world.” His criticism is not restricted to the Greek Orthodox tradition, but applies to all the Orthodox traditions.

On the other hand, Kalaitzidis envisions Orthodox theology as responding to the social concerns that create division, duality, or binaries in the world. According to him:

The public ecclesiastical role should embody the Cross-centered ethos of Christ. It should be a witness to the new reality which the church lives, and a protest against shock and institutional evil, as well as the violation of human dignity and freedom; it should be a voice defending the “other,” the “foreigner,” the least of our brothers [sic], the needy, the weak and the victims of history, who are all icons of “the other” par excellence, the “foreigner” par excellence.

Kalaitzidis emphasises the church’s importance as a witness from the perspective of ‘the Other’ or foreigner who does not belong to the dominant church. It applies to all the hegemonic situations that the marginalised experience themselves as the Other or foreigner. In this view, he suggests that the church must “engender the call to repentance, humankind’s

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24 Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, 90.
25 Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, 84.
preparation to receive the preaching about the kingdom of God, a creative, spiritual fruitfulness, and the Christ-centred healthiness of Christian communities.”

Though to a certain extent Orthodoxy attempted to take the context seriously, Kalaitzidis believes that Orthodoxy was not successful in this attempt. He complains that the methodology could not be appropriated properly when the church does not change its dominant characteristics. Kalaitzidis criticises the Orthodox methodological shift of ‘returning to the Fathers’ because, while Fr. Georges Florovsky conceived this as an attempt to move “ahead with the Fathers,” it has led to “objectification and museumification” of Orthodox theology. He acknowledges tremendous theological potential with the ‘return to the fathers’, but only with its full sense of an all-embracing touch to all. The contradiction that he observes is Orthodoxy’s inability:

to engage in serious theological reflection and to participate equally and creatively in the contemporary world. Speaking about the church’s transforming presence and activity in society, culture, and politics is reduced to nothing more than wishful thinking. Hence, the dominant ecclesiastical discourse in Orthodox contexts usually seems more interested in preserving the uniqueness of the ethnocultural ideology and the national narrative than Christian catholicity and ecumenicity. It comes across as an authoritarian and state-subsidised organ rather than serving as a witness to the church’s living and prophetic presence in the world. The church’s word has thus been secularised, betraying the fact that politics have invaded the church rather than society and politics being transformed and sanctified.

In this contradictory situation, a new approach should not aim to continue in the medieval/pre-modern era, but to engage the early teachers with the signs of our times. Kalaitzidis cautions us that “as long as this paradox stand[s], the theological voice of the church will continue to operate in a daydream and will probably remain an illusion, while its ‘political’ engagement will likely be limited to medieval/ pre-modern models of intervention, rather than witness, solidarity, and justice.” Kalaitzidis’ observation helps the Indian context of Orthodoxy to look beyond their present theological exercise and suggests the Orthodox theology not to form as an archive of a piece of work, rather it should transform to be a source of text to the present theology. It is primarily “to live and carry out its mission; it is here that the church is called upon time and time again to incarnate the Christian truth about God, the world and humanity.” To fulfil this call, Kalaitzidis imagines having a “fidelity to tradition with renewal and innovation, boasting in the Lord about the positive

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26 Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology, 85.
27 Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology, 89.
28 Kalaitzidis, “From ‘the Return to the Fathers’ to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 54 (2010): 25.
29 Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology, 90.
30 Kalaitzidis, Orthodoxy and Political Theology, 85.
31 Kalaitzidis, “From ‘the Return to the Fathers’,” 25.
things that Orthodox theology has offered up to this time, but also including an element of self-criticism and openness to the future.”32 This self-criticism helps Orthodoxy to move further with an empathetic vision of reconciliation.

Similar to Kalaitzidis, Mor Coorilose also imagines an Orthodox theological engagement with the Dalits only by identifying and upholding the “first-hand experience of pain and pathos to distinguish life-affirming forces from those that destroy life.”33 This pathos-stricken life is the life of Christ. It is this material body or ‘broken body’ found on the cross that constitutes the body of Christ in India.34 When dealing with the body of Christ, though Mor Coorilose does not agree with the approach of Christomonism,35 an all-encompassing Christological vision is what Mor Coorilose expects from Indian Orthodoxy. He links this account of the Dalit body to the logos tradition of Christian theology. The “Church is the body of Christ and, therefore, Christianity is deemed a religion of the body. Incarnation is logos becoming flesh.”36 For him, this thought is compatible with the foundational belief of the Orthodox church and its physical formation as the body of Christ. The contention that he makes in this regard is that “the bodily dimensions of Christianity have been, over theirs, narrowly spiritualised and depoliticised.”37 The body of Christ that includes the Dalit body can be understood only through a political dimension of the body. This does not reduce into a partial spiritual system that affirms only a narrow and non-political transcendence in the body of Christ.

However, Mor Coorilose believes that in the multi-faith context of India a solution does not arrive by just accepting the sociological need of the church alone. According to him:

what we need today is synthesis of these three kinds of imaginations: philosophical, sociological, and poetic: textual contextual and inter-textual. For this to materialise though,

32 Kalaitzidis, “From 'the Return to the Fathers',” 25.
35 Mor Coorilose explains his idea of Christo-monism when he talks about the importance of the inter-religious dialogue. According to him, “A Theocentric orientation guided by a Trinitarian world view prompts Orthodox theology to go beyond reductionism of either “Jesusologies” or “Christo-monism.” God is the common ground and the mission belongs to God (missio Dei) who is also the source and fountain of dialogue. The Orthodox theological accent on Imago Dei contributes towards a wider humanitarian perspective of mission and dialogue because the Imago Dei affirms that every human being by virtue of possessing God’s image has access to divine grace and salvation.” See Mor Coorilose, The Joy of the Gospel of Life, 104-5.
36 Geevarghese Mor Coorilose, “Dalit Theology and Its Future Course,” in Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172. He explains in more clarity elsewhere: “In this postmodern version of embodied theology and spirituality, a theology of the logos that took the form of body and pitched its tent among the people, it is the ‘little narrative’ that are confronted in the tents of the homes and the oppressed that will shape the content of theology.” See Mor Coorilose, “Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century,” 174.
37 Mor Coorilose, “Dalit Theology and Its Future Course,” 172.
we probably need to move beyond the postmodern thought worlds because no ‘system’ can ‘embody’ a ‘living theology’.38

His proposal of philosophical, sociological, and poetic synthesis does not minimise the historic past of the marginalised community. But by synthesising the experiences he hopes to initiate transformative healing to the dominant in connection with the suffering. He writes, “one of the most significant yet perhaps the most misunderstood aspects of Christian mission and ministry is the whole area of healing. Both mainline churches and sectarian groups have carried out healing ministries in a much-distorted manner.”39 The healing vision of the church brings new trajectories of reconciliation. Healing is followed by the process of reconciliation, which begins from the brokenness of Christ on the Cross. Such genuine reconciliation establishes societies without injustice, and without “discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, gender, race, sexual orientation, and so on.”40 It engenders the Orthodox Christological plan of holding “a balance between the head and the heart, theory and praxis, orthodoxy and orthopraxis.”41 This combination can also be interpreted as the Christological plan of transcendental (philosophical) and immanent (sociological) approach. K.M. George takes a similar position:

As Jesus sent his disciples to announce the good news of the kingdom of God and to heal the sick, the Church’s apostolic or missionary calling is to proclaim this gospel to the poor and to bring about healing, reconciliation and salvation to the world which suffers from the illness of sin and is swayed by evil.42

This combination of healing, reconciliation, and salvation in the midst of social evils is the drive of orthodoxy and orthopraxis as revealed in inseparable divine and human unity of the liturgy.

Mor Coorilose proposes an act of reconciliation before the beginning of the liturgy.

Slightly different to Ion Bria’s mission dictum of ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ Mor Coorilose sees mission as “liturgy before liturgy.”43 He seeks a transformation of the broken world as a liturgy before participating in the doxological liturgy. If this process takes place, according to Mor Coorilose, even the “liturgy after liturgy will embrace each other; orthodoxy and orthopraxis will join hands; and dialogue and dia(tria)paxis will find perfect synthesis.”44 For

38 Mor Coorilose, “Dalit Theology and Its Future Course,” 176.
him, this takes place in the base of the biblical tradition of reconciliation found in Matthew 5:23-24, a passage in which the early teachers of the church find the meaning of embrace as a Christological tool of reconciliation.

Indirectly referring to Mor Coorilose, K. M. George doubts whether it is necessary to debate the issue of ‘after’ or ‘before’ the liturgy. According to him, ‘expressions like liturgy after the liturgy or liturgy before the liturgy, useful as they may be for our pastoral-catechetical-instruction, do not seem to perceive the seamlessly holistic nature of the triune God’s creative and redemptive love that embraces the whole creation and our free and grateful (‘Eucharist’) response to it. All forms of human creativity, all created reality need to be Eucharistic in this cosmic liturgical context.’ Mor Coorilose might, however, be seen as heading in this direction himself as he does not neglect the various religious traditions and the reality of social margins in India. The key point of Mor Coorilose’s wider vision of mission in the Indian context of both the multi-faith and the people from the marginalised community is the co-existence of the Indian body of Christ as a community of justice.

Amid these thoughts of Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Mor Coorilose we see a clear scope for Orthodoxy to move forward in today’s social and religious context of discrimination and division by partnering their thoughts with the early teachers. Kalaitzidis’ scheme for appropriating Orthodox theology in the present context and looking forward to initiate a missional interaction will offer a determined stimulus for Orthodoxy. Likewise, Mor Coorilose’s most promising vision of a reconciling and healing embrace between the dominant and suffering people in the Indian context of Orthodoxy will embody a new life of Orthodoxy. In short, this vision of a transformed Orthodoxy can be practically achieved by finding the reconciling metaphors that the Orthodoxy has in its liturgy. The most promising is the liturgical embrace or kiss of peace.

6.5 Liturgical Embrace: An Inclusive Miaphysite Christological Vision

The liturgical “embrace or kiss of peace” includes a Christological plan. For instance, when we follow the Eucharistic liturgy of Severus, we see in the prayers the kiss of peace.

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45 George, “Towards a Eucharistic Missiology,” 16.
46 In the Syrian Orthodox liturgy, the word ‘embrace’ (n-aafeq) or the phrase ‘kiss of peace’ is used alternatively by different authors of the Liturgy. For instance, the Order attributed to St. Peter reads: “we may embrace one another with a kiss free from guile” (n-afeeeklahtho-de b-neeeshak-to) and St. Cyril “we ‘embrace’ one another in spirit” (n-afeek b-rooho has l-haad). Samuel Yeshu Mar Athanasius, Konatt Mathen, Kuriakose Corepiscopa, eds., Trilingual Eucharist Service Book of Syriac Orthodox Church (Cheeranchira, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2008), 217-18, 345-46. However, the liturgy of this tradition

47 Studies of miaphysite liturgy show that the prayers are addressed to the ‘Father’ except the ananamasis and the final thanksgiving prayer. See Baby Varghese, The Syriac Version of the Liturgy of St. James: A Brief History for Students (Cambridge: Grove Liturgical Books, 2001), 15. However, the liturgy of this tradition
planned as a means of bringing people of difference together before the celebration of the actual anaphora. It is important to look closely at the prayer that finds a significant role in exhibiting the relation between Christ’s love, peace, unity/reconciliation and ‘embrace’ or ‘kiss of peace’. The Order goes as follows:

Priest: Oh God, who are the Creator of all, and especially of man [sic] Whom you made rational in Your own image, you are who brought him into existence and adorned him with your divine gifts. You ordained for us the law to love one another, desiring that we all be one, just as You and Your Only-begotten Son, our Lord and our God Jesus Christ, are one. Freeing us from all division and uniting our hearts with fellowship and the unity of Your Holy Spirit, Make us worthy to agree one another with a holy kiss (bnooshaktokaadishto) and thus becoming one body and one spirit (had fagaro w-had rooho), even as we have been called in one hope of our calling in Christ Jesus our Lord with Whom befit You glory and honour with Your Holy Spirit, now always and forever. People: Amen.

Priest: Peace be with you all.
People: And with your spirit.

Deacon: Let us give peace to one another, everyone to his neighbour with a holy and divine kiss, in the love of our Lord and God. (Nai-tail shalom lah-dodai, kalnoshigareebeh, bnoo-shaqtoqa-dishowalo-hoytobhoobeidmoranwalohan.)
People: Make us worthy, O Lord and God, of this peace all the days of our lives. (Ashwolanmoryoaloho lash slomo hoqulhoon yaw-moto d-hahein.)

The above prayer of the kiss of peace or embrace in the Eucharistic liturgy is addressed to the Father but with a complete Christological link. This link is made through the category of love (hoo-bo) and its corresponding connection with the people is continued through the kiss of peace (bnooshaktokaadishto). According to Severus, God ordained the love for one another, which can also be read as love to ‘the Other’. This love is the Christological relationship and can be explicitly expressed through ‘embrace’, freeing from all forms of ‘division’ (adsa or mirpandj) and discrimination or separation (nzarto). The result of such action is to realise the unity of one body and one spirit in God and with people.

The prayer attributed to the laity includes the same expression: make us worthy of this peace (slomo) all the days of our lives. Slomo, which is shalom in Hebrew, is yet another

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primarily focuses on the celebration of the salvific event of Jesus Christ within the cosmic vision of the Church. Each prayer contains the explanation of the salvific event at different stages and at the end it submits to the Father. In the case of prayers for the exchange of peace, the nature of peace in the Christ event is narrated. George Mathew Kuttiyil, one of the liturgical theologians of the Syrian church in India aptly put this as “liturgy is the participation in the economic Trinity, the self-communication of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Sacraments, especially the Eucharist are meant to help us to encounter Jesus, our risen Lord, through symbols and words, which originated with Jesus’ words and actions.” George Mathew Kuttiyil, Eucharist (Qurbana): The Celebration of the Economy of Salvation (Madabramutha: A Theological Analysis of the Anaphora of St. James (Kottayam, Kerala: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 1999), 19.

48 An appendix is given explaining the liturgical order. Though the Syrian church follows St. James liturgy as a base, Severus follows the same order and rewrites the prayers based on his Christological confession. Since this thesis deals more on Severus’ work analysis of the liturgy here is also taken from Severus’ liturgy.

49 Athanasius, Mathen, Corepiscopa, Trilingual Eucharist Service Book, 441-42.
reference to the Christological nature, meaning ‘to make peace’ or ‘to be at peace’. In both meanings, slomo takes an exchange of peace and the praxis of that exchange of peace is ‘embrace’ or ‘kiss of peace’. As the slomo is the manifestation of Christ, exchanging the peace to each other is the Christological expression manifest in human praxis, the divine-human relation explicitly shown when passing peace to one another. It begins out of the love and at the same time it refers to the faith affirmation of one body and one spirit of the Eucharistic community in the theology of the Eucharist.

The above analysis helps us to understand the ‘embrace’ (n-aafeq) or the kiss of peace (bnooshaktokaadishto), which reveals Christ’s ‘one nature’ by expressing his love (hoo-bo) and peace (slomo) as part of unity or reconciliation. The word used in the prayer for embrace is ‘unity’, which aims at ‘reconciliation’ (hoosoyo, m-shynoosho, tharavoso). Categorically, through embrace Christ himself becomes the love and peace. By his embrace, Christ and ‘the Other’ turn to be one as the ‘divine and human’ nature becomes one nature. By an embrace, no party is superior or inferior rather both unites with equal manner of gestures as Christ putting on the human body and uniting with his Godhead and humanhood.

If the purpose of liturgy is an action, not a text or prayer alone, the liturgical embrace is also an action of bringing the people of different communities into the joy of the Trinitarian model of community of all. Severus writes: “freeing us from all division and uniting our hearts with the fellowship and the unity of Your Holy Spirit through holy kiss.” This shows that Severus’ God is not a stereotypical God who does only one act for those who belong in different types of social and religious marginalities. If Severus had been exposed to Dalit issues he would have raised a prayer embracing the Dalits and the other margins in our context. The practice of ‘embrace’ (n-aafeq) is as an imperative in the experience of the Eucharist in the Syriac Orthodox liturgy. It seems to suggest a Christology that bridges any division based on the unity of humanity and divinity together. In short, the word ‘embrace’ (n-aafeq), as it seen in the Syrian Orthodox liturgy, takes the shape of both the transcendental and immanent expression of God.

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51 The commentaries of this expression are based on St. James liturgy, which will be dealt with later in this chapter under sections 6.1 – 6.4.
52 Athanasius, Mathen, and Corepiscopa, Trilingual Eucharist Service Book, 456.
54 In his liturgy prayer, Severus brings the idea of reconciling embrace to those who are set aside. For instance: “Be, Oh Lord, a Sustainer to the widows, a refuge to the orphans, a staff to the aged, an instruction to childhood, healing to those who suffer injuries and freedom to those who are severely oppressed by unclean spirits. Have mercy upon those who suffer from chronic illness and infirmities. Release all those who are entangled in all types of troubles. Make those who are beat down. Raise those who are fallen.” Athanasius, Mathen, and Corepiscopa, Trilingual Eucharist Service Book, 442.
How can this metaphor be understood as means of an inclusive category of Christology geared towards the process of reconciliation? Such a detailed study of the embrace or holy kiss has not shaped the Syrian tradition in India as much as it has within the Western Christian traditions. Despite many scriptural and liturgical references to the inclusive nature of the holy kiss in the Eucharistic celebration, modern scholarship has focused more on the exclusivity it created in history. Given the council of Chalcedon and the schism of East and West, to some degree the Eastern Orthodox churches focused their studies on the Byzantine tradition of Eastern Christianity alone. As one effect of this focus, the position developed by the Oriental churches in general and the Syriac church in particular fails to appear within these studies.

In his significant 2005 study, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*, Michael Philip Penn observes how ritual kisses functioned as a metaphor in the early church. It had this effect, Penn argues, due to foundational questions of identity and power. The kiss transmitted various cultural discourses, namely concepts of family, spiritual exchange, reconciliation and social bodies. In his analysis, Penn demonstrates that:

…by constructing the kiss as a tool for reconciliation, early Christian leaders attempted to minimise the tensions in the community. As a form of conflict management, the kiss created an opportunity for members to reflect not the importance of group Concord, but express their reconciliation with each other, and reaffirm their unity.

He continues that, “kissing each other symbolized mutual acceptance into a larger community. The kiss tried to unite the bodies of all participants into one, undivided social body.” On the one hand, the act of embracing/kissing encourages people to accept one another. On the other hand, it excludes people and communities outside of the baptismal

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57 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 30-37.

58 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 33-49.

59 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 49, 52.
experience. The performance of the ritual kiss helped the early church construct a “chaste and closed community, a social boundary,” allowing the group to develop its “cohesive, hierarchical and exclusive” nature as a social body.\(^6^0\)

Penn concludes that the historical developments concerning the kiss of peace in the fifth century allowed the church to establish a boundary marker. It became a tool in creating an exclusive community, with a clear binary created between the baptized and the non-baptized, the faithful and the heretics, the pure and the impure, the insider and the outsider. Reconciliation was reduced to a ritual performance. Alternately stated, the ritual kiss or embrace defined inclusion as a privilege for those who were considered equal, while those considered weak were excluded from the fellowship. By the fifth century, in other words, the church is caught between the liturgical practice of exclusion and the liturgical vision of inclusion. Formally, this occurred after the recitation of the Creed, with the deacon announcing: ‘Go out the catechumens and from then the community divides into two’. As catechumens were dismissed, so this established a visible representation of ‘the Other.’ To cite Dom Dix’s more general conclusions, the fuller communion with “greetings” and “kiss[es]” is properly “restricted only to the believers”; It is not available to the “world.”\(^6^1\) By this reading, “kiss of peace” has been used as a tool for exclusion in Christian history.

Penn’s analysis of the kiss of peace ends with the fifth century. Though he grants some positive elements in the ritual kiss of peace,\(^6^2\) ultimately the kiss encouraged “social boundaries.”\(^6^3\) We should not repudiate the undeniable historical grounding of Penn’s argument. However, two points might be made. First, Penn’s analysis deals only with material from the Western Christian tradition. His readers are left with the perspective that the kiss of peace was only ever interpreted in history in terms of exclusion and boundary creation. Second, and related, Penn has ignored the way in which the same kiss has been interpreted as creating community. Penn’s claims developed without reference to the extensive non-Chalcedonian literature that has developed independently of Western theological and liturgical paradigm. The non-Chalcedonian voice permits new paths in the understanding of the ritual kiss. The following develops an alternative reading of the kiss of peace through the Eucharistic commentaries of four miaphysite theologians and commentators: Jacob of Edessa, George the Bishop of Arabs, Moses Bar Kepha, and Dionysius Bar Salibi.

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\(^{60}\) Penn, Kissing Christians, 2-3.
\(^{61}\) Dom Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (London: Continuum, 2005), 103.
\(^{62}\) Penn, Kissing Christians, 49, 52.
\(^{63}\) Penn, Kissing Christians, 28, 30.
6.6 Liturgical Inclusiveness of Christ’s Embrace: Vision of Early Syriac Teachers

The liturgical embrace, the heartbeat of the liturgy, enters into a new form in Syrian Christian liturgical theology. The Syrian Orthodox tradition is directed by this liturgy to an inclusive vision of cosmic reconciliation. Basic to this is the Eucharist and the manner of entry through the kiss of peace. By the seventh century, the miaphysite theologians of the Syriac church portray the kiss of peace as the catalyst for an inclusive or cosmic vision of the church. Taking seriously this liturgical entrance to the Eucharist, and so viewing the coordinated inclusive embrace as part of the same entrance, means the creating of a liturgical being active in reconciliation and oneness with the people who are identified with the catechumens – the margins being othered then. Christianity attained the norm of a community that is always reconciled from the dangers of division and disunity. The kiss becomes an act of love and peace, a necessary liturgical moment of forgiveness and reconciliation with one another. Not only is this basic to the performance of the ritual but it is basic to the Orthodox church’s understanding of the social context and its witness within this sphere. There is no hidden exercise of worship; only the cosmic vision of the Kingdom of heaven coming down to earth as a foretaste of the eschatological culmination. The reconciliation experienced with the kiss of peace extends to the whole of creation without any division or exclusion.

Now, let us turn to the explanations of some of the Eucharistic commentators of the Syrian Orthodox liturgy. Commentators of the Syrian liturgy are well respected and honoured for their vast contribution to the area of liturgy and its inclusive fashion. This is the positive sign that we take on the inclusiveness of the Christological embrace that we offer as a metaphor of Orthodox-Dalit conversation. Before we move on to a discussion of the Christological inclusiveness of both Dalit and Orthodox tradition in India, we turn to early West Syrian early teachers to understand the potential of the embrace or kiss of peace as they envisioned it.

6.6.1 Jacob of Edessa: Embrace – An Inclusive Eucharistic Assembly

Jacob, Bishop of Edessa, is one of the most significant figures in Syriac Christianity, especially as he wrote during the establishment of Islamic rule and culture in Syria. He was a prolific writer and theologian of the church. In the miaphysite Syriac family, Jacob’s Eucharistic commentary established fresh directions in the understanding and practice of Eucharistic rituals. Even though influenced by Greek thought, Jacob’s Eucharistic

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hermeneutics took a creative path, leading to an emphasis on inclusion. Given that most of Jacob’s works have been lost, we turn to the work of Gregorios Bar Hebraeus who quotes Jacob extensively in his Nomocanon.

Jacob’s work centred on the St. James liturgy and the inclusive vision of the Eucharistic community he finds contained within it. If the post-apostolic church defined the Eucharistic assembly in exclusive terms (with the dismissal of the catechumens), Jacob of Edessa treads a different path, highlighting the practice of an inclusive assembly that was already in practice before Jacob. In his “actualisation of Holy Eucharist (qurbano),” Bar Hebraeus quotes Jacob of Edessa:

Formerly after the reading of the Holy Scripture, the prayer over the hearers was said and the deacon announced, “Hearers, go out.” Then they passed under the hand of the bishop or of priests and went out. Likewise, the Energumens, Catechumens and the Penitents are dismissed with the special prayers of the priest and the proclamation of the deacon and they left. However, today these things have disappeared. But (now) after the reading of the scriptures, the prayer of entrance is said, then the creed is recited by the whole people. Then come three prayers: of peace, imposition of the hand and the lifting of the anaphora.

Jacob’s narration of the practice of the Eucharist in his time or a little earlier gives us the norms for the assembly as it headed to the anaphora. As to the place of the catechumens (non-baptized) in the assembly, Jacob describes how the past position concerning the “people outside (Energumens, Catechumens, the Penitents) and the faithful inside” took on a

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66 The unpublished manuscript of Jacob’s work is kept in Berlin Sachau 218, fol.178v -186v. For more details see Baby Varghese, West Syrian Liturgical Theology: Liturgy, Worship and Theology (England: Ashgate, 2004), 25. However, the fragments of Jacob’s works on Eucharistic commentary have been quoted by Bar Hebraeus in fourteenth century ecclesial canon, commonly referred to as the Nomocanon.

67 Gregorios Bar Hebraeus, the thirteenth century Syrian Orthodox bishop, codified the “church canon” named Nomocanon. He used all of the earlier Eucharist commentaries to set a norm for the Eucharistic actualization. Jacob of Edessa’s very significant contribution to the Eucharistic commentary was included in the canon, detailing the new practice in which the catechumens were not sent out after the recitation of the creed, unlike early notions that sent the Catechumens out after the recitation of the creed.

68 Bar Hebraeus, Book of Guides (Hudaya) or Nomocanon (Kottayam, Kerala: Malankara Orthodox Church Publications, 2014), 67-68. Many editions of this book have been published in India from an earliest copy available at Konattu Library, Kerala. This is a recent reprint from the earlier edition.

69 I shall very briefly mention the discussion of baptism since my research necessarily does not consider this area. For Syrians, Baptism includes the anointing of oil (Holy Chrism), the confirmation. It used to be done as a single sacrament, though different prayers are used to denote the baptism and the confirmation. A detailed study on this subject is found in B. Varghese, “Structure of the Sacramental Celebrations,” The Harp 25 (2010): 201-2. The Antiochian Baptismal liturgy consisted of only pre-baptismal rituals and anointing until the fourth Century. The post-baptismal liturgy with Chrismation was added, “probably under the influence of the rites of the reconciliation of the heretics.” Varghese, “Structure of the Sacramental Celebrations,” 215. This concept strongly suggests the main emphasis of the use of the holy Chrism as a means of reconciliation with people who confessed Christian faith in different contexts. The cardinal point to be noted is that the service of baptism was included with holy oil (presence of holy spirit). It is for this reason that the catechumens (those who are not yet baptised) were barred from the Eucharistic participation. However, this practice of barring has ceased in the miaphysitic tradition. Therefore, it is possible for catechumens to join with the Eucharistic celebration and exchange the kiss of peace.
new shape in his time. According to his commentary, no longer are the catechumens dismissed. Within this new moment in the miaphysite Syriac tradition, the catechumens remain present for the third part of the Eucharist, the anaphora. Likewise, the holy kiss is to be exchanged with all present in the new ecclesial assembly of energumens, catechumens, and penitents. If Jacob of Edessa’s commentary takes a meaningful turn, ‘the Others’ in the Indian context are not outside the Eucharistic celebration. Rather they also constitute the Eucharistic assembly. Should Jacob’s position be instituted within the Indian liturgical context of Orthodoxy it will lead to radical social consequences both within and without the churches.

Discontinuing a practice that was once treated as a basic norm seems to be a liberating step within the ancient miaphysite Syriac tradition. And because Bar Hebraeus included this modification in the canon of the church, this is no casual reference – it is now a mandated custom of Eucharistic practice within the Syrian Orthodox church.

While commenting on the exchange of peace, Jacob observes how the holy peace brings ‘them’ and ‘us’ together. As Mor Coorilose observed above, “the peace which is given, fulfils the Word of Our Lord: Leave your offering on the altar and be reconciled with your brother (Mathew 5:23-23). Similarly, the spiritual beings are assembled here, and they give peace with us, for peace was established between them and us by the death of the Lord.” Two points should be made. First, Jacob makes overt the link within the St. James liturgy between the prayer before peace and its reference to Matthew 5:23–24 and the language of the ‘unworthy’ and the ‘worthy’. One cannot approach the altar if one has something against one’s brother or sister in Christ. The prayer and the holy kiss are for the sake of this ‘worthiness’ – a process of reconciliation – and thereby a unity with God. Second, Jacob connects the three cardinal elements of Syrian Orthodox liturgical theology: peace, reconciliation, and death of the Lord. The Eucharistic purpose of peace and reconciliation is accomplished through the death of the Lord. The kiss of peace becomes a central passage towards the reconciliation that attains the fullness of God’s redemptive act through Jesus Christ. The kiss of peace stands for Christ’s peace and thereby Christ’s embrace. Jacob’s interpretation of embrace demands a move on reconciliation with those whom the Orthodoxy has not yet considered as being the Eucharistic community which offers Christ’s embrace bringing transcendental and immanent unity.

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70 This is a translation by Varghese, West Syrian Liturgical Theology, 26.
71 “Oh God of all and Lord, account these our unworthy selves to be worthy of this salvation so that without guile and united by bond of love, we may greet one another with a holy and divine kiss” Athanasius, Mathen, and Corepiscopa, Trilingual Eucharist Service Book, 122.
6.6.2 George, Bishop of Arabs: Embrace – Breaking the Enmity

Following Jacob of Edessa, the next major contributor to this discussion is George, Bishop of Arabs, a miaphysite Syrian bishop whose theological methodology was authoritatively different from that of the Western school of thought. In An Exposition of the Mysteries of the Church, a Eucharistic commentary attributed to George he notes some different Eucharistic practices undertaken in the miaphysite Syriac church. In this study, notable for the approach to the kiss of peace, Bishop George develops a potentially different direction than that taken by the other Christian traditions.

Bishop George begins his commentary by examining the question of baptism and the associated obligation to be a part of a new life. His approach invokes a new setting for the binary often developed between the people of God and people of wrath or evil. If we follow Justin Martyr, after baptism the bishop is able to kiss the new entrant into the community. Prior to this, the catechumen cannot be kissed. However, George’s commentary shows how the miaphysite Syriac teachers interpreted peace as something exchanged between the people in the congregation:

The peace which the faithful give to one another puts away and quenches former enmity and wrath, and brings about peace and quietness, and love of one with another, and reconciliation with God and with the holy angels.

The embrace is not limited to a ritual action in fulfilment of the liturgical function. Its effect is of a much wider scope, removing the enmity and wrath that exists among the people. His

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73 Varghese, West Syrian Liturgical Theology, 19-22.


75 According to the early church, only the baptised community receives the privilege to join in the community of God. See Connolly and Codrington, Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy, 12. Christianity does not compromise on this topic for the participation and functioning of the Eucharistic ceremony. From the beginning the early church followed the baptism as a mandatory event that consent to be in the Eucharistic communion. I shall only briefly mention on this topic, since my research largely deviates from this area. It is important to note that Syrian churches consider both Baptism and Myron as one sacrament. For Syrians, Baptism includes the anointing of oil. A detailed study on this subject is found in Varghese, “Structure of the Sacramental Celebrations,” 201-2. Until the fourth century the Antiochian Baptismal liturgy consisted of only pre-baptismal rituals and anointing. Post-baptismal liturgy with Chrismation was added, “probably under the influence of the rites of the reconciliation of the heretics [sic].” See Connolly, Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy, 16. This concept strongly suggests that the main emphasis of the use of holy Chrism was as a means of reconciliation with people who confessed Christian faith in different contexts. However, the cardinal point to be noted is that the service of baptism was included with holy oil (presence of holy spirit). It is believed that for this reason, the catechumens (those who are not yet baptised) were denied Eucharistic participation.

76 Connolly and Codrington, Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy, 16.
use of the word ‘former’ is somewhat ambiguous, but two interpretations could indicate its inclusive character. If the ‘former’ is the one moving towards baptism (catechumen), then baptism should bring people together to embrace, irrespective of the cultural, social, and political backgrounds. On the other hand, if the ‘former’ is the one who remains unbaptized, the kiss of peace should bring them together as Jesus himself embraced people of all social backgrounds. Whatever approach one takes, one can conclude that the kiss of peace breaks the formerly created wall between ‘them’ and ‘us.’ After Bishop George a number of other miaphysite Syrian teachers highlighted the vision of inclusive gestures and the inclusive community in the following centuries. Bishop George’s position on embrace opens the scope for understanding the ‘former’ in the Indian context – they are not someone to be excluded. The Indian church is to be qualified not with the former or latter, rather all come under one experience of embrace, recognizing their own plurality.

6.6.3 Moses Bar Kepha: Embrace – Inclusion of Gentiles

In the second half of the ninth century, the Syriac Christian communities were shaken by the radical shift in the social and religious policies of the Abbasid Empire. This period proved to be a turbulent one due to Islamic pressures. Christian religious leaders and theologians were imprisoned and tortured, and this translated into a need for a unified voice from Christian denominations. Denominational differences and theological divisions were considered meaningless. Among many Christian leaders of the time, Moses Bar Kepha, a miaphysite Syriac theologian, produced a Eucharistic commentary. Going beyond his predecessors, he produced a comprehensive commentary on the kiss of peace. This portrayed not only an all-encompassing Syrian Orthodox vision but also an ecumenical lens that invited people from different Christian denominations to come together. Varghese acclaims Moses Bar Kepha’s commentary *Baptism and Eucharist and the Consecration of Chrism (myron)* as representing a new interpretation of the history of the miaphysite Syriac mystagogical tradition. Bar Kepha remains in line with the commentaries of his predecessors, like Jacob of Edessa and George, the bishop of Arabs, while informing the Antiochian and Alexandrian mystagogues with significant contextual reflections. For instance, concerning the kiss of peace in the Eucharistic celebration, Bar Kepha writes five points:

Firstly: Since we are making ready to communicate with God through His body, and this cannot be so long as we are divided in ourselves and regarding each other; …as we

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80 Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, 27.
embrace outwardly, so inwardly we have love and concord. Secondly: by being made at peace with one another we are made at peace with God. Thirdly: the peace, which we give one another, quenches and does away mutual enmity. Fourthly: by the peace, which we give we signify that Christ has made an end of the enmity, which was between (God) and men [sic], and between the People and the peoples, (and between the soul, and) the body, and has caused peace and love to reign in the body and has caused peace and love to reign among us. Fifthly: again, by the peace, which we give at this time we fulfil the word of the Lord, who said: “if thou offer thine offering upon the altar,” etc., leave thine offering, and go, be reconciled with thy brother [sic].

Without question, Bar Kepha borrows some foundational elements of the kiss of peace from George, Bishop of Arabs and Jacob of Edessa. His own substantial contribution lies in the concept of the people’s position of ‘outwardly’ and ‘inwardly.’ In his book, Bread of Life, Moolayil Kuriyakose, a contemporary theologian of the Syriac church in India, develops this interpretation of the kiss of peace by Moses Bar Kepha. Kuriyakose proposes that the language of ‘outwardly’ and ‘inwardly’ of Bar Kepha could render the exercise of a holy kiss meaningless if it remained superficial and ritualistic. Given its intention to change both the church and wider society, the divine peace must aim at an “internal and external” elevation of the entire human race. For Kuriyakose ‘outwardly’ signifies ‘a social embrace,’ while ‘inwardly’ means “an internal embrace of love and unity.”

To foreshadow the conclusion, Kuriyakose’s interpretation of Bar Kepha supplies a liberating lens in the socio-political and religious context in India. In terms of daily practice, the liturgical kiss in the Syriac tradition in India can often be a matter of mere ritual. The vision of the holy kiss is limited to the immediate ritual assembly. Understood according to this theological and liturgical significance, however, the holy kiss must find expression in a social kiss given the Christian commitment to inward-outward associations.

This inward-outward relationship culminates in reconciliation. Mani Rajan, another historian of the Syrian church in India, identifies the holy kiss as a ritual of reconciliation with God and with one another. This exactly follows Bar Kepha’s own interpretation. The holy kiss speaks to the transformation of social divisions such as those between God and humans, a people and the peoples, and the soul and the body. The plural “peoples” refers to the gentiles, and if this is taken in its full theological intent, Orthodoxy is said to manifest the real liturgical practice of ‘inclusiveness’. Bar Kepha’s commentary not only points to the creation of ecumenical unity among the Christian groups but also contains a vision to

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81 Connolly and Codrington, Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy, 40-41.
82 Kuriyakose Moolayil, Bread of Life: Commentary on the Holy Eucharist According to the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch (Malayalam) (Pathencruz, Kerala: Jacobite Syrian Church Publications, 2013), 60. My own translation.
84 Mani Rajan, Queen of the Sacraments (Kottayam, Kerala: The Travancore Syriac Orthodox Publishers, 2008), 79-80.
eliminate the binaries created between the Orthodox and marginal communities found in any given context. As far as the Syrian Orthodox church in India is concerned, this commentary offers a challenging interpretation for a social integration of the liturgical embrace.

6.6.4 Dionysius Bar Salibi: Embrace – Reconciliation as Cosmic Vision

Towards the twelfth century, the emphasis fell increasingly on reconciliation. Dionysius Bar Salibi championed this view. Although the ancient practice of dismissing the unbaptized from the celebration of the anaphora had stopped, it would seem that Bar Salibi wrote against a background where social division within the Eucharist also remained a key topic. His concern for the reconciliation with God and the world led him to examine two major ritual practices in the Eucharistic celebration integrally connected with the kiss of peace.

First, Bar Salibi talked about reconciliation within the community. He highlighted the use of incense during the recitation of the Creed, which paves the way for the prayer before the kiss of peace. The deacon with the censer would walk around the congregation and return to the Altar. The incenses and their fragrance during this ritual performance, according to Bar Salibi, indicate the “sweet adoration and incense of reconciliation.” The smell of this perfume does not stop within the assembly of people, but goes beyond, into the entire world. Bar Salibi associates the fragrance with sacrifice, the mystery of Christ, and the event of world-God reconciliation. The mystery of Christ, which is present in the fragrance and the kiss of peace (the means of reconciliation) aims to bring the broken world to God. The world will be filled with the fragrance of the mystery of Christ. For Bar Salibi, this is Christ’s own cosmic redemptive activity, and as we participate in the fragrance of Christ’s mystery, so we too participate in the event of cosmic reconciliation.

Second, the kiss of peace stands for reconciliation with people outside. For Bar Salibi, a kiss leads to reconciliation, and thereby it elevates the world into peace. By reaffirming the miaphysite Syriac non-dismissal of the catechumens, he expected an inclusive Eucharistic assembly. In terms of the prayer of peace, Bar Salibi says, “he (God) orders us to be free

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85 Dionysius Bar Salibi, was a polemic writer and a defender of faith in the context of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim conflict. Rifaat Ebied, “Dionysius Bar Salibi’s Syriac Polemical Treatises: Prejudice and Polarization Towards Christians, Jews and Muslims,” The Harp 20 (2006): 73. However, Bar Salibi’s commentary on the ritual of kiss of peace provide an open interpretation.
86 An original Syrian ritual form in the Eucharist and other liturgical services is the incense rite with the priestly sedro (order) prayer that consists of an introduction (prooemion), the sedro prayer proper, burning incense with the hymn (Qolo) of incense, and the prayer for acceptance of the incense offering (etro). The rich and varied poetic compositions that have accumulated in the Liturgy of the Hours have in large measure supplanted the psalms. Carr Ephrem, “Liturgical Families in the East,” in Handbook for Liturgical Studies: Introduction to the Liturgy vol.1 ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997), 14-16.
87 Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi: Commentary on the Eucharist (Kottayam, Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1998), 34.
88 Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi, 35.
89 Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi, 46.
from all ill-will, division, and evil, so that by fulfilling the giving of the peace, we may make
worthy to be gathered before God and to communicate with Him in peaceful unity which
drives away from us every carnal (desires).”

90 One might interpret this carnal desire also in
terms of those things that reject the freedom and the identity of ‘the Other’ in God. Such
desires do not create ‘peace’ in the community. Bar Salibi understands such peace as
occurring only through complete reconciliation with the gentiles:

By the peace that we give each other at that time, we indicate that we are prepared to have
communion with the Word, through His body. This will not be possible if we are
alienated from ourselves and others... The peace that we give makes an end to and
destroy the mutual enmity. By the peace, again we indicate that the enmity and anger
which existed between God and men [sic], between the people and Gentiles, between the
soul and the body, have been abolished by Christ and peace reigns between them.92

To further this line of argument, there exists in the miaphysite Syrian Eucharistic liturgy an
additional prayer of the fraction. One such prayer is attributed to Bar Salibi. Here he
incorporated the word ‘gentile’, reinforcing the togetherness of “the people and the Gentile”
through the blood of Christ.93 The holy kiss is not an act of the body alone. It is an act of the
spirit, whereby people discard anger and then embraces each other with the peace that leads
to the spiritual harmony of love and tranquillity.94

Bar Salibi’s concern for reconciliation retains both a vertical and a horizontal dimension.
He does not limit reconciliation to a process occurring within the church. Reconciliation is an
event also within the social context, something that will happen between the people and the
entire creation. Reconciliation is to fragrance the entire creation. Bar Salibi’s vision of the
cosmic nature of liturgical fragrance invites us to participate in the cosmic reconciliation that

90 Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi, 49.
91 On the other hand, Bar Salibi explains what role each one play determines the status of “peace.” “By
peace be to you all, he [God] exhorts the clergy and the people to give peace [to] each other in tranquillity and
love. In the case of the clergy, in accordance with what our Lord told His disciples: When you love each other,
everybody will know that you are my disciples (John 13:35); and in the case of the people in accordance with
Love your neighbour as yourself (Lev. 19:18) and the people (shall love each other). Again, the peace is given
to fulfil the word of Our Lord: Leave your offering and be reconciled with your brother (Mt. 5:24). Similarly, at
that moment, the spiritual beings also assemble there, and with us, they give peace with us, because by the death
of the Son they had peace with us.” Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi, 50. Moreover, with the priest’s
pronunciation the peace and tranquility to all, the peace is shared among the people and by people’s response
with your spirit the same peace shares to the priest. This cycle penetrates the peace among all. This part is also
seen in the writings of Moses Bar Kepho. Connolly and Codrington, Two Commentaries on the Jacobite
Liturgy, 40.
92 Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi, 50.
93 In his prayer on the fraction, he narrates the purpose of incarnation as a means of reconciliation with
heaven and earth, people with gentiles and soul with the body. Athanasius, Mathen, and Corepiscopa, Trilingual
Eucharist Service Book, 147. See also Varghese, The Joy of Freedom, 54-55.
94 Peace symbolises the divine concord and God who has removed our faults and reconciled us with His
greatness. By this symbol, the familiarity and openness with Spirit and with the spirit of ‘just’ are united.
Varghese, Dionysius Bar Salibi, 51.
Christ has brought through his mystery and so to be open to a cosmic community within the liturgical celebration.

The interpretation of embrace by the above mentioned four miaphysite liturgical commentators provides two major insights. First, it is a metaphor for an inclusive act and second, it carries the potential to act as reconciliation with ‘the Other’. Moving from an ‘exclusive’ nature to an ‘inclusive’ identity, ‘embrace’ demands that Orthodoxy in India initiate the process of reconciliation. Embrace does not expect a coercive reconciliation. It is not the dominant forcing the weak to yield for a reconciliation. Rather, the essence of embrace guides the dominant that towards, as Bar Kepha suggested, an ‘inward’ reconciliation or contriteness. A natural confidence created in ‘the Other’ will develop a space of reconciliation as envisioned in the miaphysite Christological plan of embrace.

6.7 Reconciliation: A Practical Dalit-Orthodox Embrace of Liturgy in the Liturgy

As reflected by Severus and other early teachers of the liturgical commentaries, to embody Christ’s embrace (divine-human) as a practical reconciling process of bringing people of all social categories together within the liturgical space can be understood as ‘liturgy in the liturgy’.\(^95\) It is suggestive of the recognition of the ‘outside’ or ‘the Other’ within the liturgy but not as an objective of mission. Liturgy in the liturgy does not imagine a missional characteristic of giving or extending the liturgy to ‘the Other’ rather, rather they too belong as part of the liturgy. It means ‘the Other’ is a part of the liturgy with a complete identity of its own. This is the mystery of the liturgy. When the ‘Christ event’ becomes the celebration of the liturgy in the miaphysite tradition, the open armed Christ on the Cross invalidates the separateness of the outside and inside.

As we understand this mystery from the early teachers of the church, we must also listen to the voices of present teachers like Miroslav Volf. His theological treatment on ‘Christ’s open arms on the Cross’ is significant in reshaping the reconciled Christian community from the perspective of ‘the Other.’\(^96\) The open arm encourages the Christian faith to reconcile as a process of affirming the life of ‘the Other’ within God’s all-encompassing nature of love and interpersonal communion. It can be completely fulfilled through the image of God being human – “becoming human and allowing himself to be a sacrifice on the cross.”\(^97\) As discussed earlier, this experience of God as transcendental and immanent essentially

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\(^95\) I am grateful to Jayakiran Sebastian for encouraging me to look at the possibilities of ‘liturgy in the liturgy’ to be able to appropriate within the Orthodox theology.


determines the foundation of reconciliation. God allows us to be a part of Christ even or the liturgy celebrating the pluriformity within the table of the underprivileged, despite any social, cultural or racial differences.

However, Orthodoxy’s claim on universal or cosmic liturgy can be experienced only when the celebration of the plurality of ‘the Other/s’ become a part of the liturgy. In doing so, the transformative knowledge is such that the Other is not an enemy of the ‘polluted’ entity but rather is a part of the liturgy. In the present content in India, it requires both reconciliation and forgiveness. Since the Orthodox theology recognises the need for practical inclusiveness based on theological analysis, seeking forgiveness from the people who were historically denied an embrace is also a part of reconciliation.98 This is not to claim one community’s defeat or victory. Here, the Dalit and Orthodox communities stand as equal partners of identity with unique theological visions. Foreseeing a ‘liturgy in the liturgy’ challenges the community to come closer, leaving their personal spaces, and to enjoy the liberation of the intimacy of embrace.

Many Dalit theologians have opened the Dalit communities’ conversation with theologians from other traditions. Anderson H.M. Jeremiah, a modern Dalit theologian calls it “reconciliatory and all-embracing.”99 It offers the perfect opportunity to celebrate bipolar conversation. Christ as Dalit God holds an ‘all-embracing’ vision on the Cross with open arms.100 It means that the Dalit Christ creates a universal possibility (inclusive), as found in contexts of injustice at the margins.101 In this process “both the oppressed and the oppressors will be critically challenged to work in an integrative and dialogical manner for a non-exclusive and non-dehumanising society.”102 The all-embracing (inclusive) Christological vision and the doctrinal positions shall lead to a practical measure of Dalit-Orthodox embrace.

It is worth to recalling Sathianathan Clarke’s two-dimensional Christology here. Clarke uses the idea of the “expansive side” and “constrictive side,” which in fact Orthodoxy

98 In the liturgical reconciliation model proposed by Robert J Schreiter, reconciliation is complete only when the victim forgives the oppressor and when the oppressor truly repents. See Robert J. Schreiter, Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order (New York, Massachusetts: Orbis Books and Boston Theological Institute, 1992). 45. The best model that Schreiter proposes to achieve this goal is the “ritual” content, specifically the Eucharistic ritual. Schreiter, Reconciliation, 74-75.


101 Peniel Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 64.

102 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 64.
understands as the terms of divinity and humanity of Christ. It can also be assumed as inside or outside. In a practical sense, this is the Dalit and Orthodox communities proposing to have a dialectical relationship. This becomes the starting point or subject of reconciliation for the Dalit community to forgive those who trespassed them in order to be able to fulfil, in Rajkumar’s language, an inter-relationality of communities.

The Orthodox mission can achieve its goals, especially in the context of the caste system in India, only when Orthodoxy celebrates the liturgy by identifying the equal partnership of the Dalit body, not as an outside body, but as Christ’s body of the liturgy. Fulfilling the vision of Christ’s embrace transforms ‘the liturgy’ as a celebration of the pluriformity of Christ’s body, gathering from all over to one table as a continuity of the ‘Christ event’ present day. Differently stated, For the Orthodoxy in India, the point of departure for the missional experience of the liturgy begins from Christ’s embrace, which upholds an inseparable identity of the divine and human natures of God, and practically celebrates the liturgy by transforming the inside-outside or horizontal-vertical into one table – not by disintegrating the plurality of identities but becoming inseparably touched or embraced.

6.8 Conclusion
Embrace that leads towards the reconciliation, as discussed above, is a Christological category that aims to have ‘unity’ and ‘inclusiveness’ within the scope of plurality. Embrace is a process of acceptance of each other but is not tolerance. ‘Acceptance’ as an equal category by confessing the Christological element in embrace is what unity or inclusiveness means in the Orthodox-Dalit conversations. The immanent God and God in Jesus is to be understood more on its ontological and immanent nature. But the reduction that we see now is the challenge, upon which one should be cautious. Caste militates against ordinary acts of humanity such as are enjoined upon men in Scripture and is a standing denial of love and humanity.

The voices of Orthodoxy invite us for an embrace of the philosophy and the context. In other words, it is an embrace of both the divinity and humanity of Christ, which aims to have an embrace between the Orthodox and Dalit communities. Thus, on a theological level, the arguments of this chapter are three dimensional, resulting in a move forward for an experience of ‘liturgy in the liturgy’. The three-dimensional findings are: first, the Dalit theologians gave us new impetus with an inclusive and cosmic Dalit Christology; second, the Severian findings of Christology equally opened new vistas to understand the inclusiveness

103 Sathianathan Clarke, Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 183.
of miaphysite Christology; and third, we have set a good grounding with the inclusive liturgical embrace offered by the Orthodox theology to have an inclusive liturgical embrace that aims for a liturgy in the liturgy. Christ’s consubstantiality to the marginalised communities allows the Orthodoxy in India to develop new trajectories of Christological notions, which an inclusive position of considering all people under the ‘humanity’ of Christ. This is the all–encompassing, healing, and reconciling ‘liturgy in the liturgy’ through the practical experience of touch or embrace.
7. Touch (Embrace) as Mission: A Synergy of Liturgy

We know the One with his divinity and humanity and He has proved it to us by his crucifixion as He was exercising both the high and the lowly matters together … Let the Church come and reveal the truth to the liars and acknowledge openly His divinity and humanity.  
Ignatius Patriarch Zakka

The problem of the church’s witness, i.e. the problem of overcoming the evil in the world, is not basically a moral issue… It is therefore only by a massive reaffirmation of the eucharistic identity of the church through a radical *liturgical renewal* that our Orthodox church can bear witness to its fundamental characteristics of unity and catholicity… Not only would we promote Orthodox unity, we would also actively contribute to the quest both of the visible unity of the church and of the unity of humankind.  
Petros Vassiliadis

There is a continued practical distance, one that is both visible and invisible, in the area of Orthodox and Dalit relations in the Indian context. The reasons for this are complex and involve both social and theological histories, but it is beholding on the Orthodox churches in India to address its own history and theology in this regard. In an attempt to begin this process, this thesis has revisited the Orthodox tradition to show the potential of all-inclusive miaphysite Christological and its appropriation of the liturgical ‘kiss of peace’ or ‘embrace’ to begin the process of reconciliation with the people who are socially marginalized. It took this route due to the potential similarities with Dalit Christology and so to a potential ground upon which we can meet.

Locating this potential ground within the liturgy itself follows the critical evaluation of Ion Bria’s description of the existing Orthodox mission dictum – ‘the liturgy after the liturgy’. It is the recognition of Orthodox theology’s all-encompassing space, one without any room for exclusion. But this reference to the liturgy builds upon a fundamental Christological claim, one which uses a miaphysite approach, as developed by the early teachers of the Church and their treatment of a transcendental and immanent Christology. Here, the purpose was not to return to a hagiographical approach to Orthodox theology but to initiate practical action within the contextual debate over Dalit theology and its importance for meaningful future engagements.

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Orthodoxy in India has failed to pay sufficient attention to the Dalit life and the varied potentiality of its theology. Critical here is the failure to critique theological notions of purity and impurity, and especially the way in which impact social realities. The idea of Dalit Christians being identified as ‘impure’ against the dominant caste of ‘pure’ or denial of the transcendence to the Dalit bodies must be rejected. If the church continues to de facto affirm the *Vedic* philosophical account of purity and pollution, it does so in opposition to its own theological insights concerning the inclusive or cosmic nature basic to Orthodox theology and its understanding of the Eucharist.

It is true that the caste practice and its inhuman face remains in Indian society. No sections of Indian Christianity have been able to completely rid themselves of this evil practice. Christianity, though being a religion of equality and love, is still burdened by the social system of caste. When this stretches to the exclusion of communities based on ‘caste division’, Orthodoxy has the responsibility to look into its own alignment with caste practice and to develop practical remedies given its own theological commitments. As a church, which touts its presence in every aspect of Indian social life, has not offered its official solidarity with the Dalit life and their struggles in India. As basic to its mission, the Orthodox church needs to initiate and to engage in discourse with the Dalit community in general and the social mission with Dalits Christian community in particular.

In this context, the Orthodox Church has a responsibility to invite reconciliation with the Dalit Christian community as part of its theological commitment of all-encompassing, inclusive, cosmic liturgical mission. With a reconciling mind, the church has to patiently accept the present contradiction of ‘liturgy as mission’ since it fails to engage practical and theological intimacy with the Dalit community. Differently stated, the practice of ‘untouchability’ which informed the public and spiritual lives of the Orthodox opposes the Christological expectations embedded in Orthodox liturgical theology. Orthodoxy’s practical failure to accommodate the struggles of the Dalit community in their theologizing process needs to be re-examined when imagining an Orthodox theology of margins in India.

One practical solution is to acknowledge Dalit theology as a movement of reconciliation. As a counter theology or people’s theology, the emphasis of the humanity of God or the immanent nature of God within the materiality of the world, belongs to the richness of Dalit theology. The counter theological movement does not contract the inseparable unity of divinity and humanity as Dalit Christology concentrates its specific theological engagement of the divinity, transcendence with humanity, or the immanence of Christ.

Miaphysite Christology or the non-Chalcedonian Christology promote an inseparable unity of the divine-human natures of Christ. In this process of imagining God putting on the human body without reducing the divine nature, miaphysite Christology offers an undivided nature of
Christ. Practically it encourages conceiving Christ’s all-encompassing body as a part of Dalit human body. So, God’s ‘putting on or clothing of human body’ is not possible apart from also putting on the Dalit body. If Christ’s human body is inherently divine, the Dalit body is also inherently divine. Further, Christ, one among the Trinity, suffered on the cross and the suffering of the body of Christ is also attributed to the suffering of the human body. God’s embrace of the human body is also God’s embrace to the suffering body of the human. Recognising the Dalit body as a miniature of such a suffering human body, God’s ‘clothing of’ the human body includes the Dalit body. This is a primary theological step for Orthodoxy to practically engage into the life of Dalit community.

These findings in this study certainly help Orthodoxy to approach Dalit theology and its theological possibilities within the Indian Christian theology. Though Dalit theology does not trace its lineage through miaphysite Christology, it shares a number of key concerns that inform Orthodox accounts of miaphysite Christology. For instance, the attribution of the divinity to the Dalit body and the suffering of the Dalits as a point of divine suffering has been accepted by most of the first and second generation Dalit theologians. Though the third generation feels that the attribution of divinity to the Dalit body is only an offered transcendence (as opposed to an inherent transcendence), it must be understood as a criticism against a western Christian epistemology. The Dalit theologians do not reject the transcendence of the Dalit body within the knowledge of the materiality. It is true that the Orthodoxy and the Dalit theology keep a different ordering in conceiving the divinity and humanity of God (For Orthodoxy, the order of God becoming human is God putting on or clothing of the human body whereas Dalit theology tries to understand this process from the point of view of human first). However, the concept of the inseparable unity of both the divine and human natures of Christ is not denied or rejected within the Dalit theological endeavours.

These interpretations demand Orthodoxy to fulfil the foundational characteristics of its mission by reconciling with the Dalit community in India. As this study recommends in initiating such a reconciliation through a liturgical ‘embrace’, it affirms the human and divine characteristics of Christ, opening up Christological reconciliation by bridging or embracing the Orthodox and Dalit communities into the life of Christ in the Trinity. This reconciliation process helps us to understand the significance of being together as one body of Christ in the liturgical moments.

Practically, this is the liturgy in the liturgy allowing the Other to be an insider with their own individual identity and to initiate a concrete and inclusive ‘touch’ or ‘embrace’ in the context of ‘untouchability’, imagining the open arms of Christ on the Cross. This practical approach of embrace can be a missional approach to prove the Orthodox liturgical paradigm of mission of inclusivity and all-encompassing. It will enable ‘the liturgy after the liturgy’ to engender the ‘cosmic embrace’, which is the liturgy in the liturgy of ‘divine-human touch’. This practical
definition of the Orthodox mission with the Christological potential of the ‘embrace or kiss of peace’ can lead the Orthodox churches in India to a new possibility of Orthodox mission in the Indian social context of marginality.

As to the implication of this approach, first, it provides a space for Orthodox theology to evaluate critically the practical failures of the Church. The original vision of Orthodox theology and the patristic teachers should be understood in view of theology’s practical possibilities. So far, the capacity of Orthodox theology to enable a social embrace of mission in its fullness seems to be unexplored. Due to this, Orthodoxy is often misunderstood as holding a conservative or fundamentalist theology of the Christian church. On the contrary, the cosmic nature of Oriental Orthodox church theology can stimulate an interpretation not only in the liturgical but also in the social context of the people.

Second, an openness to interact with other theologies could help Oriental Orthodoxy to build intracommunity engagements. Historically, Oriental theology encourages theological appropriations within the dominant social and cultural life of the people but not with the people at the margins of the society. In this context, seeing theological significance in the social, cultural, and political context of the marginalized community is yet another implication for Orthodoxy. This will be a celebration of the plurality of human thoughts and situations. In short, Orthodoxy can open its doors to the world inviting ‘the Other’ inside for mutually enriching conversations.

Third, even though this study limited itself to Orthodox Christian and the Dalit community in India, this discussion points to a wider political discourse and to address any form of marginality and discrimination that constituted by the dominant in the community. The limited scope of this thesis necessitates the lack of attention to other Dalit issues such as Dalit women, Dalit economic discrimination, Dalit land deprivation and so on. In this sense, further research needs to be undertaken in the contexts of class, colour, gender, economic poverty, ecological crisis and many such discriminatory situations. At the same time, this limited study can offer some impetus for initiating the reconciling process in the context of the suffering and pain of the margins in the society.

Fourth, this thesis is not limited only to the Oriental Orthodox context alone but to the similar situation of Orthodox theology around the globe. Most importantly, this thesis offers a new reading of patristic theology. The local approach of the St. Thomas tradition should be seen as a representation of the Orthodox faith more widely. In short, the findings of this thesis can go beyond particular or local milieus and be applied globally. This means, in the Indian context, the Dalit and Orthodox theology can learn from each other for an all-encompassing theology of margins around the world.

Fifth, this thesis highlights the urgency of a paradigm shift in Orthodox theological engagement. The model that I propose for Orthodox theological endeavour is one of ‘patristic
symbiosis’. By following a ‘patristic symbiosis’ or ‘synergy’ with the patristic teachers, this method aims to partner contemporary questions with the patristic teachers. Through this method, Orthodox theology can listen to the voice of the patristic teachers again in today’s social context. Without limiting the Orthodox renewal within the ritual reformations, it can revitalise theology for the context. In this process, more research should be initiated not only in the context of liturgical theology, but also in the entire scope of Orthodox theological ventures. Most importantly, as world Christianity reshapes its geographical, political, cultural, and migrant milieus in an unprecedented way, the theology of the Orthodox tradition and specifically the theology of the miaphysite tradition can offer much theological impetus to envision new orders in world theological scholarship.

With the vision of ‘touch’ or ‘embrace’ in the Indian context of ‘untouchability’, this thesis offers a casteless Orthodox theology of mission envisioning a practically reconciled embrace between the Orthodox and Dalit communities. It does not suggest that Ion Bria’s vision of theology was unsuccessful, but that the practical application has failed in the Indian context. The practicality of the liturgy after the liturgy is a new vision of liturgy in the liturgy. With this paradigm shift, Orthodox theology can continue to uphold the cosmic missional fulfilment of ‘the liturgy’ identifying the struggles of socially and politically marginal communities with in the structure of liturgy. This will also enable Orthodoxy theology to enflesh the gospel in hostile contexts. On an eschatological note, the findings of this thesis fulfil an all-encompassing praxis of the liturgical embrace (kiss of peace) within the wide-opened arms of Christ fulfilling the liturgical embrace as a social embrace.
Appendix 1

Structure of the Eucharistic order of the Syrian Orthodox Church adapted from
Athanasius, Samuel Yesu, Konatt Mathen, and Kuriakose Corepiscopa, eds. Trilingual

I. Preparation rite

The first Service
The Opening prayer
Psalm 51
Entry into the Sanctuary
Kissing and going around the Alter
Arrangement of the bread and wine
Service of Penitence
Promiun-Sedero
Quolo
Ethro
Eqbo
Hutomo
Lord’s Prayer - Our Father

Second Service
The Opening Prayer
Washing of the Hands
Vesting
Kneeling before the Alter
Spreading of the veil over the paten and chalice
General commemoration prayer and commemoration of names
Promiun-Sedro
Cleansing of the paten and choice
Hutomo
Qaumo and Creed
II. The Pre–Anaphora (Public Celebration)

Entrance procession around the alter and the Responsory of Mar Severus
The Trisagon
The Reading of the Epistle
The Reading of the Gospel
Promiun-Sedro
Blessing of the censer and the censing
Creed
Kneeling before the Alter
Silent commemoration of names

III. The Anaphora

Introductory Prayers: The Three Prayers
Prayer of Peace (Kiss of peace or Embrace)
Prayer of the Imposition of Hands
Prayer Over the Veil
The Anaphora (the Eucharistic Prayer)
Trinitarian Blessing
Introductory Dialogue
Prayer of the Offering
Sanctus
Post-Sanctus
Institution Narrative
Anamnesis
Epiclesis
Intercessions: Sixfold Cannons
Preparation for the Communion
Fraction
Lord’s Prayer
Rites before Sancta Sanctis
Holy Things to the Holy
Communion and Post-Communion
Glossary

Syriac Words

adsa or mirpandg – division
‘amma/ ‘amo – a nation, gentiles
anaphora – the liturgy
noo-shaq-tho qaadishto – holy kiss
byath – through
dergo – step (stairs)
etro – Incense offering prayer
fagaro – bread
hootomo – concluding prayer
hash – suffered
had fagaro w-had rooho – one body and one spirit
hoo-bo – love
hudaya – Book of Guides or Nomocanon
ihidaya – only-begotten
‘aeto – church, community
kepha – rock
kurhone noshoye – human pain
l-besh – putting on or clothing
lo-meth-hab-lono – incorruptible
lo mo-yu-tho – immortal
lo hoshoosho – impassible
met-barnosho-nutho – humanisation
meth-hablana – corruptible
masbronootho – supposition
msabronootho – expectation
nusha-qtho – kiss
myron – holy chrism
n-`aafeq – embrace
nzarto – discrimination
nethkatalash – to struggle not death
petgomo – verse or saying
prooemion – introductory prayer
qaumo – one of the four stations of night prayer
qolo – hymn, sound
qurbano/qurban – holy eucharist
qumtho – resurrection
rāz – symbol
ramsho – vesper
rōzō – mystery
sedro – order
sh-hemo – breviary for the weekly cycle, or evening prayer
shlomo – peace
tuyobo – preparation

**Sanskrit Words**

anubhava – becoming, living, feeling, experiencing, and knowing.
advaita – That which is not two
aham Bramhasmi – God is within
atman – human being or human soul
brahman – hindu god or divine soul

brahmanic/ Brahman/ Brahmana – priest class in hindu varna system

bhangi – the scavenger
chandala – people of outside the caste or the fifth group
chera, chola, pandya – three hindu dynasties
dal – broken or oppressed
dhobi – the washer man or women
dasyus/dasas – slaves

ezhavas, pulayas, panas, kuravas, parayas, and vedars – people of shudra caste or below

lokayata – material philosophy
manusmriti. – ancient legal text of India
madhymeeka – middle path
mambudiris – highest caste in the varna system
nairs – below of brahman caste
pratyaksha – immanence
sat-chit-ananda – hindu expression of God as Trinity
svayambhu – self-existent

varnas – caste, e.g. brahmana, ksatriya, vaisya and sudra
veda – hindu scripture

**Malayalam Words**

Kaattikootti – haphazard manner
poyin – go away
yakoba – Jacobite Christians or Syrian Christians
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