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HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS
IDENTITY

by

Laura Michelle Coles

Thesis submitted to Canterbury Christ Church University

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

[2013]

Last but by no means least, I want to say thank you formally to my immediate family for supporting me and always taking an interest in my PhD. Finally, to Chris, whom I met at Canterbury Christ Church University: I thank you, and God, from the bottom of my heart for the love, friendship and shared passion in theology and faith that we have. I could not have done this PhD without you.

<u>Notes</u>

First, a note on sources: Regarding the Sanskrit terminology used in this thesis, the transliterated spellings have been checked predominantly against W.J.Johnson's *A Dictionary of Hinduism* [2009]. All primary sources not originally written in English have been consulted in translation; their very existence in translation is something I am truly grateful for, as it has made these writings accessible to me. Secondly, a note on spellings: there are various ways to spell particular names, e.g. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay has a couple of variations. I have tried to be consistent by using one spelling of each name only.

Thirdly, regarding the use of photographs: I am grateful to the Victoria & Albert Museum, London for their kind permission to use a photograph from their database, of the Cōḻa period sculpture *Śiva Naṭarāja*. The photographs of Saccidananda ashram are used with thanks for accommodating me as a PhD student. These photographs have greatly enhanced the content of chapter eight.

Abstract

Abhishiktananda described himself as a "Hindu-Christian monk", and spent much of his life blurring the religious boundaries between being Hindu and being Christian. There are many others like him who have claimed or been assigned religious identities which might seem paradoxical. In contemporary theological speak, they can be seen as having a 'double religious identity'; that is, they are believed to be engaging with both simultaneously. Indeed a 'theology of double religious identity' tends to attribute this to cultural norms, family ties, syncretism or even a consumerist approach, and has explored it mostly through Buddhist-Christian examples. Whilst a few references have been made to 'Hindu-Christian identity', this thesis has chosen to widen the demographic and draw on a set of case studies solely located within the interfaith sphere of Hindu-Christian dialogue (These include Robert de Nobili, Abhishiktananda and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay). By exploring it outside of the Buddhist-Christian paradigm, this thesis hopes to aid a better theological understanding of double religious identity, by examining both how and why such identities occur.

The shift into Hindu-Christian dialogue uncovers further reasons as to why double religious identity might arise, which includes aesthetics, politics, theology and inculturation. Inculturation is a means of mission and dialogue which involves suitably adapting another religious culture to ground the Church in a different context. This use of religious symbolism has led, at times, to perceptions of its practitioners as both Hindu and Christian. Indeed, this thesis concludes that perception plays a large role in the designation and understanding of people's double religious identities. It hopes that this research will aid further interest in the interactions between religious identities, particularly within Hindu-Christian dialogue. By taking a broader approach to what constitutes and influences a person's religious identity, such identities as 'Hindu-Christian' can be better understood.

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Introduction

Defining oneself according to religious affiliation alone would be a puzzling concept, as there are many aspects of us that make up our personal identity: age, place of birth, gender, favourite colour, the one book we would take with us to a desert island perhaps. What we do for a living, our schooling or where we live might say a lot about us, but what does our religious identity really mean? We are not introduced to one another by religious type, but by name. Our religious identity is not defined on our passport[1], but our place and year of birth is. It might then be easy to think that religious identity is not really an essential part of who we are. Does it simply represent a community that we belong to, a defined set of beliefs that we hold as individuals, or is there more to it than that? Arguably, our religious identity is a very definite feature of who we actually are: it tells other people how we believe the world came into being, whether we believe in an afterlife and what ideas inform our ethical values, and it also gives us an identity which we can share with others. Discovering that someone else we have just met is a fellow believer instantly gives us something to talk about, for example, and in many ways having a religious identity distinguishes people from one another. For the most part, religious identities seem fairly simple: a Christian may be understood as someone who believes in the salvific nature of Christ's death and his subsequent resurrection, whereas a Hindu may be someone with a concept of karmic retribution. If one was to proclaim themselves as Christian or Hindu, most other people would have at least a vague conception of what a Christian or a Hindu 'is'. They would appreciate that these types of religious identities are different from one another, and some might be able to explain further, outlining certain beliefs and practices that distinguish a Christian from a Hindu.

Yet defining what a Hindu or a Christian is can be a difficult task. This is because a denominational difference within Christianity means that some views can oppose each other; to give a very basic but significant example Mary has a more exalted status in Roman Catholicism than she does in Protestant Evangelical traditions. As for Hinduism, trying to find a common thread that ties all Hindus together is a seemingly complex task, exemplified by the debate concerning whether Hinduism is a single religion, or an umbrella term for many different Indian religions. The following from Julius Lipner sums up, quite succinctly, the problems of defining Hindus and Hinduism:

> The monolithic understanding of Hinduism...is suspect to its very roots; it gives the
> impression that it is something given, "out-there", static –and that those who claim to
> be "Hindu" all believe and act in a regimented fashion. But this is not how I see the

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[1] at least in the UK, where I am writing.

phenomenon we describe as "Hinduism": I see it as dynamic, elusive, changing –in and through the diverse beliefs and practices of its adherents (Lipner, 2006, p. 92).

Unlike Christianity, which invariably is held together by common factors throughout all its denominations such as Creeds, the validity of the Bible and the understanding of Christ as Saviour, Hinduism has no such common thread and is, as Lipner puts it, "dynamic, elusive, changing" (Lipner, 2006, p. 92) which makes it difficult to pin down exactly what defines a Hindu, or indeed Hinduism as a whole. Both Hinduism and Christianity, then, are perhaps not as easy to define as it might seem.

There are occasions when people's religious identity might not be quite so clear cut as 'Hindu' or 'Christian'. Take for example Father Henri Le Saux, or Abhishiktananda as he is also known. He was a Benedictine monk yet also a proponent of inter-faith dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity who had a deep-rooted desire to indianize the Church. Abhishiktananda is a man who engaged with Hinduism to such a degree that his Christian identity was called into question, by both himself as well as others, because of his adoption of certain Hindu practices and aesthetics alongside his vocation as a (Christian) Benedictine monk. To take a slightly more contemporary example, there are some dalit Christians who retain the practice of Hindu rituals, including pūjā, despite their baptism into the church and hence live on the boundaries of two religions. It is also acknowledged that some people 'naturally' belong to two religious traditions, say, for example, if one parent is a Christian and the other is a Hindu. All three of these examples border Hindu and Christian religious identities, but what does this have to say about the authenticity of their religious identity – are they not really Christian or Hindu, both at the same time or a new type of religious identity altogether?

Religious identity, then, is not quite as straightforward as might first be supposed. It is ultimately subjective; referring to one's religious ideas, feelings and thoughts about the Divine and the meaning of life, this means that religious identity is open to change and also to different perceptions. Such changes might be small, such as changing opinion on how best to worship God, or they might be more important such as a change in belief from Trinitarian doctrine to Unitarian doctrine. However, some changes in religious identity might actually cross the borders of other religions. To take a hypothetical example, a Christian might come to the conclusion that karma (a doctrine they have discovered through contact with Hinduism) is a doctrine that they want to incorporate into their own religious beliefs. However, by doing so they ultimately blur their religious identity because karma is not a Christian doctrine; it is (in the context of this example) a Hindu one. Therefore this would be quite a significant change in belief, for our hypothetical Christian to believe in karma. Is this person, then, still a Christian,

with such different beliefs to other Christians, or have they become a Hindu? This person has not renounced belief in Christ as redeemer; they have merely added (or perhaps 'borrowed' might be a more fitting term) from another religious belief system. What we have instead is someone in-between two religious belief systems, and consequently someone with what may seem to be a rather confusing religious identity. They might even be accused of taking a rather *laisez faire* attitude to spirituality, picking and choosing the things they like best to create their own 'brand' of religion. There are of course a number of options, such as conversion to Hinduism, which would retain a single religious identity, but as previously discussed because this person still believes in Christ's (unique) salvific nature, this would not fit into the traditionally recognised concept of 'a Hindu' either.

The theology of double religious identity explores how it might be possible for people to engage with more than one religious identity simultaneously, giving it a bi or multi-faceted approach. The people listed above certainly *engaged* with more than one religious identity, but is this necessarily the same thing as *having* more than one religious identity?[2] For those who question the authenticity of multiple religious identities, such approaches are akin to consumerism, picking the bits of religion that they like best and discarding the parts that make them feel uncomfortable. To hold more than one religious identity simultaneously, it would seem, offends the black-and-white simplicity of identifying labels such as 'Hindu' or 'Christian', and can be deemed less than authentic or proper. However, should it always be the case that religious identity is not authentic if it is non- singular? Religious identity is an evolving concept, which can be influenced by the presence or discovery of other religious identities. This is increasingly true as people become acutely aware of the effects of globalization[3].

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[2] For example, a person may accept their neighbour's invitation to accompany them to their place of worship, thereby engaging with a new religious identity. However, unless that visit has a profound effect on that person to the extent where they want to instigate changes in their own religious identity, they will not actually have a double religious identity.

[3] This rather broad term is actually a web of academic theories based around an awareness of "…the growing interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all aspects of society" (Jones, 2010, p. 4). The 'interconnectedness' of religious identities is apparent in individuals in this thesis, such as Abhishiktananda. Globalization theories (pluralized because the 'theory' behind globalization occurring is debated by academics) argue that a change is occurring in the way that the world is both perceived and is operating. For example, Anthony Giddens (a key academic in the field) argues that modernity and globalisation are bound up together (Jones, 2010, p.44). Giddens himself makes clear that whilst the origins of the term globalisation are found in economics, 'to see it solely in these terms would be a mistake because it is also cultural, political and technological' (Giddens, 1999, p. 10). See Giddens'

The presence of other religions, and therefore other religious identities, confronts people with the realisation that there are other ways of understanding the world, and the divine. By the presence of these other religious identities, people may decide to distance themselves further from, or perhaps find out more about, other religious beliefs and it is the latter which can sometimes lead to a change in religious identity, as the karma example illustrated earlier. This is not to say that every single person who encounters another religion will change their religious identity – it is just that for some people learning about another religion can give them pause for thought about their own beliefs, to the extent where they are significantly affected by

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publications *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* [1991a], *The Consequences of Modernity* [1991b] and *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping Our Lives* [1999]. However, it is important to recognise that 'globalization' is largely a term of the mid-twentieth century onwards, therefore to apply it to those who are pre that time period would be anachronistic. However, "When globalization started…depends, in part, on how you define it" (Martell, 2010, p. 65). For an overview of the history of globalization, see chapter 2 in Luke Martell's *The Sociology of Globalization* [2010]. Andrew Jones' *Globalization: Key Thinkers* [2010] provides an engaging overview of various contributions to the debate of globalization, and its possible future development, including Giddens' own standpoint. For a good critical analysis of Giddens, see chapter 4 of Justin Rosenberg's *The Follies of Globalisation Theory* [2000].

In this thesis, globalization is related in particular to understandings, and the transformations, of cultures, religions and religious identities. One significant debate in globalization theory is whether or not globalization is to be perceived negatively or positively. In terms of double religious identity, it could be argued that the fluid boundaries of religious identity and the interconnecting of religious traditions (specifically through the individuals outlined here) could be seen as a positive, interfaith contribution to the development of human faith itself. On the other hand it could also be perceived as a threat, largely because it could be viewed as dangerously syncretic (explored later on in this chapter) or as a lessening of the exclusivist claims of religious authority and tradition. For application of globalization theory to religion specifically, see Lott, E. 'Globalising Faith Identities' in *Religious Faith, Human Identity: Dangerous Dynamics in Global and Indian Life* [2005]. He remarks that: "In the modern world…the self-identity of religious people is rarely experienced only in one form and at one level. There is an all-important new *fluidity of identities*" (Lott, 2005, pp. 179-180). This is applicable to some of the double religious identities explored in this thesis, especially in the contemporary case studies. That idea of fluid identities is of course significant to this research because it is this theory of identity, as fluid and not static, that this thesis draws on. Another good point of reference for globalisation, culture and identity is Bhikhu C. Parekh's *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World* [2008], in particular chapters 2, 7 and 9.

the other religious identity. There are many people who can appreciate or learn about another faith, without changing their own religious identity, especially those who are involved in inter-faith dialogue. Whereas one person would learn about another faith and leave their religious identity as it is, on the other hand another one might decide that the other religion in question has something to offer them, maybe in terms of belief or practice or both. In some cases, this might lead to a complete change in religious identity, through conversion, but at other times it could lead to a double religious identity. Abhishiktananda is a good example of a person in between two religious boundaries, and it is the examination and understanding of these types of religious identity which concerns this thesis.

The theology of double religious identity is a relatively new field of study, which examines the phenomenon variously labelled as 'hyphenated religious identity', 'multiple or double religious belonging/identity', and 'non singular religious identity'[4]. In essence, this theory argues against the simplicity of saying that religious identity can only ever be singular, suggesting that there are ways of being religious which absorb much more than one identity possibly could. The first chapter will outline the literature associated with this theology, as well as the scholars who contribute to this field and their theories. By doing so, it will highlight that whilst this theory is continuing to develop and take shape, there seems to be a gap in that no-one, as yet, has taken this theology of religious belonging and applied it to the lives of (both historical and contemporary) people in the Hindu and Christian traditions in one piece of research. Double and multiple religious identities are an important contemporary topic, which is most often found in areas of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Paul Knitter's book, entitled *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian* [2009], in which he writes that he "...can't imagine being a Christian and a theologian without this engagement with Buddhism" (Knitter, 2009, p. xiii) is exactly the sort of approach that this study is bearing in mind. 'Comparative theology', which explores the ways in which scholars are affected by their in-depth study with another religious tradition, is also an important approach. The theology of double religious identity argues that experiencing another religious identity does not always have to bring about absolute change (conversion) but can be a way of enhancing the understanding of one's own religious identity, regardless of whether one takes on a non singular religious identity, temporarily or permanently. This 'idea of going over and passing back' has been referred to by Panikkar as "'…intrareligious' dialogue" (cited in Dupuis, 2002, p.63); Panikkar himself describes it in one way as helping one to "...discover the 'other' in ourselves..." (Panikkar, 1999b, p. xix). He is adamant that a genuine interreligious dialogue requires this intrareligious dialogue (Panikkar, 1999b, p. 74).

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[4] Terminology will be explored later on in chapter 1; essentially the various terms are reviewed and one term (double religious identity) is settled on for use in this thesis so as to avoid confusion.

By moving this theory into a different field of interfaith dialogue (the Hindu-Christian), it demonstrates that the terminology of double religious identity is at present too vague: for example, two people might very well have a double religious identity, but this is not always manifested in exactly the same way. The reality is that people experience having a double religious identity in many different ways. This thesis will have two main purposes: whilst broadening the terminology of the theology of religious belonging, it will do so through examining the Hindu and Christian religious traditions by drawing on dialogical case studies. This enables this thesis to contribute to the developing theology outlined above but also maps out the journey of Hindu-Christian dialogue through the lives of those whose religious identities are blurred.

So why choose Hindu-Christian studies rather than any other pairing of religions? The shared history of Hinduism and Christianity, in relation to colonial India, makes them an interesting pair to study alongside one another, and their seemingly overwhelming differences are another good reason for comparative study. The limitation of studying just two religious identities is not to be understood negatively, as within Hinduism and Christianity there is real scope for being able to explore the nature of double religious identities in detail. This is because the stereotype for each (Christianity as either exclusive or inclusive, and Hinduism as pluralistic) has provided an interesting breeding ground for such religious identities, in particular regarding a particular kind of Christian mission and dialogue, 'inculturation', which appropriates culture as a means to making the Church more 'indigenous'. However, the problem with that, as will be discussed, is that 'Indian' culture and 'Hindu' are sometimes perceived as overlapping; therefore when someone believes they are using Hindu culture to indigenize the Church, they might be perceived as using Hindu religious elements, leading to emotions ranging from confusion to anger.

Hindu-Christian dialogue is an important field in the much broader task of inter-faith dialogue. Their perceived differences, speculated upon earlier, makes it much harder to find obvious similarities, which for some people might be the main purpose of inter-faith dialogue. Also, more often than not old colonial ills are brought into conversation, whereby Hindu-Christian relationships were not one of equal dialogue but of misbalanced power. Redressing this balance is perhaps another aim of (specifically) Hindu-Christian dialogue. It is issues like these that make Hindu-Christian dialogue an important task for theologians and believers to engage in. However, this study will stress the continued need for grass-roots, praxis based involvement in inter-faith dialogue as well. Indeed, many of those with double religious identities are involved in Hindu-Christian dialogue on a practical level, as well as a theoretical level, as Abhishiktananda was. However, as hinted at earlier, for some of these people this can sometimes lead to confusion over the true nature of their religious identity. At times Hinduism

and Christianity can seem quite open to sharing religious traditions, or at least encompassing the other into their own religious framework, the merits and downsides of which will be discussed in chapter 2.

Issues of methodology

One might question the authenticity of an approach in dialogue which examines a small selection of case studies to make its point, rather than a systematic, more doctrinal/philosophical overview. In the same vein, one might also question why little attention has been given to issues of dialogue that focus on doctrinal parallels or similarities in this thesis[5]. The reason for using case studies for this research is that it enables the reader to have an insight into real people, and real situations. That is not to undermine the credentials of dialogue which is based more on complex philosophical or doctrinal underpinnings, but the issue of religious identity (as it is presented here) can only properly be explored through reference to people who have actually *held* such identities. Felix Wilfred suggests that dialogue:

> …never really takes place among religions; dialogue is always among people. Therefore we need to pay attention to the subjective quest and religious search of people, individually and collectively (Wilfred, 2005, p. 64).

That is precisely what this study aims to do; to examine a particular mode of inter-faith dialogue (the Hindu-Christian) and examine the ways in which certain people (and an ashram) have, through a 'subjective quest', come to embody the principles of that dialogue. Their religious identity is blurred in the process, thereby contributing to the theological debate on the authenticity and the living out of a double religious identity.

As a result of studying Hinduism, this research is necessarily situated post-colonially. It has to both remain aware of the Orientalist attitude of some of the case studies, yet at the same time be sure not to posit anachronistically a methodology which, in their own historical contexts, simply did not exist. Hinduism is often perceived by scholars as a colonial construct, and hence Orientalism plays a part in this thesis, highlighting how in different time periods Hinduism was variously conceived. For example, accusations of Orientalism are directed towards the colonial missionaries who identified themselves as Christian sannyāsa[6]. I am of course writing from a post-colonial perspective, which means that I am aware of certain biases in colonial periods, and can therefore view them in that light. However, post-colonial methodology gives me the

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[5] For readers interested in these sorts of parallels/comparisons, see the following works of comparative religion: Parrinder, G. [1975; 2nd edn] *Upanishads, Gītā and Bible: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Christian scriptures* and Sheth, N. [2002] 'Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison'.

[6] See chapter 9 of this thesis.

vantage of hindsight in approaching 'Hinduism' as more than 'a' religious tradition. I must be careful not to impose a post-colonial method and *context* onto the case studies, yet obviously I will be approaching them post-colonially. As for how I understand the notion of 'Hinduism' for the purpose of this thesis, it will be relevant to the time period that the case study is situated in; this is fully explored and analysed in chapter 2 but essentially it is vital to appreciate that the 'Hinduism' de Nobili encounters, in the sixteenth century, is very different to the 'Hinduism' that Bede Griffiths encountered in the late twentieth century.

It should not be forgotten that post-colonial methodology also has other roles to play in this study, besides discussing the appropriate use of the term 'Hinduism/s'. Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* argued that Orientalism is "...a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3). What is meant by this is that colonisers wielded power over the colonized. As Said explained, "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (Said, 1978, p. 43). If we apply this thinking to India, we can see how the political dominance of India by colonial powers fabricated and supported a distinction between 'us' and 'them' as knowledge of 'the East' was conveyed by Europeans. This would lead to some of the distinct "polar opposites" (Loomba, 2005, p. 45) still visible to us today, such as 'the East'[7] being incredibly spiritual and 'the West' as overly concerned with materialism[8], which the Hindu reformer Vivekananda popularized, if not introduced[9] (Thomas, 1969, p. 134). What Said was remarking upon was that "...the very designation of something as oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgement" (Said, 1978, p. 207) i.e. that to describe something as Orient meant that a stereotypical, pre-conceived idea of what that means would affect the ways in which it was viewed. Post-colonial methodology, in turn, would argue that these conceptions or stereotypes

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[7] Of course, this is a problematic term in itself, because it encompasses a diversity of cultures.

[8] Bede Griffiths also makes such distinctions between the East and West, a distinction which leads Ursula King to comment on one of his works (*The Marriage of East and West*) as espousing "spiritual romanticism" and being "simplistic, if not to say myopic" (King cited in Robinson, 2004, p. 30).

[9] The fact that Vivekānanda was 'the colonized' shows how it was not always the colonizers who embraced these conceptions; in fact Vivekānanda used them to his advantage and is famous for popularizing Hinduism as a world religion and enforcing this view of the East as spiritually superior to the West.

are not always strictly true[10], but rather were generated as political tools (Loomba, 2005, p. 44) in order to maintain that distance between colonized and colonizer. Post-colonial methodology seeks to move forward from such abstractions as the mystic East and the material West, as well as appreciating 'the East' in its own right, rather than defining it solely by its colonized history[11]. However, Said is not without his faults[12]. Bhabha accused him of promoting a one-way colonial relationship; "...there is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification" (Bhabha, 1983, p. 25). For Bhabha, colonial relationships were not that straightforward. The importance of post-colonial discourse, for this study at least, lies in how it is applied to explorations about religious identity. What is important to remember is that few of the case studies presented here would have been aware of post-colonial discourse, as this is a methodology which emerges post their own lifetime. de Nobili, for example, would have no idea that his conception of the East, indeed that of his contemporaries, would now be considered firmly within the realms of Orientalism and a product of colonial power. It is therefore crucial that post-colonialism methodology, whilst being allowed to discuss these case studies in the light of the post-colonial discourse of our day, is not anachronistically imposed onto methods or questions about religious identity at a time when such a discourse did not exist[13].

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[10] For example, the 'East' was often perceived as spiritually rich and centred on spiritual wealth rather than materialism – however contemporarily India is a subcontinent where expensive hotels and boutiques can exist side-by-side with raging poverty.

[11] As Sharada Sugirtharajah explains, "Postcolonialism is a way of critiquing totalizing tendencies in Eurocentric as well as nationalistic modes of thinking and practice" (Sugirtharajah, 2003, p. xiii). Hence, such a methodology is relevant to this thesis by allowing me to explore case studies such as de Nobili and Bede Griffiths within their historical context, but with the hindsight that their knowledge about 'the Other' (more often than not, specifically the *religious* other) was affected by the reality of colonial power.

[12] Some examples of key primary sources include those referenced in the text as well as Said's *Culture and Imperialism* [1994] and Homi K. Bhabha's collection of essays *The location of culture* [1994]. For critical engagement with Said's work, and Bhabha's also, see chapters 2 and 4 respectively of Bart Moore-Gilbert's *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* [1997]. For key sources relating post-colonialism to Hinduism, see Richard King's article 'Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism"' [1999]; Sharada Sugirtharajah's *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* [2003] and Saurabh Dube's chapter 'Postcolonialism' in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby's edited volume *Studying Hinduism: Key Concepts and Methods* [2008], pp. 289-302. The following are a good selection of readers of post-colonialism: John McLeod's *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* [2007]; Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* [1998] and *The Post-colonial studies reader* [1995] edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.

[13] This is discussed by Paul Hedges in his article, 'Post-Colonialism, Orientalism, and Understanding: Religious Studies and the Christian missionary imperative' [2008]. Referring to Friedrich Max Müller

An ethnographical and biographical approach is taken to the individual case studies themselves, especially concerning the use of personal and private correspondence. The nature of examining the religious identity of either a group of people or of an individual is of course ethnographic. In terms of Hindu studies, Matthew N. Schmalz asks: "What exactly is Hinduism? Ethnography attempts to answer the question from the inside out and by representing how Hindus think and act" (Schmalz, 2008, p. 116). To re-phrase that, if I were to ask 'what is double religious identity?' I can (and will) use ethnography as a method to determine this, 'by representing how people with such identities think and act'. My textual analysis situates me in their religious and cultural worlds, accessible through their various personal writings: for example their catechisms, their publications, and of course their private and public writings – letters, journals, articles etc. Another ethnographer, Martyn Hammersley, outlines five features of ethnographic methodology (Hammersley, 1998, p. 2) of which I will discuss the third and the fourth. Concerning the third feature, he states that:

> The approach to data collection is 'unstructured', in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set up at the beginning, nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do entirely pre-given or fixed (Hammersley, 1998, p. 2).

Of course whilst his assessment might apply more to ethnographic research 'in the field' than to textual analysis, nevertheless I believe that this is one of the ways in which the method of ethnography relates to my own research. Whilst I initially advocate six facets for my study of Hindu and Christian double religious identity, as the reader will see these facets evolve when applied to the chosen case studies (in order for the reader to be able to trace this development, the diagram is reproduced at the end of each set of case studies). For example, I feel there is a need to distinguish between three types of spiritual double religious identity, as I discover through my research that it would do a disservice to put Sen and Abhishiktananda under the same 'spiritual' facet without further explaining *how* they have a spiritual double religious identity. So whilst I begin with a selection of facets (as necessary to the argument) nevertheless I am conscious that these might evolve throughout my research; the final diagram in the general

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and Monier Monier-Williams throughout, Hedges argues that "We should also see them as creatures of their own age. Their criteria were not the same as ours for the objective study of religion, but a danger comes when we wish to cast such figures into the outer darkness and condemn everything they said and wrote" (Hedges, 2008, p. 75). That comment about 'their criteria not being the same as ours' is exactly why post-colonial methodology needs to be used with care, and not imposed upon the writers of the past; of course one can reflect on how the study of religion is now different in its approach but at the same time the context of (in this thesis) Christian missionaries needs to be taken into account. Also see Hedges article entitled 'The Old and New Comparative Theologies: Discourses on Religion, the Theology of Religions, Orientalism and the Boundaries of Traditions' [2012], especially p. 1133.

conclusion is testament to the flexibility of the facets and also to my own admission that they will evolve as I apply them to particular case studies.

Hammersley's fourth feature of ethnographic research is that "The focus is usually a small number of cases..." (Hammersley, 1998, p. 2) and this is perhaps more obviously applicable to my research; in selecting eight case studies I have obviously limited my scope so that I can focus on detailing and assessing the double religious identities I want to explore. (The reasons for selecting *eight* case studies will be discussed later on in the methodology). In all, ethnographic research which focuses on textual analysis is a research method that informs this thesis, through both my selection of a set number of (limited) case studies and through being flexible with my starting point, the facets. However, I feel that more discussion is needed surrounding this issue of 'classic' ethnography and my use of ethnography through 'textual analysis'[14]. There is a key difference which needs to be emphasised here; classic ethnography usually implies fieldwork, yet the research in this thesis is built upon textual analysis and interpretation of sources. Ethnography is (perhaps traditionally) related more to the Social Sciences than to the Humanities, but 'religion' is a phenomenon which is encountered in both disciplines, most obviously in the Sociology and Anthropology of Religion. For this reason, ethnographical methodology can be relevant for theological and religious studies, especially when dealing with issues of subjectivity such as religious experience. It is important to point out where exactly I am situating this study; by training I am a theologian and not a sociologist or anthropologist. In the Social Sciences there are academics like Rowena Robinson[15] who are anthropologists dealing with issues of religion, and indeed religious identity – they are then on the anthropological side of the fence, but edging towards the theological side. I see myself as the mirror image of them; on the theological side of the fence, but dealing quite closely with anthropological (and sociological) issues and hence making use of its relevant methodologies also. However, my reliance on textual analysis rather than fieldwork has led to (in the main part) a use of retrospective case studies, as my theological training dictates, and a lack of interviews. Instead, I am choosing to focus on their writings and what others have to say about them.

Of course accessing these writings, especially the private correspondence and journals, is an ethical consideration in itself. The works I have accessed have all been published, and so I am

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[14] Not that Hammersley sidelines that; indeed his book I have just cited from is entitled *Reading Ethnographic Research* and is intended to educate ethnography students and researchers on how to read and analyse pieces of ethnographic research in an efficient manner (Hammersley, 1998, p. xi).

[15] See her publication, *Christians of India* [2003] and her report 'Christian Communities of India: A Social and Historical Overview' [2010].

not encountering any of their correspondence (either within themselves or with other people) that has not hitherto been explored. Another aspect to consider ethnographically is the issue of misrepresentation. The individual case studies are all deceased, and hence their writings are subject to interpretation on my part which cannot be directly verified in the first person. Especially with a subject as sensitive as someone's religious identity, I want to try and represent them as fully and authentically as possible. If I have misrepresented any of the case studies, it is with apologies and a desire for it to be pointed out to me by those who believe this to be the case. However, to the best of my knowledge, through balanced argument and careful enquiry, I believe that I have fairly and honestly represented the case studies in question, having sought quality, scholarly resources to back my arguments. A note on chapter eight: I was fortunate enough to have been able to visit Saccidananda ashram on a personal visit; whilst the photographs used in chapter eight of this thesis are from that visit they serve only to enhance the content of the chapter and should not be interpreted as ethnographical fieldwork. The photographs are another source to be analysed, utilised in the same way as primary and secondary source texts.

By viewing religious identity as constantly evolving, I am telling the story of people's religious journey, mainly through their own eyes but also through the eyes of others. This reliance on biography, and indeed autobiography (where diaries and personal correspondence are referred to) requires the use of the biographical method. Barbara Merrill and Linden West describe this method as "…research which utilises individual stories or other personal documents to understand lives within a social, psychological and/or historical frame" (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 10). My use of the biographical method then is in part due to the nature of the resources I will be using, i.e. personal documentation, but also because by exploring their religious identities I am exploring the lives they have led, historically and socially. Their faith journeys are an intrinsic part of their religious identities. They also make the important note that biographical research "…transgresses overly rigid academic boundaries" (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 54). The authors also remark upon the importance of accurate representation, warning biographical researchers not to misrepresent people (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 169), which I have already explained as being a key concern for this thesis.

Because of its opinion that religious identity is much more holistic and evolving than it is static, this research relies on a feminist interpretation of the evolving nature of identity. In this thesis, the feminist methodology comes into play by supporting a more flexible notion of what religious identity 'is'; i.e. that it is a fluid concept, not a static one. A more holistic approach to religious identity allows scholars to explore the relevance of double religious identity as more than just a syncretic or consumerist ideal. Jeanine Hill Fletcher argues from this perspective, saying that:

Identity – even religious identity – is not given once and for all with a collective label of our "religion". Rather, the process of identity development takes place throughout one's life. Conceptualizing identity as a *verb*, the negotiation of religious identity is a lifelong activity that occurs through historical, contingent, complex and multiple processes (Fletcher, 2005, p. 96).

Her description of identity as 'verb' reiterates her point; identity is something which develops, it grows through different processes. In this thesis, these 'processes' might be understood as Upadhyay's development into a Hindu nationalist, or de Nobili's development into sannyāsa. Also, by seeing religious identity (or any identity for that matter) as constantly evolving and changing, rather than a static descriptor, it authenticates the journey that someone like Abhishiktananda undertakes. It also gives double religious identities relevance; if religious identity is understood as something porous and capable of change then it allows, in theory, for people to have many aspects to their religious identity. This is nowhere more obvious in this thesis than in the breaking down of 'double religious identity' into various facets; the very premise of this thesis then is dependent on a feminist understanding of identity.

Stausberg and Engler[16] describe feminist methodologies as a conscious option; "…not a method in a strict sense but a methodological position that suggests ways of using methods as means to empowerment" (Stausberg and Engler, 2011, p. 12). A large aspect of this involves the empowerment of the researcher themselves as well as the people which they are writing about. Mary Jo Neitz[17] explains that feminist methodologies (feminist standpoint analysis in this case, which focuses on the position of the researcher) involves "…researchers owning their own positions" (Neitz, 2011, p. 56), such as their cultural standpoint, and their own biases. This issue of bias in religious studies is a pressing one; Neitz points out that there is a stereotype of theologians being neutral or objective, particularly when it comes to examining their own religion (Neitz, 2011, p. 61). To draw on a well-known feminist theologian, Rita M Gross argues that "One cannot get completely outside one's skin and one's culture to observe religion from some neutral nowhere…" (Gross, 2009, p. 83). These views are important in relation to this thesis; the feminist standpoint analysis that Neitz and Gross advocates serve to remind me that I am connected to the people I write about. This is because I have chosen this research

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[16] *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* [2011].

[17] See her chapter in the above book; 'Feminist Methodologies', pp. 54-67. For feminist methodology related exclusively to religion, see Fletcher, J.H. *Monopoly on Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* [2005] and Gross, R.M. *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration* [2009], from which the above references were drawn. In particular, see chapter 4: 'The Place of the Personal and the Subjective in Religious Studies', pp. 77-93 and chapter 5: 'Methodology: Tool or Trap? Comments from a Feminist Perspective', pp. 94-110.

based on the similarity of my own spiritual experiences; of being pulled towards Hinduism despite being Christian. However, feminist standpoint analysis does not merely allow you to see such a connection and be aware of it, but encourages you to *own* your biases; there cannot be complete objectivity because I am subjectively involved in this research too. In short, I need to make clear (as I will now) that my bias lies in a sympathy for people like Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths who are drawn to Hinduism despite, and perhaps because of, their Christian convictions. And therefore, I will not be capable of representing them objectively. However, the beauty of feminist standpoint analysis is, as Neitz extols, that 'this flaw of bias can become a valuable tool, even empowering' (Neitz, 2011, p. 63). I will briefly pick up on her use of the term 'tool' here; Gross points out that methodologies "...should be tools and not ideologies" (Gross, 2009, p. 107) and by this she means that I should not stick dogmatically to a methodology. I am happy to see methodologies as tools, because that way they are informing my research without dictating its overall direction, thereby enhancing the ways in which I go about research and not hindering it by checking that I am adhering to a particular method.

My inability to be completely objective, then, is in fact part and parcel of my being a researcher, if I subscribe to feminist standpoint analysis, which I choose to. Because the issue of religious identity is subjective, I need to be aware of my own biases and how this informs the way I write and the way I interpret the case studies. First, I am acutely and constantly aware of the danger of anachronistically imposing my own opinions and values onto the case studies. Even so, I want this thesis to contribute to current discussions concerning responsible Christian mission. I have been honest about the way in which I see the Church needing to be more responsible, whilst at the same time retaining my own Christian religious identity as belonging to a particular tradition of the Church. There is also the issue of *why* I have chosen various case studies, indeed, why I have chosen to make them the subject of my thesis in the first place, which I briefly alluded to earlier. To refer back to the biographical method, Merrill and West suggest that "A topic we choose in others' lives may be motivated by or raise profound issues in our own" (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 5). Also, within feminist methodology, Gross points out that "…autobiographical elements are quite common in feminist theology, as feminist theologians explore and explain how their formative experiences helped shape their theological outlooks" (Gross, 2009, p. 89). So by drawing on both feminist and biographical methodology, I believe I am able to expose certain details about how my theological interests came to rest upon double religious identity. What's more, these methodologies justify my importance of doing so. Whilst I do not believe myself to have a double religious identity, my fascination with Hinduism and what Francis X Clooney calls the "imperfectly formed insider" (Clooney, 2004, p. 101) recognises some of itself in the experiences of other comparative theologians, like Clooney, for whom the longing to understand the religious life and faith of another has led to

the strengthening and renewal of their own personal religious convictions. Clooney explains further that:

> Though in many ways still outside the other tradition, one becomes enough of an insider that that the tradition's realities work powerfully and invite an assent. The theologian is captivated, in a way analogous to how she or he might experience religious truths and realities in her or his home tradition (Clooney, 2004, p. 102).

I hesitate to call myself a comparative theologian; people like Clooney, Knitter and Ward have spent many years immersing themselves in (through both study and sometimes practice of) another religious tradition. Yet I am acutely aware that Hinduism captures my attention more than studying Buddhism, or Sikhism or any other religious tradition and perhaps this is because it speaks to me on a level other than the scholarly, at times. For now, I am content to begin to identify myself with some of the expressions that comparative theologians make. How does this answer the issue of how I came to choose these case studies? Simply because I was fascinated by those who tried to entertain Hindu and Christian identities simultaneously, and I identified with their desire to learn not just about, but from Hinduism. My first encounter with such a person was Bede Griffiths, through his collection of essays *Christ in India*. It might even go further back than that, being so absorbed in the ways in which Christian mission in India impacted on Hinduism as to write my undergraduate dissertation on it. Either way, Bede Griffiths set me off down a path to find others like him, and I encountered my case studies through a desire to understand and know why some people have a Hindu and a Christian religious identity, and the impact this had on them and the dialogues they were involved in. Each case study has been chosen because their religious identities might seem to be a contradiction in terms, such as a 'Hindu-Christian', or because their interaction with Hinduism and Christianity on the level of dialogue caused problems among their contemporaries.

There were quite a few case studies which could have been used in this research, and part of my methodology included selecting just eight of them (two each across four time periods[18]). The work of Bishop V.S. Azariah would have been a good choice, for example, as he could have been explored from the perspective of culture and inculturation. He was the first Indian Anglican bishop, and was very particular about the relationship between Hindu culture and Christianity. Whilst he made adaptations in areas such as liturgy, architecture and the marriage

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[18] The choice to span time periods instead of focusing on just one was also a methodological consideration. I wanted to demonstrate that the theology of double religious identity, whilst contemporary, could be applied across time periods. Essentially, I believed it important to show that the fluidity of religious boundaries has long played a role in the ways in which Hinduism and Christianity have interacted.

rite, on the other hand he saw caste as incompatible with Christian faith and expected the Christians in his diocese of Dornakal to transcend caste boundaries[19]. Another good case study could have been Bishop Appasamy, an Indian Christian theologian notable in particular for advocating Christianity as 'bhakti mārga'. He translates bhakti as 'love', seeing it as more than simply 'faith' or 'devotion' (the typical English translation of this term) (Appasamy, 1926, pp. 22-23) and explores this through the Gospel of John[20]. He argued that in bhakti expressions, there is "…probably the nearest affinity to real Christian experience" (Appasamy, 1926, p. 22). However, I settled on Upadhyay as an Indian Christian theologian (for an indigenous case study) for two reasons. First, double religious identity could be explored through a wider variety of facets with Upadhyay; for example his *political* affiliations in later life, and his *cultural* assertion as a 'Hindu-Catholic'. Secondly, there is also a wider case to be made for Upadhyay having a double religious identity, for example because of the prāyaścitta ceremony he underwent, post Christian conversion. It was for reasons such as these that I felt that Upadhyay was the better choice for this research, as they substantiated the claim that he could be explored through the theology of double religious belonging. On the other hand, I felt a certain amount of hesitation in choosing a case study like Appasamy, because I felt that I was in danger of anachronistically imposing such an identity upon him, which could have led to misrepresentation on my part. Other Indian Christian theologians could have been chosen to explore specifically the *theological* and *cultural* facets of double religious identity, because (perhaps rather obviously) a hallmark of such theology is that it draws upon Hindu theological concepts and culture to explain Christianity. For example, Nehemiah Goreh (1825-1895)[21] would have been interesting; one of the things he did was to compare Hindu concepts like avatar to Christian concepts like incarnation, to show how some aspects of Hinduism were already leading towards Christian revelation (Boyd, 1969, pp. 55-56). Also Boyd observes how, like Sen, Goreh emphasised "...the fact that Christianity was in its origin Asian, not

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[19] See Billington-Harper, S. *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* [2000]. Chapter 8, 'Overcoming Caste and Culture in India', is particularly relevant. Also see J.Z. Hodge's biographical *Bishop Azariah of Dornakal* [1946].

[20] See Appasamy, A.J. *Christianity as Bhakti Mārga: A Study of the Johannine Doctrine of Love* [1926]. See also his *What is Moksa?: A study in the Johannine doctrine of life* [1931] and *My Theological Quest* [1964]. Robin Boyd's chapter on Christian bhakti and Appasamy (chapter 7, pp. 110-143) in Boyd's *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* [1969] gives an excellent overview and analysis of Appasamy's theology.

[21] For further secondary literature on Goreh, see chapter 4 (pp. 40-57) of Robin Boyd's *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* [1969]; Paul Hedges' *Preparation and Fulfilment* [2001] p. 150f and Jon Keune's article 'The Intra- and Inter-Religious Conversions of Nehemiah Nilakantha Goreh' [2004]. Two good primary sources are Goreh's *Letter to the Brahmos from a converted Brahman of Benares* [1868] and his *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems*, compiled and introduced by K.P. Aleaz [2003].

European..." (Boyd, 1969, p. 54). Another exemplary theologian could be Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885)[22], who Hedges says believed "...it was possible to speak of Christianity as fulfilling certain aspects of Hinduism and Hindu desire" (Hedges, 2001, p. 149).

I have given just a few examples here of possible case studies who were put aside. In the end I chose the eight case studies for this research based on my own interests, their variety of contexts and facet engagement, and also because of their inter-linking relationships. In terms of variety and context, there are European missionaries, Indian Christian converts, dalit and caste Christians (of different denominations) drawn from different time periods. As for the inter-linking relationships, Upadhyay knew Sen and was influenced by his time in Sen's Brahmo Samaj; Upadhyay shows both awareness and admiration for Robert de Nobili and his mission; the St Thomas Christians explored in the first case study and the group of final case studies in South India share certain traits. A possible limitation is that the individual case studies are all male; however I believe that this is a reflection of the time periods themselves. I also believe that the inter-linking relationships of the other case studies made them the better choice, and that to 'positively discriminate' by picking a case study purely on the basis of their gender would not be an appropriate methodology.

Each of the methodologies mentioned here underpins the research in this thesis. Post-colonialism is obviously a reflection of the subject matter; it would be very difficult to discuss Hinduism without reference to it because the term 'Hinduism' is loaded with colonial implications. Post-colonial definitions of Hinduism speak of 'little' and 'great' traditions, or 'Brahminical' and 'dalit'[23]. Chapter 11 of this thesis engages with some of the 'little' traditions, by exploring Christian inculturation through dalit or adivasi religiosity. Therefore I need to take a postcolonial approach if I want to avoid branding dalit or adivasi religiosity as 'Hinduism'. This is something I am keen to avoid, because I believe that the religious landscape is actually far more complex than that, as chapter 11 demonstrates. The biographical method will be used as it allows me to tell the stories of my case studies as part of an exploration into their double religious identities. Their narratives (be it the life story of a person or the formation of a place, i.e. Saccidananda ashram) are an integral part of their religious identities, offering insights into how and why such identities occurred or developed. Drawing on the feminist methodology permits me to substantiate my position that identity is an evolving concept, and therefore can

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[22] For more on Banerjea, see Hedges, P. *Preparation and Fulfilment* [2001] p. 144f ; *From exclusivism to inclusivism: the theological writings of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885),* compiled and introduced by K.P. Aleaz [1998] and Banerjea's own *The Relation between Christianity and Hinduism* [1882].

[23] However, as will be explored later on in this thesis, categorising dalit religiosity as 'Hindu' has its own pitfalls.

encompass many facets; I have already explained that a good source for this comes from Hill Fletcher's advocating identity as 'a verb, not a noun.' Also by choosing to locate myself within feminist methodologies, I am choosing to not only be aware of my biases as a researcher but also to embrace them, acknowledging that any biases I have will impact on this research. I cannot write about Hindu-Christian identities without acknowledging that my own passions for Hinduism, as a Christian, led me to read about some of the case studies in the first place. Not only that, but also that my own faith journey as a Christian has been impacted by my own study of and contact with Hinduism. Finally, ethnography has an important role to play in the methodology of this thesis too, through textual analysis, as it allows me to study the lives of the case studies through accessing their own writings. But it is also important because I can have a starting point, the facets, which do not have to be fixed but are permitted to evolve as and when they engage with different case studies, meaning that my research is flexible and adaptable.

The case studies' attitudes, methods of engagement and the problems they encountered will be examined, to give an overall picture of the extent to which their identities may be considered as 'doubly religious' and demonstrate how they have contributed to Hindu-Christian understanding. Through them, the theology of double religious identity will be shown to be in need of expansion once it is applied to Hindu-Christian dialogue; in order to do justice to the complex nature of such religious identities the terminology needs to be broken down further. Each case study will be used to highlight a different *facet* (or combination of facets) of 'double religious identity', and the case studies span four time periods, to demonstrate that double religious identity (in various forms) is not just a contemporary phenomenon.

Early case Studies

- **The St. Thomas Christians** (circa fourth century AD onwards) – This first case study highlights an important distinction: that *inculturation* can be a spontaneous as well as a deliberate process. The St. Thomas Christians are one of the (if not *the*) oldest Christian communities in India and their liturgies, rituals and practices absorbed Hindu ideas in some instances. The very nature of inculturation means that the *aesthetical* and *cultural* facets can be employed here, too.
- **Robert de Nobili** (1577-1656) was a sixteenth/seventeenth century Jesuit whose missionary methods called into question his Christian religious identity, both amongst his colleagues within the Roman Catholic Church and the people that he was trying to convert. de Nobili illustrates the *aesthetical* and *cultural* facets of double religious identity through his pioneering work, viewed contemporarily as *inculturation*.

Indigenous Case Studies

- **Keshub Chunder Sen** (1838-1884) Sen was a key figure in the Hindu Renaissance[24], whose creation of the Church of the New Dispensation *culturally* and *spiritually* synthesized Hindu and Christian ideas. His many lectures and addresses propagated various doctrines, hence why he is also understood as having a *theological* facet to his double religious identity.

- **Brahmabandhab Upadhyay** (1861-1907) This wonderfully complex figure is best known for his assertion of his own identity as "Hindu-Catholic" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 25); his life was a mission in trying to reconcile his spiritual religious identity (Christian) with his *cultural* (Hindu) one. Post-conversion, he was dedicated to trying to found an Indian Christian theology, adopting certain *aesthetics* like kāvi on the way. However, there is also a fascinating *political* facet to his double religious identity in later life, and a strong *theological* side to him that attempts to develop an Indian Christian theology.

Post-colonial rule Case Studies

- **Saccidananda Ashram** (founded 1950) This Catholic āśrama was founded by Jules Monchanin and Abhishiktananda. Uniquely, this case study uses a place to exhibit a facet of double religious identity, so the actual āśrama itself is shown to be *aesthetical* (and most importantly, not spiritual) in its double religious identity – once again, this is to do with issues that surround the practices of *inculturation*.

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[24] The Hindu Renaissance occurred "…from the early 19th century until Independence (1947)" (Johnson, 2009, p. 220) during British colonial rule of India, and was a time during which Hinduism underwent various reforms. Hinduism was reformed not just according to its beliefs (i.e. mūrti worship was abandoned and criticized by some like Dayānanda Sarasvatī and Rāmmohun Roy) but also according to its practices, and associated religious-cultural practices. For example, the abolition of satī was called for by Rāmmohun Roy. Indeed, ethical reform is a key theme of the Hindu Renaissance and Gavin Flood points to "…the construction of Hinduism as an ethical spirituality, equal, or superior, to Christianity and Islam" (Flood, 1996, p. 251). Keshub Chunder Sen, a case study of this thesis, is also considered a Hindu reformer; so are Ramakrishna, his disciple Vivekānanda and Mohandas K. Gandhi. Their approaches to Christianity differ – whilst some reformers incorporated aspects of Christianity or allowed Christian influence on their version of reformed Hinduism, still there were others who were vehemently against Christian influence. See Flood's *An introduction to Hinduism* [1996] pp.250-261 for a solid overview and introduction to the Renaissance and its reformers. For further readings on the Hindu Renaissance, see Glyn Richards edited volume of the reformers' own writings, *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* [1985]; Noel A. Salmond's *Hindu iconoclasts: Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati and nineteenth century polemics against idolatry* [2004] and M.M. Thomas' *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* [1969].

- **Jules Monchanin** (1895-1957), **Abhishiktananda** (1910-1973) and **Bede Griffiths** (1906-1993) Although originating from Christian traditions, they have been criticized for their involvement with Hinduism at an *inculturative* level. They not only jointly exhibit the *aesthetical* facet of religious identity, but in the cases of Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths, also demonstrate other facets independently. The *spiritual* facet, for example, is brought together most explicitly by Abhishiktananda. Bede Griffiths, however, does not so much embrace the spiritual facet (at least until later life) but much more of a *theological* facet, which Abhishiktananda also embraces.

Contemporary Case Studies

- **Dalit Christians and the law** This chapter takes a critical look at the current situations of dalit Christians in India, particularly regarding Indian law. It examines examples of dalit Christians who feign a Hindu identity in order to not only protect themselves and their families but also to gain access to privileges given by law (reservations) to dalits. This is because dalit Christians (and dalit Muslims) do not qualify as dalits according to Indian law. This case study then exhibits the *political* facet that double religious identity can manifest.

- **Double religious identity, dalit conversion and spontaneous Christian inculturation**: This final case study is split into three parts: The first examines the lives of dalit Christians who, through being *culturally* dalit, find themselves on the edge of both Hindu and Christian worlds. The second part examines *inculturation* in contemporary South India, through, firstly, the Mukkavar Christians. Of particular interest is their approach to Mary; their double religious identity is played out through *cultural, inculturative, theological* and *spiritual* facets. The third part examines Hindus and Christians who demonstrate a cross-over in participation and worship; this will be examined through the relationships construed between deities and saints, and also through Indian representations of Christ. Again, this can be understood as *inculturation*, but perhaps also might be considered an *aesthetical* and *cultural* double religious identity. This is all as part of an on-going, natural dialogue between people of different faiths and the religious traditions which are part of their culture.

The reader will notice that each case study has been assigned (at least) one particular facet of religious identity. The traditional understanding of religious identity is thus: One is either a Christian or a Hindu and is known as having a ***singular*** religious identity. However, studying

the relationship between religious identities has led to a branching out of that terminology into *non- singular* as well:

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │  Religious Identity  │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                  ┌────────────┘         └────────────┐
          ┌───────────────┐                   ┌───────────────┐
          │   Singular     │                   │  Non-Singular  │
          └───────────────┘                   └───────────────┘
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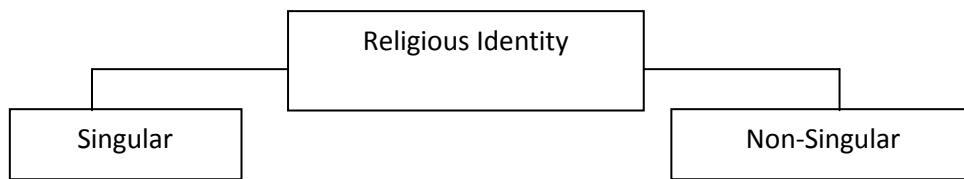
As chapter one will show more explicitly, 'non singular religious identity' is most commonly referred to as **hyphenated, double religious identity** or **multiple religious identities**. In this study I will suggest, for ease of comprehension, that the two are distinct.

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │  Religious Identity  │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                  ┌────────────┘         └────────────┐
          ┌───────────────┐                   ┌───────────────┐
          │   Singular     │                   │  Non-Singular  │
          └───────────────┘                   └───────────────┘
                  ┌───────────────────────────────┴──────────┐
   ┌──────────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────────┐
   │ Hyphenated/Double Religious│              │  Multiple Religious   │
   │         Identity          │              │      Identity         │
   └──────────────────────────┘              └──────────────────────┘
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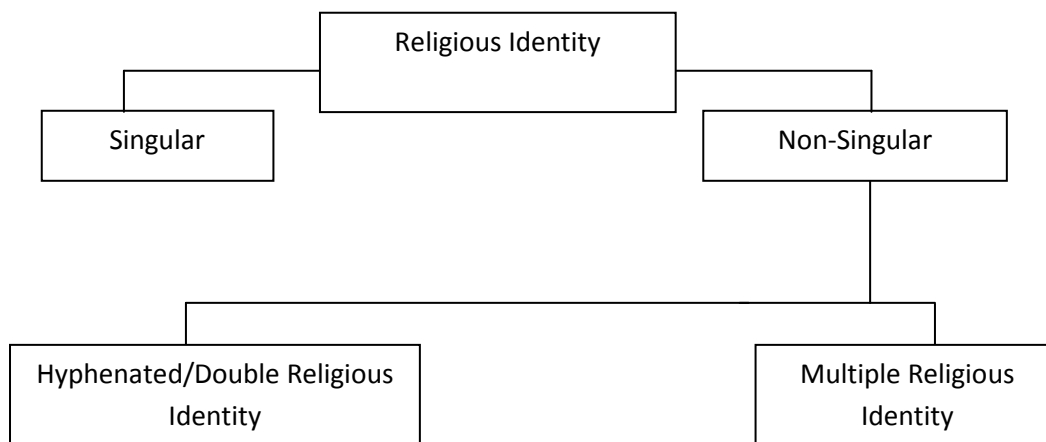
Multiple religious identities are perhaps more readily aligned with people who believe that all religions have the same Truth at their essence; Aupers and Hautman argue that a key facet of 'New Age spirituality' is indeed "…the belief that the diversity of religious traditions essentially refers to the same underlying spiritual truth" (Aupers and Houtman, 2012, p. 6). It could be possible, therefore, to explore multiple religious identities through New Age spirituality[25]. Multiple religious identities can also be perceived negatively or sceptically,

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[25] There are a variety of sources available on exactly what constitutes New Age, as well as critical understandings of its impact. In terms of defining New Age, see Paul Heelas' *The New Age Movement* [1996] for a critical engagement, and also Frisk's article 'Quantitative Studies of New Age: A summary and discussion' in Volume III of Spirituality in the Modern World', edited by Paul Heelas [2012]. In volume III, an article by Aupers and Houtman 'Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The social and public significance of New Age spirituality' points out that the term New Age is used to describe those who "…it is argued, draw upon multiple traditions, styles, and ideas simultaneously, combining them into idiosyncratic packages" (Aupers and Houtman, 2012, pp. 3-4). It is in this understanding, then, that

whereby it is suggested that having more than one religious identity is merely a reflection of consumerism; believing in and practising aspects which you have personally selected from a menu of religious options.

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multiple religious identity could be explored through New Age spiritualties. However, the authors conclude that such a definition of New Age as 'pick and mix religion' is superficial (Aupers and Houtman, 2012, p. 9). 'Following one's own path and experimenting with different traditions', the authors argue, is to be expected if "New Agers believe that the sacred resides in the deeper layers of the self…" (Aupers and Houtman, 2012, p. 9). However, there are those who take a more negative approach to New Age; in volume IV of Heelas, Steve Bruce's article 'The Failure of the New Age' remarks that "In the free market for ideas, New Agers maximize their returns by choosing what suits them best and synthesising their preferred combination" (Bruce, 2012, p. 76). To give one more example, Paul Hedges offers a balanced view which is helpful in assessing New Age from as much of an objective standpoint as possible. He writes that although pick and mix religion is criticized, nevertheless "…it should not be derided. In our contemporary context it marks out the religious life of many, and we should not disparage unnecessarily what may well be meaningful and uplifting voyages of spiritual discovery for those involved" (Hedges, 2010, p. 238). I like Hedges' approach, as it fits well with the sentiments of this thesis also; much as in the same way New Age has a stereotype of being eclectic and consumerist in the freedom to choose what one spiritually engages with, so too does multiple or double religious identity have the same stereotype. But what matters is that for some of the case studies involved here (e.g. Abhishiktananda, K C Sen), their double religious identities took them on fascinating spiritual journeys which should not be undermined or ridiculed.

With regards to consumerist spirituality, Carrette and King's book *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* [2005] strongly criticises the ways in which spirituality has become a product; the following quotation sums up their feelings on the subject rather well:

> You can buy your way to happiness with your very own spirituality, cut off from all the suffering and ills of the world and index-linked to the latest business success. Spirituality has arrived in the corporate marketplace and all that is required is a desire to consume (Carette and King, 2005, p. 53).

This is a very strong response to consumerist spirituality, and the authors suggest that there is a need for people to have an *engaged* spirituality now, "…grounded in an awareness of our mutual interdependence, the need for social justice and economically sustainable lifestyles…" (Carette and King, 2005, p. 182). I think that their critique of New Age spirituality as needing engagement with social justice is a strong one, and although their above quotation is deliberately provocative, it does make the reader think about the implications of a spirituality which is solely inwardly focused. To give one final example, a really interesting study of New Age spirituality is Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's *The Spiritual revolution* [2005]. The book publishes the results of 'The Kendal Project', which comparatively explored traditional religion and New Age religion in Kendal (in the Lake District, England) as a means of testing the claim that a spiritual revolution has occurred. The authors conclude that whilst traditional religion has not yet been overtaken by New Age spiritualties, "…if the trends we have charted continue into the future, a spiritual revolution will take place within the next 30 or so years" (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p. 48). It is then a really fascinating insight into the practice of New Age spirituality.
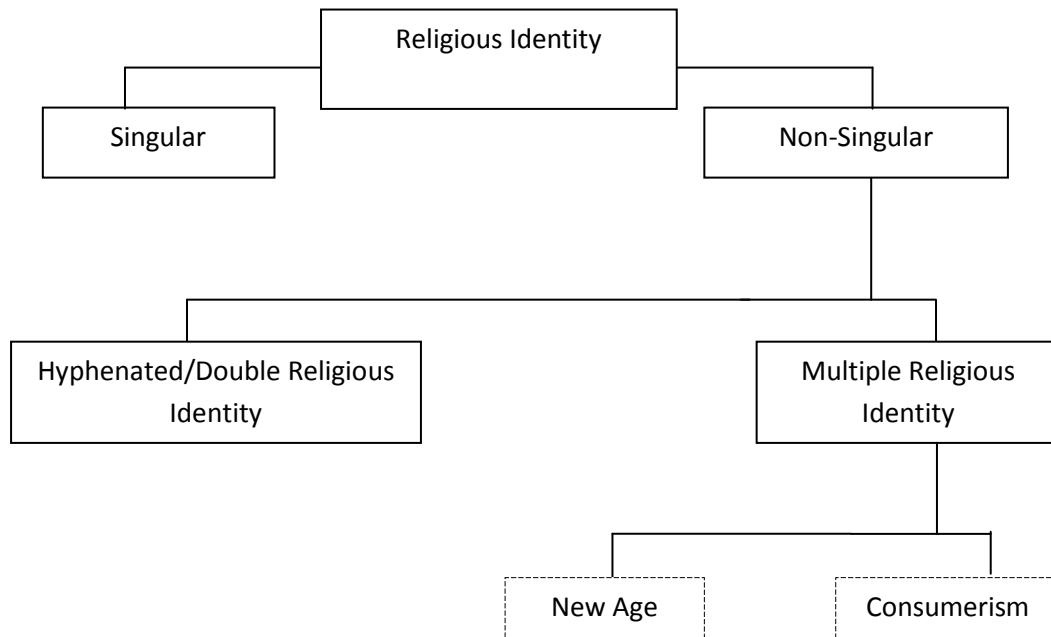
The diagram up to this point shows the breakdown of religious identity, into singular and non singular. The two branches are Hyphenated/Double religious identity and Multiple Religious identity. Multiple is seen to have two facets, which are 'New Age' and 'Consumerism'.

Hyphenated/Double religious identity is what concerns this study, and hence the case studies will be used to show six different facets of hyphenated/double religious identity. One might question why I have chosen **six** facets, instead of eight or four etc. In order to properly test this theory, for me six facets seem like an adequate number. This is because it is not too few, so that the call for expansion of 'double religious identity' might be seen as limited or weak, but it is also not too many, as excess might lead to a neglect of the detailed analysis warranted to make the argument. These help to distinguish different approaches but also aid a broader understanding of how and why double religious identity happens or is engaged with. Again, six seemed like a good number for this. The six facets selected for this thesis are: Politics, Aesthetics, Spirituality, Culture, Inculturation and Theology. That is not to say that these lists of facets are exhaustive, they are anecdotal. For example, consumerism might also fit as a facet in hyphenated/double religious identity, as well as multiple. Another possibility could have been to explore double religious identity as a result of having one Hindu parent and one Christian parent; this facet might have been labelled 'Upbringing' and scholars such as Raimon Panikkar[26] have spoken about their own experiences of this.

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[26] Panikkar had a Hindu father and a Catholic mother. However, Panikkar was adamant that he did not wish any biography of himself to be written (see website http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/altre-biografie.html) and any exploration of his religious identity would have entailed this. Therefore Panikkar has not been considered as a case study for this thesis. For an exploration of religious identity

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Hyphenated/Double Religious │
│          Identity           │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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| Politics | Aesthetics | Theology | Spirituality | Culture | Inculturation |
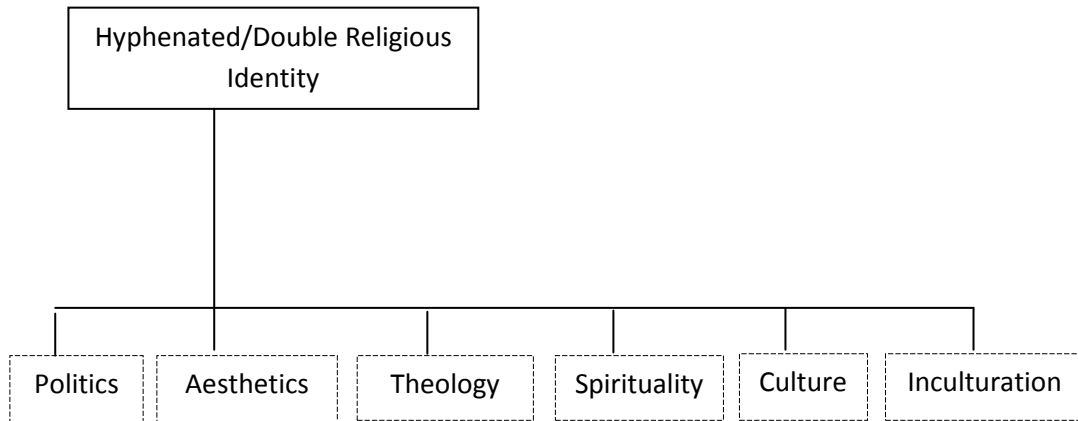
The facets which I have chosen do need further explanation before progressing, bearing in mind their capacity as examples and not an exhaustive list. As will be demonstrated, the facets chosen overlap in some instances and refer as much to how a person perceives their own religious identity, as to how it is perceived by other people.

- Politics – Being 'Hindu' and being 'Indian' are sometimes interpreted as one and the same, which is a particular political interpretation of 'Hinduism' as both religion and culture. However, the political facet here is concretely understood as a response to a political situation – for example, some dalit Christians are motivated by the political issue of reservation, adopting a 'legally Hindu' identity in order to qualify for government reservations. Upadhyay, as a different example, was motivated by the political cause of an independent India, at least in his later life. It could be argued that all of the case studies are political – after all, they are working within such a framework, especially the Christian missionaries who were pioneering inculturation, which has been construed as another form of imperialism. However, when referring to the political facet of a person's double religious identity, what is meant is that they are motivated by a certain political situation which (in their eyes at least) warrants change.

- Theology – The theological facet simply refers to the *religious beliefs* of the case study in question, which then plays a large role in the formation of their own religious identity and in their *public* theological voice. For example, Keshub Chunder Sen's theological understandings changed over time, which influenced both the perception and the actualisation of his own double religious identity. The theological facet might also be applied when the case study's theology is expounded as certain doctrines; to

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by Pannikar, see the chapter 'Religious Identity and Pluralism' in the edited volume *A Dome of Many Colours: Religious Pluralism, Identity, and Unity* [1999, pp. 23-47].

take Sen as an example again, his understanding of Jesus led to the doctrines he propagated as 'divine humanity' and 'divine sonship'. However, there is also another type of theology, 'personal theology'. Where this descriptor 'personal theology' is used, this refers to the case study's own particular beliefs and practices which might be kept private or shared with close friends and family. The essential difference is that their theology is not deliberately offered up as a way of understanding God which others must seek to emulate. Someone's theology might seem to partake in two religious spheres, or they may be strongly influenced by another religion so as to incorporate it into their own theology and way of understanding God and the world, but are not beliefs that they then propagate. In short, the beliefs which make up their theology are personal to them and are not generalized. In contemporary theological terms, the study of this field is known as 'comparative theology', as coined by Francis X Clooney. However, Rose Drew stresses that "Not all protagonists understand the discipline in precisely the same way" (Drew, 2012, p. 1042) and, like her, I will concentrate on Clooney's definition (Drew, 2012, p. 1042). Clooney defines it as "…the practice of rethinking aspects of one's own faith tradition through the study of aspects of another tradition" (Clooney, 2007, p. 654). St. Anselm defined theology as *Fides quaerens intellectum*, or 'Faith seeking understanding', a definition which Clooney relates to his own quest as a comparative theologian (Clooney, 2004, p. 99). In this thesis, the 'faith seeking understanding' is a person's attempt at trying to understand the presence and validity (or not, as the case may be!) of other faiths and indeed the contextualisation of their own. All of this may impinge greatly on how they or others perceive their religious identity in terms of Hindu and/or Christian. Rose Drew questions whether or not Clooney's admission that Hinduism has led him into a greater appreciation and dialogue with his own (Christian) faith means that he can "…now claim some measure of Hindu faith" (Drew, 2012, p. 1046). She quotes Clooney himself as saying that "comparative theology 'opens the door to a kind of multiple belonging'" (Clooney, cited in Drew, 2012, p. 1046) and herself argues that "…this process can go as far as full-blown dual belonging…" (Drew, 2012, p. 1047). This is extremely important for this thesis, as it suggests that both the study of double religious identity and comparative theology could be related. This could be further related to the case studies examined here, say, Abhishiktananda, whose crossovers into Hindu study strengthened his own faith convictions as a Christian. Hence this theological facet will be split into two parts, 'personal' and 'public'.

- <u>Spirituality</u> – Admittedly, 'spirituality' is hardly a clear cut term! However, when used in this thesis it will refer to the individual pursuit of a religious path and/or religious

identity, focusing on the *experiences* and *emotions* associated with being a Hindu and a Christian. These experiences/emotions might come about through interaction on various practical levels e.g. performing a pūjā, partaking in the Eucharist, praying, meditating, reading Holy Scriptures from both religious traditions[27]. This facet is the one most 'traditionally' associated with double religious identity; someone is seen to participate in two religions simultaneously, which might be a tension filled existence and can be problematic emotionally, but might also prove to be actually difficult because they are trying to practise two religious disciplines at the same time. Abhishiktananda is a strong example of this type of double religious identity because of his attempts to hold Advaita and Catholicism in tension. On the other hand, it might be natural for someone to spiritually identify with two religions; for example if they are brought up by parents who have two different religious identities. (e.g. one a Christian, one a Hindu) or are part of a culture where double religious identities are the norm. Those engaged in the more spontaneously occurring inculturation of the Church in South India may be viewed as spiritually interacting two religious traditions, which might be labelled as 'syncretism', as explored in the final case study.

A note about syncretism generally: syncretism is often viewed negatively (especially within Christianity) as either inadequate or unorthodox. For example, Hendrik Kraemer argues that "The term syncretism has always more or less had the connotation of expressing the *illegitimate* mingling of different religious elements" (Kraemer, 2004, p. 41). However, there are those who view syncretism in a more positive light than this, and I believe that it is important for this research to represent both sides of the coin. Perry Schmidt Leukel's chapter 'In Defence of Syncretism'[28] identifies four charges related to syncretism, namely 'the corruption of truth', 'superficiality', 'inconsistency' and 'the loss of identity' (Schmidt-Leukel, 2009, p. 77) and proceeds to challenge said charges. Whilst all four are significant, the one most related to this thesis is 'loss of identity'; Abhishiktananda feared syncretism, precisely because of this idea of losing his Christian identity, his monastic identity. Schmidt-Leukel notes that "…it needs to be shown how syncretistic developments can bring about a transformation of identity

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[27] There are certainly strong connotations here with Ninian Smart's Seven Dimensions of Religion (Smart, 1989, pp. 10-21). In particular, the second one which he labels "Experiential and Emotional" (Smart, 1989, pp. 13-14) and also the first and third dimensions, "Practical and Ritual" (Smart, 1989, pp. 12-13) and "Narrative or Mythic" (Smart, 1989, pp.5-16). Indeed, giving religious identity various 'facets' could be paralleled with Smart giving religion seven 'dimensions'.

[28] From his publication, *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* [2009].

that is not its loss but its deepening and widening" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2009, p. 85). For Schmidt-Leukel then, syncretism can be a force for good because it can *widen* and *deepen* a person's religious identity, leading to transformation. In this sense, Abhishiktananda theoretically has nothing to fear. But in reality, the widening and deepening of his religious identity is beset with difficulties, because it requires him to act on his theological presumptions. What I mean by this is that Abhishiktānanda's theology speaks of finding God outside of his Christian faith, of feeling spiritually drawn to Advaita. But to act on those feelings, to be courageous enough to experience Christ outside of the confines of his Christian convictions and practices and to have his religious identity transformed - that is painful. So whilst syncretism can have both a positive aspect – as Schmidt-Leukel provides – and a negative one (see the charges outlined earlier) it still remains that the possibility of having one's identity widened and deepened through a syncretic encounter can be fraught with complications. What is important for this thesis is that syncretism in all of its guises – positive, negative, painful – are recognised as valid possibilities[29].

The next three facets – culture, aesthetics and inculturation – overlap fairly significantly with regards to missionary case studies.

- Culture[30] – This is another term employed throughout this thesis which might be considered 'vague', but for the purposes of this thesis, culture refers to the social environment of the case study in question, of which there are many aspects. These identifying aspects of that environment might include language, particular customs, the

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[29] For further readings which appraise syncretism, see Eric Maroney's *Religious Syncretism* [2006], in particular chapter 1(pp. 1-22) and *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, an edited volume by Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen [2004]. Also, the first appendix in Carl Starkloff's *a theology of the in-between* [2002] entitled 'Christian Views of Syncretism' (pp. 143-156) offers an excellent review of theological positions taken by different scholars in relation to syncretism. Also, Paul Hedges' viewpoints on syncretism are explored in chapter 11 of this thesis, through engagement with his text *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* [2010].

[30] For academic literature concerning culture, see the following: Terry Eagleton's *The Idea of Culture* [2000], especially the first chapter; Fred Inglis' *Culture* [2004] including chapter 1 which traces the concept of culture (pp. 1-32); Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays* [1993] in particular 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture' (pp. 3-30) and Järviluoma-Mäkelä's article 'The moving and shifting concept of culture' [2011]. For readings regarding the relationship between religion and culture, see the relevant section of chapter 3 in this thesis. For example, see Kathryn Tanner's *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* [1997]; Geertz's essay 'Religion As a Cultural System' from the above referenced volume (pp. 87-125) and *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, edited by Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney and Kathryn Tanner [2001]. Of particular note is the chapter by Sheila Greeve Davaney, 'Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis', pp. 3-16.

emphasis placed on the arts[31], structure of society[32], the significance of education, the ethnicity, gender and sexuality of the people who belong to said culture and how each of those in turn are viewed within the framework of that environment. Another important aspect of culture is religion, its beliefs and its practices – or is it? A cultural facet is necessary for this thesis because the relationship between religion and culture has been interpreted in different ways – some see them as linked, others see them as entirely separate entities. If they are interpreted as separate, then a person may believe they can use the cultural elements of a religion, but not the religion itself, to their own advantage. This is the premise on which inculturation is built. For example, Robert de Nobili insisted that his use of certain Hindu symbols was legitimate because they were cultural, not religious. However, if other people perceive those symbols as religious (or even religious and cultural) then that person may appear to have a double religious identity. So, particularly when inculturation or the pioneers of it call certain elements of a culture 'purely' cultural (i.e. having no religious connotations whatsoever) it is questioned by those who can only see that symbol or element for its religious value. It is certainly questioned whether it is possible to separate religion and culture so completely, and indeed this premise is what leads, in the most part, to harsh criticisms of the practice of inculturation.

There is a second interpretation of cultural, which is applicable to both Upadhyay and Sen. Just as some Jews might describe themselves as 'culturally' Jewish but not 'religiously' so, some people may use the term 'Hindu' to refer to their Indian heritage. This can have more negative connotations when employed by Hindutva, which is explored later on in this thesis.

- Aesthetics – Someone (or something, as with the case study of Saccidananda ashram) with an aesthetically double religious identity takes on the signs and symbols (the aesthetics) of another religion – often this is because of their involvement in inculturation. For example, the appropriation of the Oṃ symbol, the wearing of kāvi (the orange/saffron coloured robes worn by a Hindu sannyāsin as a symbol of renouncing the world in pursuit of mokṣa) and the use of āratī in Christian worship. Indeed, taking the concept of Hindu āśrama and putting it to Christian use is a strong example of aesthetical double religious identity. The issue of separating religion and culture means that there will always be those who disagree that it should or can be

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[31] i.e. drama, music, literature, sports, visual arts (painting, photography etc.).

[32] This could be in relation to wealth, importance, respect – the three are not necessarily linked.

done, hence why the borrowing of the 'cultural' aesthetics in inculturation is also sometimes seen as borrowing 'religious' aesthetics. This might lead to accusations of heresy, syncretism (if those doing the accusing perceive syncretism in a negative light) or of disguising Christianity with Hinduism in order to trick people into converting.

- <u>Inculturation</u> – Aesthetics plays an important part in the religious identities of some of the case studies. This is most noticeable in those who pioneered a particular approach to mission and dialogue called inculturation. This is when practitioners adapted their dress, customs, symbols, liturgies, rituals and practices to be more Indian, leading to the foundation of Indian churches and Christian āśramas. Such adoptions in inculturation can lead to, at the very least, a perception of the practitioners as having a double religious identity. Often, the missionary will be confident in their own Christian identity but others might struggle to appreciate that, especially if they are critical of this approach to mission. Inculturation actually combines some of the other facets – the aesthetical, cultural and theological – because it dichotomises religion and culture. Hence, when Bede Griffiths wore the kāvi, he was using it to draw parallels in Hinduism to his status as a Benedictine monk in Christianity, but Sita Ram Goel, for example, has been particularly critical of both Christian āśramas and those who operate them, in his book *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* [1994] It is this ambiguous perception of the practitioners of inculturation having a double religious identity which warrants investigating the relationship between double religious identity and inculturation.

The first part of this thesis is concerned with setting the scene for the aforementioned case studies, through which they can be better understood. This includes detailed analysis of different terms associated with religious identity, how best to understand Hinduism and Christianity as religions, what inculturation entails and why it is controversial. Part II will pull together the above groundwork and use it to examine double religious identities through the selected case studies. By doing so, it is hoped that the ways in which double religious identity are understood will be enhanced, and it will be shown how, in Hindu – Christian dialogue specifically, discussions about double religious identity have already been an important aspect of that work. The case studies will be used not just to examine these themes but to explore the nature of these people's religious identities as well. Each case study, then, fits into one or more of these facets. It shows how they had a double religious identity, but not always for the same reasons: they might fit only one facet, or they might fit multiple ones. Either way, those who were missionaries fit under the 'inculturation' facet, and act as a case for arguing that inculturation does indeed function as a type of double religious identity. *However, this is only if the terminology of double religious identity is expanded in order to include various facets.* By

doing this, double religious identity can be seen as a phenomenon that is connected with inculturation (which also feeds into aesthetics and culture, and sometimes, theology) but also with other reasons like contemporary political issues, as well as the more 'traditional' understanding of double religious identity as syncretism or a result of being brought up within two religious traditions. Through these case studies, there will be scope not only to contrast their different approaches within the same historical context, but also to explore the nature of Hindu and Christian religious identities, and the grey area in-between which was occupied.

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                          │    Religious Identity    │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
                 ┌────────────────────┴──────────────────┐
        ┌─────────────────┐                      ┌─────────────────┐
        │     Singular    │                      │   Non-Singular  │
        └─────────────────┘                      └─────────────────┘
                                                          │
                          ┌───────────────────────────────┴────────────────┐
        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
        │ Hyphenated/Double Religious      │        │   Multiple Religious        │
        │           Identity               │        │        Identity             │
        └─────────────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘
                        │                                        │
                        │                          ┌─────────────┴─────────────┐
                        │                    ┌────────────┐           ┌────────────┐
                        │                    │  New Age   │           │ Consumerism│
                        │                    └────────────┘           └────────────┘
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Politics   Aesthetics   Theology   Spirituality   Culture   Inculturation

Personal   Public
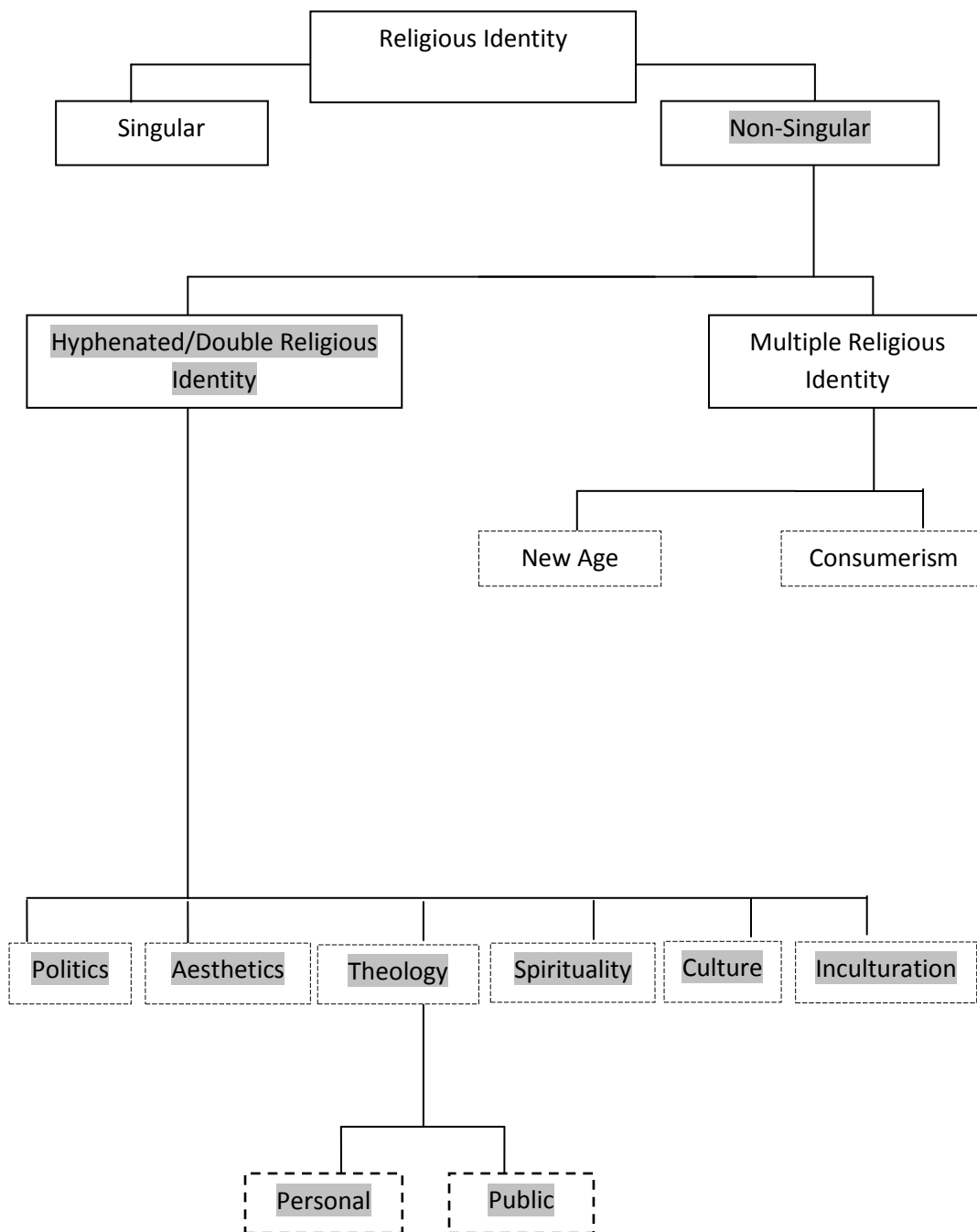
The shaded panels of the diagram overleaf indicate the remit of this study. Double religious identity will be explored via a set of case studies, two each across four different time periods. Each case study will fit at least one of the following facets - Politics, Aesthetics, Theology, Spirituality, Culture or Inculturation. This will be the basis of the argument put forward: that double religious identity can not only be found outside of Buddhist-Christian studies, but once shown to be in Hindu-Christian studies, it needs to expand its terminology. This is so that it can be better understood and more fully explained, rather than giving the impression that any type of non-singular religious identity is either consumerist or syncretic. This necessarily includes making inculturation a type of double religious identity, because of the reaction to inculturation that accuses it of syncretism, deceitfulness or of shallow theologising. The aim of this thesis is to explore the contribution of people with double religious identities to Hindu-Christian dialogue. At the same time these case studies will evaluate the terminology associated with 'double religious identity', showing it to be lacking in sufficient depth and giving suggestions for the broadening of said terminology through the employment of various facets. Before that happens however, it is important to assess the context of the belief systems that these double religious identities have arisen out of. This is why the first part of this study focuses on discussing the attitudes of Hinduism and Christianity towards other religions in some depth, as well as introducing terms and arguments which are important to understanding the theology of religious belonging. Just as Knitter could not be a Christian without Buddha, so too could the people represented in this study not have had the religious identities they did/do have without Hinduism or Christianity, and they could not have contributed to Hindu-Christian dialogue in such fascinating ways.

Chapter 1: **Religious Identity and Hindu-Christian Dialogue**

There is a wealth of literature regarding human identity, but from the outset let it be made clear that this study is not concerned with the philosophical intricacies of what it means to be human, or what human identity actually entails. Rather, it is concerned with a certain aspect of identity: the religious[33]. Religious identity is not always straightforward; there are different types of religious identity such as hyphenated/double and multiple religious identities. Crucially for this thesis, religious identity is made up of different facets, and interacting any of these facets with another religious identity can lead to a perception or actuation of double religious identity. An examination of the associated terminology and theology of non-singular religious identity will be explored in this chapter, with one term, 'double religious identity', being singled out as the one which will be used throughout this thesis. This chapter will then look at some of the issues associated with this type of religious identity; and explore some of the explanations given for holding two religious identities simultaneously, whilst relating these questions to the various case studies. The literature review section at the beginning of this chapter summarises the key readings for double religious identity.

Literature Review

Double religious identity is a fairly recent topic in theology and religious studies; perhaps the best known and most comprehensive guide to it is Catherine Cornille's edited volume, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* [first published 2002]. In this, she has drawn together a number of essays by scholars in the field, including Claude Geffré, Jacques Dupuis, Elizabeth Harris and Francis X Clooney. Her volume is necessarily limited to the discussion of Christian identity and its relationship with other identities, so that Christian identity is the primary focus. Because the volume takes a general approach, there is little engagement with people's concrete double religious identities; this is a book of theory and questions, rather than application, although Elizabeth Harris' chapter explores the issue at least

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[33]As just one example of defining a specific religious identity, in Kathryn Tanner's *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* [1997] she defines Christian identity in social terms, 'in virtue of a cultural boundary' (Tanner, 1997, p. 104) and as 'continuities in belief and action' (Tanner, 1997, p. 96). For a good, general exploration of identity, see chapter 2 of Bhikhu C. Parekh's *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Independent World* [2008], entitled 'The Concept of Identity'. In particular, Parekh's comment about personal identity, "Although it is open to revision, it needs to be relatively stable" (Parekh, 2008, p. 13) is important for this thesis with regards to case studies like Abhishiktananda, who lived in Hindu-Christian tension. But it also applies to the ways in which identities are perceived; Parekh comments that "One could be mistaken about what one takes to be one's own or another person's identity" (Parekh, 2008, p. 9). That issue of perception, particularly with case studies like Saccidananda ashram, Bede Griffiths and Upadhyay will be particularly important.

from a particular geographical vantage point (Sri Lanka). However, the predominant pattern among scholarly works dealing with the issue of double religious identity is to deal with theological and philosophical questions, possibly because the exclusivist Truth claims of Christianity seem to react harshly with the possibility of engaging another religious identity alongside it. For that reason some of the chapters, like Jeanrond's, and Panikkar's, deal with the issue of what it means to belong to or identify oneself as Christian in the first place, and the theological problems a Christian might face in doing so. Cornille stresses that multiple religious belonging is a "positive challenge", not a threat, to Christianity (Cornille, 2002, p. 4) and certainly the case studies in this thesis, for the most part, can be seen as positive challenges too, particularly considering the ways in which the church does mission and dialogue. Cornille herself has written extensively on the use and possibility of an authentic multiple religious belonging[34]; of particular note is her article which appeared in Buddhist –Christian Studies 'Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions' [2003]. A key theme of her work is the critical engagement with the question of whether or not it is possible to *belong* completely to two or more religious traditions without conflict ensuing.

Michael von Brück is another excellent scholar in this field. His chapter concerns a theology of multiple religious belonging/identity which appears in D'Arcy May's edited volume *Converging Ways? Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity* [2007], which is notable not only as an introduction to the theological conundrums of double religious identity, but also to its implications. Of primary importance to this thesis is his suggestion that people might have double religious identities in different *ways*; for example intellectually, emotionally, socially and institutionally (von Brück, 2007, p. 199). Cornille also makes similar suggestions; in a lecture at Heythrop college in March 2012 she outlined five different types of multiple religious belonging, which included 'cultural', 'family' (i.e. because one parent is a Christian, the other is a Hindu), 'needs basis' (which she labels 'serial' and is dealt with later on in this chapter) 'categorical' and paradoxically a 'non-belonging' (Cornille, 2012). This non-belonging involves identifying with another religion, but not wanting to commit to it, which leads to a picking and choosing mentality; she calls this 'New Age' religion (Cornille, 2012). However, I would identify her 'non-belonging' as more of a consumerist attitude than a New Age approach, because this 'lack of commitment' is a hallmark of consumerist approaches towards religion, not New Age approaches[35]. I identified 'consumerism' in the introduction as a possible type of *multiple* religious identity, therefore leaving such a category outside the scope

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[34] Notice the change in terminology, from 'double' to 'multiple'. This issue of terminology is addressed extensively in the next section.

[35] Recall the discussion on New Age spirituality in the introduction.

of this thesis, instead choosing to concentrate on a definite belonging to two religious identities. I decide to use 'cultural' as one of the facets for double religious identity, however Cornille's description of what that entails is very different from my own. For Cornille, there is a distinction between double religious belonging in the East and the West[36] - in the East, the double identity comes about by virtue of identifying with that particular culture, so for example to be Japanese or Chinese is to be "all those religions" (Cornille, 2012) e.g. Shinto, Buddhist etc. However, in this thesis the cultural facet is identified as being concerned with ideas about mission; e.g. a convert wanting to remain within their Indian culture after converting to Christianity, or how inculturation extracts culture from religion and uses it to its own advantage. What Cornille calls the 'categorical' type of belonging is concerned with those who identify with other [spiritual] *practices*, giving examples such as Panikkar, Griffiths and Abhishiktananda (Cornille, 2012). Cornille argues that they "found it difficult to let go" (Cornille, 2012) once they had identified elsewhere (e.g. Hinduism). I would not place Bede Griffiths under this category, for there was no real 'conflict' involved. As for Abhishiktananda, it was much more than 'identifying' with the practice, and the question that immediately springs to mind is did he in fact *want* to let go of either religious identity?[37]

Peter C. Phan also deals with many of the questions surrounding double religious identity, for example in his article, 'Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church'[2003]. He firmly situates multiple religious belonging within the typology [in the much wider field of the theology of religions] of inclusive pluralism (Phan, 2003, p. 495), therefore giving this new field grounding by pairing it with a popular and much researched area. Importantly, he sets out limitations for what the term 'double religious identity' can entail. However, since this is not applied to any particular pairing or multiplication of religious identities in real people, I hope to test some of these boundaries he sets, one of which is to not view double religious identity as "simply" inculturation (Phan, 2003, p. 496). Phan argues that inculturation is about cultural identity *and* religious identity; "…a person needs and must not renounce his or her cultural identity and traditions upon becoming a Christian" (Phan, 2003, p. 496). However I will argue that it is more appropriate to see culture as one of the facets making up a person's religious identity, and therefore it is appropriate to consider seriously some (although not all) attempts at inculturation as leading to at least the *perception* of having a double religious identity.

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[36] These problematic categories are dealt with later on in this thesis.

[37] Although Cornille does go onto say this type is a more permanent belonging (Cornille, 2012). This will be addressed in the appropriate case studies.

Michael von Brück and Catherine Cornille, then, are two of the few scholars to deal with the topic of double religious identity from the perspective of 'type'. There seems to be sufficient groundwork on the theological and philosophical issues, as well as the benefits and problems of, or reasons for, the occurrence of double religious identities. Rightly so, recent academia, such as Rose Drew's *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging* [2011], has started to focus on particular people who express these double religious identities. I do not mean that no one has ever written anything about people with double religious identities. Rather, the point is that very few write exclusively about their religious identities *rooted in the theology of multiple religious belonging*; that is the new development. Take for example Abhishiktananda, his experiences have been thoroughly and extensively treated[38], but very few of them do so with explicit reference to this kind of theology. These writers all help shape the theoretical backdrop for reasons why double religious identity occurs, and the theological problems which that poses, normally from the Christian perspective. However, by placing this research within the sphere of Hindu-Christian dialogue, I am opting to narrow the research into a particular type of double religious identity, the Hindu-Christian, considering the questions (e.g. how is it possible, what forms does it take?) and the theological problems which such identities raise.

There has been some reference made to Buddhist and Jewish belonging. One such example is given by David B. Myers in his autobiographical article, 'Coming Home Spiritually to More Than One Faith' [2009]. Here, he explains how his "…integral spiritual practice involves alternating rather than fusing spiritual paths. On different days I live out different religious narratives" (Myers, 2009, p. 51). This is a really interesting type of double religious belonging, where he seems to shift between religious identities rather than attempt to hold them in a permanent tension. However, when studies of double religious identity are restricted to a particular type, scholars tend to focus on the Buddhist-Christian. Rose Drew is the most current researcher in this field. In *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging* she takes a case study approach, by interviewing people who claim both belonging to Buddhism and Christianity and critically analyses their engagement and the questions such an allegiance bring to the surface. She argues that "There can, of course, be various degrees and kinds of Buddhist Christian identity" (Drew, 2011, p. 3) and talks in terms of scale. As she sees it, there are "…commoner, softer forms of the phenomenon" (Drew, 2011, p. 3) for example those "…individuals who are influenced by both Buddhism and Christianity but nonetheless identify much more with, and have a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to, one rather than

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[38] e.g. see Visvanathan, S. (1998) *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narratives of Abhishiktananda, a French Monk in India* and Freeman, L. (2010) 'Abhishiktananda: Identity and Loss, Conflict and Resolution.

the other" (Drew, 2011, p. 3). Drew's understanding of Buddhist Christian identity as 'varied' and 'on a scale' means that from the outset she recognises the importance of not using the term 'Buddhist Christian identity' in a blanket way, appreciating that such identities take many forms; different forms for different people. This is something I have also recognised in my own study of Hindu-Christian identity, and I think that it is both necessary and important to recognise diversity within the articulation of dual or multiple religious identities as this will only aid further understanding of their origins and developments. Yet Drew contends that those at the softer end of her scale who are "…immersed in one tradition and adopting the odd belief or practice from another does not imply *belonging* to that second tradition" (Drew, 2011, p. 3) and it is here that we see (as with Cornille) that there are issues with the exact terminology being used to describe such phenomena. Drew's issue is with the term 'belonging', as rightly she sees this as more than just 'the odd belief or practice from a second tradition' being utilised. Her study, then, chooses to restrict her focus to those at the opposite end of her scale, "…people who are firmly rooted in – and identify themselves as committed adherents of – more than one tradition" (Drew, 2011, p. 3). For example, one of the questions she explores with her interviewees (such as Roger Corless and Ruben L.F. Habito) is how you can *combine* Buddhist and Christian practices (Drew, 2011, p. 164). Corless responded that "…although there are some differences, when he prays to Avalokiteśvara or Tārā, it is fairly similar to the way in which he might pray to Christian saints" (Corless in Drew, 2011, p. 166). This is a really interesting insight into the actual negotiation that people enter into when they confess a dual belonging, and in my own chapter 11 I look at the interactions between Christian saints and Hindu deities.

 Drew's study is undoubtedly one of the most thorough studies available on Buddhist-Christian identity and, like her, I will see double religious identity as being possible in different ways. However I believe that the issue of terminology is problematic enough to need addressing from the outset and so I propose to provide new insights by further developing the term 'double religious identity' as something multi-faceted. The facets of double religious identity that I choose to explore through Hindu-Christian examples will show *in what ways* Hindu-Christian double religious identity can, and has been, lived. I do not think that the extension of 'religious identity' into 'double or multiple religious identities' will be truly helpful unless it is recognised that such identities are *also* multidimensional. In short, 'Hindu Christian identity' cannot be used as a blanket term as this will lead to further misunderstandings and it is important, if we are going to discuss such identities, that the ways in which they occur are articulated as clearly as possible.

Other writers who engage in Buddhist-Christian identity studies include Paul Knitter, whose books *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian mission and global responsibility* [1996] and

Without Buddha I could not be a Christian [2009] have had a profound impact on this research. In the former, Knitter expresses the sentiment that:

> I cannot simply bow in silent respect before other believers; I must also learn from them, speak to them, somehow find myself in them (Knitter, 1996b, p. 14).

Whilst this book deals with the theology of religions rather than double religious identity, this short sentence sums up the very heart of double religious identity, and indeed I believe it to find fruition in his latter publication. Knitter writes in *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian* from personal experience and it is a wonderful account of the theological and spiritual problems and questions which arise from such an engagement; above all it also speaks very much of the positive experiences of that. The discipline of comparative theology needs to be mentioned here (of which Francis X Clooney is the leading contemporary authority[39]) as comparative theology and the theology of double religious identity seem to be on paths which occasionally cross. Paul Knitter is a good example of a comparative theologian who fits that mould. In *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian*, he declares a possible double religious identity, as a 'Buddhist Christian' (Knitter, 2009, p. xiv). He also shows himself to be a comparative theologian, offering reflections on his theological development and the influences Buddhism, as both a study and a discipline, have had on him as a Christian.

The interesting thing about the methodologies employed when discussing double religious identity (and comparative theology) is that scholars have to deal abundantly with subjectivity, often including their own subjectivity if they are writing an account of their own double religious identity. Indeed, the theology of double religious identity can also be an autobiographical exercise. Elizabeth J Harris is one such theologian who refers to their own personal experience of 'doubly belonging' when writing about it[40]. Jeannine Hill Fletcher's article, 'Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism' [2003] helps to ground understanding of the concept of identity as much more multi-layered and flexible than might have been supposed, and the influence of subjectivity in research is very much a part of that. Perry Schmidt-Leukel has a brilliant chapter[41] on double religious identity in his *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-Faith Encounter Changes Christianity* [2009]. His views on syncretism are particularly interesting, for he attempts to give

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[39] For example, see his *Comparative Theology: deep learning across religious borders* [2010].

[40] For example, see her article 'The Beginning of Something Being Broken: The Cost of Crossing Spiritual Boundaries' [2002].

[41] See chapter 3 'Multireligious Identity: Problems and Considerations', pp. 46-66.

it a more positive note, rather than pursuing the negative connotations of syncretism[42]. Through that he is able to offer a theology of double religious belonging which is not afraid of being seen to blend different religious influences. There are many other scholars worth reading; Komulanien's article 'Theological Reflections on multi-religious identity' [2011] is fantastic in that it is one of the few articles to refer to Hindu-Christian double religious identity; Michelle Voss Roberts' article 'Religious Belonging and the Multiple' [2010] is another. However, scholars do tend to remain within that general field of asking questions and philosophising; certainly the case study approach is gaining popularity now that the groundwork has been so amply laid but the focus is on Buddhist – Christian expressions of double religious identity, and it would be interesting to move that into a different sphere.

Hindu-Christian double religious identity

What then of double religious identity in the Hindu-Christian area, what has been written on that? Asides from references to particular figures who engaged in both religious traditions and identities, little attention has been paid here. Komulainen has already been mentioned; his article 'Theological Reflections on multi-religious identity' takes Upadhyay as one of the main examples of "Hindu-Christianity" (Komulainen, 2011, p. 50). Komulainen's paper is one that reflects on the theory etc. of multi- religious identity, but spends the second half of the paper *relating that theory to* two people (the other is Raimond Panikkar). He explicitly concludes that:

> …Brahmabandhav Upadhyay should still be remembered as a pioneering example of a dual religious belonging, with his strong vigour for contextualizing the Christian faith in Hindu culture (Komulainen, 2011, p. 56).

This not only helps to validate my own choice of Upadhyay as a case study for this thesis but it also demonstrates that it is not new to think of Upadhyay in such terms. Indeed, it is certainly not unusual for at the very end of his major work on Upadhyay[43], Julius Lipner reflects "How narrow must our religious labels be? How open to hyphenated religious identities should we become?" (Lipner, 1999, p. 385). Upadhyay, it would seem, is a person whose life seems to prompt such questions.

With regards to the founders of Saccidananda ashram, Hans Gustafson's paper 'Substance Beyond Illusion: The Spirituality of Bede Griffiths' [2008] explicitly refers to "…Griffiths and his attempt at maintaining a 'multiple religious belonging'" (Gustafson, 2008, p. 45), whilst

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[42] See chapter 4 'In Defence of Syncretism', pp. 67-89.

[43] *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary* [1999]

strongly maintaining that Bede Griffiths was very much rooted in the Christian tradition. But of all the case studies selected for this thesis, it is his predecessor at the āśrama, Abhishiktananda, who is almost always associated with double religious identity or 'deep' Hindu – Christian dialogue. He is an ideal contender for the label 'double religious identity': his own writings speak clearly about the tensions he encountered trying to follow both Advaita and his monastic Christian vocation, and certainly his diary excerpts provide much ground for describing him as both Hindu and Christian. A brilliant journal article which refers clearly to the double religious identity of Abhishiktananda is Michael Amaladoss' journal article 'Double Religious Identity: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?' [2009] Not only does he make a distinction between 'identity' and 'belonging[44]' - he is working from the former – but he also refers explicitly to Abhishiktananda, arguing that:

> The question that we should ask with reference to Abhishiktananda is not whether the Christian/Hindu community or institution thought that he belonged to it, but rather what is the identity that he himself experienced (Amaladoss, 2009, p. 524).

Amaladoss does not attempt to answer this question, as it is his parting remark on the section which deals with Abhishiktananda in the article, but hopefully this research will contribute to trying to understand what 'identity he experienced' in line with the theology of double religious identity. There are scholars devoted to research on Abhishiktananda, including Shirley du Boulay (e.g. [2005] *The Cave of The Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books) and James Stuart. (e.g. (ed.) [1995] *Swami Abhishiktananda: His life told through his letters*. Revised edition. Reprint, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000). These two also had a personal connection with Abhishiktananda, being followers of his and spending time with him on his various retreats. Often, scholars who talk about his double religious identity also identify with him because they feel that they are in a similar position. A well balanced approach towards Abhishiktananda's personal theology is *Jesus Christ: Quest and Context of Abhishiktānanda (Henri Le Saux OSB)* [2011] by Santhosh Sebastian Cheruvally, which divides his theology into 'Trinitarian-Saccidananda Christology' and Self-Awakening Christology' (Cheruvally, 2011, p. xxx). Cheruvally argues that only the former works in the Indian-Catholic context; 'Self-Awakening Christology' actually struggles to integrate the Christian truth-claims related to Jesus, and therefore Le Saux struggles to make this personal theology relevant (Cheruvally, 2011, p. 192). Abhishiktananda was chosen as a case study for this thesis because, in many ways, he is the archetypal Hindu-Christian, whose life, faith and principles embody many of

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[44] This is substantiated in chapter 1 of this thesis, in the section 'Inculturation and double/multiple religious identities'.

the answers to the questions posed by modern theologians about what it means to have a double religious identity.

In deciding upon the other case studies for this thesis I have tried to make a wide selection; if this research is to address the gap in the research of Hindu-Christian double religious identity specifically, the case studies need to be varied. They also need to demonstrate that when affected by mission and inculturation in India, Hindu-Christian religious identity can manifest in different ways. Most of them will have been referred to as having a double religious identity at some point, with the possible exception of Robert de Nobili. The reader will see that his 'double religious identity' is purely in terms of culture and aesthetics (as a pioneer of inculturation) and therefore to say he has a double religious identity is not a statement on his faith but rather on how he was *perceived*. The two case studies which are contemporary were settled upon initially because of the research in the following books, *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India* [2010], an edited volume by Rowena Robinson and Joseph M Kujur; Corinne Dempsey's *Kerala Christian Sainthood* [2001], and the book she co-edited with Selva Raj, *Popular Christianity in India: Riting between the Lines* [2002]. Each of these books deals sensitively with the issues surrounding Christianity in India, be that the legal consequences of declaring a Christian identity or the implications for the Church of (a more spontaneous) inculturation towards India, and Hindu culture. Of particular note is Kumar and Robinson's chapter in *Margins of Faith,* 'Legally Hindu: Dalit Lutheran Christians of Coastal Andhra Pradesh'. Again however, none of these works operate within the framework of double religious identity, hence the reason to include these dalit Christian examples in a case study for this thesis. Whilst agreeing that their religious identities are complicated, I think that a greater exposition on *how* and *why* such identities exist contemporarily within a Hindu-Christian framework, with reference to the theology of double religious identity, is a must.

Indeed, there seems to be a gap within the literature of double religious identity – mostly it concentrates on the theological, theoretical intricacies of having double/multiple religious identities, and even those that take a case study approach within such a framework often focus on the Buddhist-Christian paradigms. I think it is time to shift into a different area, the Hindu-Christian one, especially because there are complicating factors like inculturation and the reception of Christianity and Christian mission in India. Indeed, the possibility of retaining Hindu culture alongside Christian conversion has been a persistent problem, and contemporary

writers such as Brian K. Petersen[45] and David C. Scott[46] both address this question in particular. Also, a theology of double religious identity needs to be more widely applied than to two or three (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish) of the so called 'world religions'; with the exception of a handful or works, especially Amaladoss' 2009 journal article (referred to earlier[47]) which refers to Sen, Upadhyay and Abhishiktananda (amongst others such as Panikkar and Gandhi) as having double religious identity (Amaladoss, 2009, pp. 39-40). Otherwise, there has been limited detailed analysis on Hindu-Christian double religious identity, despite the many possibilities which exist for doing so.

Singular and Non singular Religious Identities

The most commonly recognised religious identity is also the most familiar: *singular religious identity*, which, in the context of this study, refers to someone who claims to be a Christian *or* a Hindu. People who claim to have a singular religious identity have fixed boundaries, and singular religious identities can sometimes be linked to exclusivist viewpoints; if a person believes that their religion is the only epistemologically valid one, then it is more likely that they will be definitely Christian or definitely Hindu. However, it should not be overlooked that inclusivists and religious pluralists may also have very fixed religious boundaries, yet are open to the possibility that other religions may contain some element of Truth. Whilst some people have religious identities with fixed boundaries, it is important to recall that religious identity itself is actually quite fluid and can be influenced in different ways by the existence of other religious identities and belief systems.

Linguistically there are a wealth of terms used to describe 'double religious identity', which has led Catherine Cornille to denounce the term 'belonging', preferring 'identity' or 'identification' to be used. This is because she believes it expresses better what people are actually experiencing – Cornille does not believe it is possible for people to 'belong' to two religious traditions at once, but it is perfectly possible for them to 'identify' with another one (Cornille, 2012). Her preference for 'identify' rather than 'belong' is because she believes that one cannot speak of *belonging* to two religious traditions, as "There is still one tradition which remains dominant and normative" (Cornille, 2012). However, one can *identify* with elements that do not contradict the dominant tradition (Cornille, 2012).

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[45] 'The Possibility of a "Hindu Christ-Follower: Hans Staffner's Proposal for the Dual Identity of Disciples of Christ within High Caste Hindu Communities'. [2007]

[46] 'Baptism in the Indian Context – An Event of Separation or Human Solidarity?' [1990]

[47] 'Double Religious Identity: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?'

I also have concerns over the choice of language used to describe non singular religious identities. It is better to have uniformity when describing something, and therefore when I am referring to this idea, I will use one term only. The chosen term for this thesis, *double religious identity* allows for this: It gets around the very clear problem that Cornille remarks on, in terms of 'belonging'. For example, de Nobili would never have seen himself as *belongin*g to Hinduism; he was a Christian, initiated through the waters of baptism and clearly belonged to the worshipping community of Christians. But he identified with certain aspects of Hindu culture, seeing them as separate from the religion of 'Hinduism', and would use these markers of (for him, *cultural*) identity in his missionary methods. Hence, de Nobili can be said to have identified with the cultural and aesthetical facets of double religious identity, but he did not belong to it spiritually. To avoid confusion, this study will use the term multiple religious identity as a way of referring to people who have an affinity with more than two religious identities. The actual case studies examined only identify with two religious traditions, the Hindu and the Christian, so 'double religious identity' is what informs the rest of this thesis after the concept of 'multiple religious identity' has been put to rest.

Catherine Cornille gives a good definition of what it means for a person to view themselves, or be seen by others, as having a double religious identity[48]: They "...come to find themselves in between traditions, unwilling to renounce the tradition of origin and unable to deny the truth discovered in the other tradition" (Cornille, 2002, p. 4). 'Tradition of origin' is an important phrase here; John Hick speaks of the cultural trappings of religion, where if you are born into a Christian culture, with Christian parents, you are very likely to grow up a Christian (Hick, 1980, p. 44). Each of the people in this study started from a specific cultural viewpoint, i.e. the one that they were culturally immersed in from birth. However, when they encountered other religions, the truth that they recognized in it was at the very least comparable to the truth they had grown up with. It is this point of comparison, of similarities,[49] which was taken deeper by the people this study will examine, to the point where they 'find themselves in between

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[48] To use my own terminology.

[49] However, is it possible that the attraction of differences, and not just similarities, in the 'other' religion is a reason for being in between religious spheres? It could be argued that although Christianity has no place for the Hindu doctrine of, say, karma, a Christian may be drawn towards such a philosophy, particularly if they are uncomfortable with the traditional Christian judgements of Heaven and Hell. With karma, there is measured retribution both in the current life and the lives to come, whereas judgement only comes eschatologically in Christianity. So then, the very different doctrine of karma might appeal to someone's own religiosity in a way that they cannot deny, leaving them in between religious traditions.

traditions'. This is especially true for Abhishiktananda and for Bede Griffiths, both of whom started from a European Christian perspective. Upon moving to India, these Benedictine monks were not only open to the truth they found in Hinduism, but they also set about incorporating it into their own theological frameworks. Whilst Griffiths tried to reconcile doctrines on a theological level, Le Saux's spiritual difficulties are expounded in his diaries and letters, giving a biographical account of his religious identity.

Double Religious Identity– spiritually and theologically speaking

Peter C. Phan speaks in terms of people having "multiple religious belonging" (Phan, 2004, p. 60). He reminds the reader, quite significantly, that the early Christian community lived out a double religious identity on a daily basis, as Jews who believed in Jesus as the long-awaited for Messiah. In the Acts of the Apostles, this Jewish-Christian double religious identity only becomes singular as of chapter 15, which concerns gentile circumcision (Phan, 2004, p. 68). It is precisely at the point when non-Jews can also believe in Christ as the Messiah and become identified members of believers, that there is a break between Judaism and Christianity (Phan, 2004, p. 68). Furthermore, Claude Geffré argues that the early Christians "believed in the possibility of remaining Jewish while becoming Christian" (Geffré, 2002, p. 102). Contemporarily, some Jewish people will still refer to themselves as 'cultural' Jews instead of 'religious' Jews, and may be culturally Jewish but religiously Buddhist, for example. However, in contemporary society, Christians are stereotypically identified with exclusivism: The well-cited verse of the Fourth Gospel, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no-one comes to the Father except through me", (John 14: 6), is just one example of how such a view of Christianity is reinforced. Yet some of the case studies presented here have moved away from that stereotype to such an extent that their religious identities are no longer singular, but instead balance precariously between the religion of their culture and the religion they have also attached themselves to spiritually.

The theological implications of having a double religious identity are, of course, huge. Is it possible to be a member of a stereotypically exclusivist religion, like Christianity, yet also claim to believe in the tenets of a stereotypically pluralistic religion, like Hinduism? It could be argued that by having a double or multiple religious identity, people are leaning more towards a pluralistic understanding of the Divine; however the difference between pluralists and Griffiths (as just one example) is that there is some contention over how they viewed their own identities. Whereas some pluralists might confess to belonging to many religious spheres, because they believe that all religions inadequately (yet equally) encompass Truth, Griffiths *et. al* have ambiguous identities, to say the least. Alan Race suggests that "On the whole he [Griffiths] confesses inclusivism, but occasionally he appears to follow a pluralistic approach"

(Race, 1983, p. 62). For example in *Christ in India*, Griffiths writes "Christ did not come to destroy these religions; he came to fulfil them" (Griffiths, 1984, p. 92) yet his 'hand analogy'[50] is clearly a pluralistic approach. Griffiths and Le Saux remained Benedictine monks; they never actually converted to Hinduism, therefore remaining Christian, but they drew on Hinduism to such a large extent that they do not appear to be 'simply' Christian, especially in Abhishiktananda's case. Is it that Indian culture is such that it promotes the pluralistic lifestyle, for religions have always had to try and co-exist in harmony because of their geographical proximity to one another, or is it that Griffiths shows a tendency towards real assimilation of doctrine, worship and faith? To give another example, patterns of Hindu and Christian worship and doctrine are sometimes assimilated and shared by Indian Christians, such as the use of meditation or āratī in Christian worship, especially in deliberate inculturation. Bob Robinson also remarks on the situation of Christians for whom "…this dual world (as it might be called) includes simultaneous participation in two religious traditions, especially in the necessities of village society" (Robinson, 2004, p. 42).

Inculturation and double/multiple religious identities

There is dispute over whether or not inculturation 'counts' as a type of double/multiple religious belonging. Cornille, for example, suggests that this is currently being deliberated (Cornille, 2012) and adds that if it is a type of multiple/double religious identity, then it is very interesting and unique (Cornille, 2012). This thesis uses inculturation as one of the facets of double religious identity, and agrees with Cornille that it is a unique type of belonging. Primarily, the issue of perception means that if inculturation is perceived to be entertaining both Hindu and Christian religious identities, then that is one possible way in which double religious identity can manifest. Also, inculturation relies on a dubious distinction between religion and culture, which this thesis believes is actually quite difficult to delineate or even actualise[51]. Therefore, by including 'culture' and 'inculturation' as facets of double religious identity, this mode of double religious identity can be differentiated from, say, a spiritual double religious identity, whereby the person claims to be spiritually Christian and spiritually Hindu at the same time.

However, there are those who argue against including inculturation as a way of having double religious identity. For example, Jacques Dupuis says that there "…are various possible understandings of the concept…" (Dupuis, 2002, p. 63) of double belonging or hyphenated religious identity "… which it would in any case be a mistake to label hybrid" (Dupuis, 2002,

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[50] See chapter 9 of this thesis.

[51] See the discussion in chapter 3 of this thesis.

pp. 63-64). I agree with Dupuis entirely! To equate double religious identity with hybridity would only allow for a narrow understanding of what double religious identity entails – i.e. a hybrid of Christian and Hindu identity. However, the term 'hybrid', which means a mixture or a fusion, implies that this [hybrid] religious identity mixes or syncretises Hindu and Christian, and this is not always the case, as this thesis will argue. Dupuis himself goes on to add that, with reference to inculturation and double religious identity, "…the problem of the Hindu-Christian would be that of the inculturation of Christian faith and doctrine in Hindu culture. Here, obviously, the concept of a Hindu-Christian would offer no difficulty in principle" (Dupuis, 2002, p. 64). There would be no difficulty because the interaction is with Hindu cultural identity, not Hindu religious identity (Dupuis, 2002, p. 64). Dupuis has just proved his own point; that there are 'various ways of understanding the concept' of double religious identity. I agree that it would be a mistake to label inculturation a 'hybrid' religious identity, because of the meaning of the term hybrid. But if the term 'double religious identity' is used, and more significantly used as an umbrella term in the way this thesis suggests, then inculturation can be counted as one of the possible ways in which Hindu-Christian double religious identity can manifest.

Amaladoss also has similar misgivings about the relationship between double religious identity and inculturation; in fact he expresses these as an Indian Christian himself (Amaladoss, 2009, pp. 520-521). He argues that "In a predominantly Hindu context, the terms which I use to express my Christian faith may have a Hindu resonance…But we give it a Christian meaning…" (Amaladoss, 2009, p. 521). This is true, for it is the basic premise of inculturation. He further adds "I am not a Hindu-Christian because I pray in an Indian language, even if some of the words I use are also used by the Hindus in their own religious context" (Amaladoss, 2009, p. 521). This is also true. But it could be argued that inculturation can lead to *perceptions of double religious identity*, and this is an important point for this thesis. Also Upadhyay, for example, in his attempt to truly found an Indian Christian theology, claimed a Hindu-Christian identity and did use Hindu terms (e.g. in his 'Vande Saccidānandam' hymn) as well. This is an ideal place to reiterate a claim made in the introduction to this thesis: the facets are not exhaustive, and the case studies are used as selected examples only, and therefore absolute statements cannot be reached from them, only that the expansions of terminology would greater aid understanding of how and why double religious identities occur. Not everyone who inculturates is going to be a Hindu-Christian, and just because Upadhyay had a Hindu-Christian identity in terms of his theology and culture does not mean that others like him will also have a double religious identity, just as Amaladoss himself does not claim such a double religious identity.

Nevertheless, this thesis does believe that inculturation can give rise to double religious identity through the *theological* or *aesthetical* facets. This does not mean that Upadhyay, as an Indian Christian, was also spiritually Hindu, what it means is that the relationship between religion and culture is so close[52] that sometimes it could give rise to a perception of double religious identity. If the phrase 'double religious identity' is expanded to include various facets, it can be easier to comprehend the ways in which this double religious identity occurs. It is necessary to point out Amaladoss' distinction between 'double religious identity' and 'double religious belonging'; the former is a personal experience, the latter is community or institutionally based (Amaladoss, 2009, p. 520). In his article, he is talking about double religious identity, the personal experience, and hence does not identify his own experience as 'Hindu-Christian'. But other Indian Christians might, Upadhyay certainly did in his expression 'Hindu-Catholic'. Amaladoss' paper should be taken in context here, whereby he is talking about religious identity from a personal perspective and not a community perspective. This thesis, whilst taking account of Amaladoss' and Dupuis' perspectives, still maintains that if double religious identity is treated like an umbrella term rather than an absolute term, then inculturation can be treated, in some cases, as a way of having a double religious identity.

Double Religious Identities: Vocation, choice, lifestyle or underhand conversion?

The arguments for how double religious identities come about can be categorised into two parts; the argument over whether or not double religious identities are a calling or a matter of personal choice, and secondly whether it can be a genuine lifestyle choice or a lifestyle which only serves to hide true missionary intent to convert.

People with a multiple religious identity may come from any former religious background, or indeed none, perhaps making the choice to embrace 'religion' generally rather than as one particular belief system. Individuals may not necessarily start from a particular theological perspective or religious background, but assume many religious identities as they continue to search for religious truth, the meaning of life or whatever else it may be which turns them towards religious faith. What is important for Phan is that such a lifestyle is not something to be taken lightly; to embrace multiple religious identities is "... a demanding vocation, a special call to holiness, which up till now God has granted only to a few" (Phan, 2004, p. 81). Phan genuinely believes that for someone to have a multiple religious identity it is not a choosing, but a calling. This would certainly lend strong argument to cases such as Abhishiktananda's, who felt that his religious identity was always in tension, but nevertheless dedicated his whole life to trying to work out these tensions, rather than ignore them. However, the dalit Christians

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[52] As Amaladoss himself states (Amaladoss, 2009, p. 521).

examined seem to embrace double religious identities of their own volition, rather than specifically seeing it as a vocation. On the other hand, Marcus Braybrooke likens people who have a double religious identity to being bilingual:

> My own view is that just as some people are bilingual, so some scholars can gain a deep appreciation of another religion while others will draw on aspects of another faith to enrich their personal pilgrimage (Braybrooke cited in Bharat, 2007, p. viii).

Some people really appreciate a faith which is not their own, and understand it and can even speak it, much the same as someone who is bilingual. Also, if someone is bilingual, they do not lose the ability to speak one language when they speak the other. It is the same for those with a double religious identity; by practising or synthesising elements and doctrines of two religions it does not mean that they lose the ability to practise each of them in their fullness[53]. If anything, their understanding of 'religion' (as a concept in the same way that 'language' is a concept for linguists) is greatly enhanced. Braybrooke's comments offer an interesting juxtaposition to the argument that having a double religious identity is something which always brings about tension, or spiritual conflict, in one's religious identity. Whereas Phan argued that to have a double religious identity was some sort of demanding, 'martyrdom' like vocation (Phan, 2004, p. 81), Braybrooke brings out the advantages of being religiously bilingual, using positive adjectives such as 'enrich' and 'deep appreciation'. For Braybrooke, double religious identities can offer a means of communication, a way of doing dialogue, and not something which confuses peoples' spiritualities. Le Saux's diaries do suggest that his double religious identity caused him great angst, but Bede Griffiths (regarding his own experiences) does not seem to dwell on these negative aspects as much as Le Saux does. Whilst this may be due to differences in their character or outlook on life, it could be suggested that there is also the possibility that not everyone feels that to have a double religious identity means one has to be troubled by the implications of that. However, as a short aside, in Drew's study of Buddhist-Christian dual belonging she says that "Of course practising thoroughly across traditions is not without practical difficulties, and it is revealing that none of those I interviewed would *advise* dual belonging" (Drew, 2011, p. 201). Her results of a contemporary study of peoples' actual experiences of dual belonging does then lend weight to Phan's argument that double religious identity is vocational, and difficult even for those who live it at times; this is seen nowhere more in this thesis than in Abhishiktananda's own tensions.

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[53] Although perhaps the community of religious believers that they have left behind may feel that the person who has chosen another religion has forsaken their ability, or even their right, to fully participate in the worship of the community that they were previously engaging with. For example, people may have strong opinions about a Christian who leaves the Church to become a Hindu taking the Eucharist.

In terms of the debate concerning genuine lifestyle choice vs. conversion tactics, some cases among dalit Christians help to defend the former argument that double religious identities are genuine lifestyles. A good example of this might come in the form of dalits who have become Christians, yet have not really left Hinduism behind and seem to feel no conflict in doing so. Indeed, multiple religious identities are quite common in certain parts of Asia. To take just one example, Michael Amaladoss comments that:

> ...there are some in India today who feel that they are heirs to two religious traditions. Hinduism or Buddhism is not exterior to them. It is their heritage. So they make a conscious effort to integrate them in their lives. They occasionally call themselves Hindu or Buddhist Christians (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 108).

In such cases, two religious traditions might play an important role in someone's 'heritage', and hence the two religious traditions (and hence identities) are incorporated showing how double religious identities might arise simply because 'they are heirs' (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 108) to Hinduism and Christianity. Whilst Amaladoss says that this is a 'conscious effort to integrate' (Amaladoss, 1998, p.108), it could also be argued that the religious identity of dalits is not always deliberately assimilated. Rather, it may be the case that the pluralistic environment of Indian culture facilitates an easy negotiation of religious boundaries[54]. On the other hand, Abhishiktananda and Griffiths, whilst being open to assimilation, nevertheless came from a European Christian background; therefore, they might not have adapted so easily to their double religious identities.

People who have a multiple religious identity are generally caught up in several religious spheres at any one given point and in this sense they may not be so dissimilar to the religious

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[54] However, these religious boundaries are not always 'easily negotiable'. Prakash Louis reports on the extent to which some dalit Christians can be discriminated against in the church itself, including "…separate cemeteries and separate seating arrangements in the place of worship for the upper castes and lower castes continues unabated even today" (Louis, 2007a, p. 20). It is these sorts of attitudes that perhaps mean that religious boundaries have become more fluid, because caste (a Hindu cultural/religious institution) so easily permeates other facets of society, such as the Church. Dalit theology essentially grew out of awareness of attitudes such as these; Rajkumar points out that "The issue of caste discrimination was also not tackled with seriousness by Indian Christian Theology" (Rajkumar, 2010, p. 37) and hence dalit theology intended to address that (Rajkumar, 2010, p. 38).

One of the reasons dalits may have wanted to convert to Christianity in the first place is because of the caste discrimination that they often faced within Hinduism. However, it may be difficult to reject Hinduism completely because the stigma attached to caste continues *through the attitudes of other people*. If that is the case, then religious boundaries are not necessarily easy to negotiate.

pluralist, who sees truth as equally represented, although never fully, in other religions. However, this relates only to the conception of academic forms of religious pluralism, such as the type advocated by Hick. Religious pluralism in terms of environment, such as in the South of India (indeed India as a whole) is more related to the presence of a multitude of religions in a geographical space, and the impact that can have for mutual understanding, co-operation and dialogue. As a consequence of this, it could be argued that the attitudes of European countries might tend to see religions as more definite types, rigidly separate from each other, whereas in India religious boundaries tend to overlap or blur, because religions live side-by-side. However, the choices of Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths to live the lifestyles that they did will show how having a double religious identity may also have, intentionally or unintentionally, led to confusion. This confusion does not concern only their religious identity, but also their true nature, as possible missionaries only out to convert people to Christianity. Whilst some, mostly Christian, will uphold Abhishiktananda and Griffiths (and others) as "...pioneers who have relentlessly endeavoured to combine in their own life their Christian commitment and another faith experience" (Dupuis cited in Phan, 2003, p. 507) others, such as Srinivasan[55], feel that there is a darker side to approaches of inter-faith dialogue that are akin to Griffiths' and Abhishiktananda's methods. This is because they believe it conceals their attempts at conversion: "Present day missionaries...have created a cultural hybrid of Hindu and Christian symbols and practices, deliberately fostering confusion as to their true intentions" (Srinivasan cited in Bharat, 2007, p. 138).

Occasionally, attempts at *inculturation* based double religious identities, being Hindu and Christian, are met with suspicion by Hindus like Srinivasan. They are concerned that such attempts at dialogue are not really dialogical at all, but are more concerned with converting Hindus to Christianity. The role that conversion plays in religious identity is a difficult one, for in India conversion and missionaries are still strongly linked to the colonial past. During the British period of colonialism, conversion to Christianity from Hinduism was an absolute; it was expected that there would be no return to a Hindu way of life once conversion was complete and indeed (from the missionaries' perspectives) conversion to Christianity was the only path to salvation. However, if conversion did not lead to a complete shift in one's religious identity, where would this then leave it? For the exclusivity of Christianity, as portrayed by the missionaries, left no room for compromise and it is more than likely that any convert returning to a Hindu religious life would be considered still 'unsaved' by the Christian missionaries.

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[55] Srinivisan and other Hindus who criticize Le Saux and Griffiths specifically are discussed thoroughly in chapter 9.

From some points of view, such as Dayānanda Sarasvatī's, enough damage had been done for those who originally converted to Christianity to be considered no longer completely Hindu, and he actually devised an initiation ceremony to welcome back the Hindu into the Hindu religious life (Flood, 1996, p. 256). So conversion could sometimes leave people in-between religious spheres, and Hindu nationalists or Christian missionaries would attempt to correct this by encouraging the person to become recognised as a full member of either the previous or new religion. It also meant that when Abhishiktananda and Griffiths drew on both Hinduism and Christianity, it would harp back to missionary methods espoused by early Portuguese missionaries, such as de Nobili's, who did exactly that: he adopted sannyāsin robes and used it as a way of initiating conversation for later conversion. However Abhishiktananda, in one diary entry, answers the challenge from a critic that their āśrama is little more than a shield for their missionary conversions, by plainly stating in his diary "I am not a Hindu monk in order to bring about conversions" (Abhishiktananda, 31/3/1952. Abhishiktananda, 1998, p. 28). It is also possible that the missionary methods of people such as de Nobili were not easily forgotten, and therefore any attempts to synthesise or inculturate ideas from Hinduism and Christianity are met with distrust.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Griffiths and Abhishiktananda have received warm welcomes from other Hindus, and Christians, so it is perhaps safe to assume that their lives and works have a mixed reception in India. Jeannine Hill Fletcher sees the approach of Griffiths *et al.* as "postcolonial theory" (Fletcher, 2003, p.22) and it might be worth trying to see these approaches as *post*colonial. By doing so, it might be possible to draw a line under the happenings of colonial past wrong-doings that a better Hindu-Christian relationship might be facilitated, and pioneers can be seen beyond the old colonial trappings of European missionaries who are simply out to convert. It is fair to argue, however, that for the most part the efforts of Abhishiktananda and Griffiths have gone a long way towards taking inter-faith dialogue in a new direction; not just talking about how dialogue could be facilitated, but actually *doing* it as well. This is also where there becomes a distinction in the use of religious identity: Academic based religious pluralism does not necessarily use identity as a way of doing dialogue, whereas in Griffiths' āśrama in South India, religious identity has become one way of understanding, appreciating Hinduism and Christianity. Dialogue is not just about discussing similarities and differences, but rather it is about emphasising the importance of practising dialogue. By compromising the rigid boundaries of religion, dialogue can sometimes be facilitated, although it has to be careful to be seen not to overstep the mark through inculturation, and become simply an appropriation of cultures, as the foundation for later conversion tactics.

Closing Remarks

By the very nature of speculating upon others' religious identity or belonging, the issue of religious identity has become an objective study as well as a subjective one. The objective study of religious identity can be said to engage with the issue of how one deals with the abundance of religious identities in relation to one's own. The subjective deals with the spiritual and existential problems encountered by those who find themselves in-between traditions, and thereby on the margins of different religious identities. It can also relate to the theologies or spiritual ideas that they develop by doing so. This study hopes to draw together both the objective and the subjective, discussing and analysing the issue and arguments associated with both the ambiguous and evolving nature of religious identity by referring to select case studies that may be seen as having double religious identities.

There seem to be five main schools of thought concerning how people come to have non-singular religious identities in Hinduism and Christianity. The first such opinion from a Christian perspective is that this is a calling, a vocational role (Phan, 2003, p. 519); Phan expresses that "Ultimately it is not something one looks for or demands at will" (Phan, 2004, p. 81). Secondly, it is seen as something one might choose to do, as a means of inter-faith dialogue and enhancing their own faith, although their motives are sometimes unclear. Thirdly, it can be seen as a deceptive image; Goel for example, referring to de Nobili, argued that "a truly ethical criterion would dismiss him as a plain and simple crook" (Goel, cited in Bharat, 2007, p. 7). Even if genuine dialogue is wanted, Goel maintains that it has become "a fashion accessory rather than a faith necessity" (Goel, cited in Bharat, 2007, p. 108). Fourthly, it may be experienced by dalit Christians who have converted to Christianity but still suffer the discrimination of being dalit. Their double religious identity, then, might be imposed on them culturally, being seen as 'polluting' due to Hindu religious understandings of dalithood. Finally, there is the argument for those who are simply brought up with a double religious identity; this may be because their parents have different, singular religious identities, or because the cultural and religious climate of their geographical location abounds with different religions. By examining the people or groups of people in question, this study will hopefully shed light on some of these ideas. Certainly, double religious identity has played a role in inter-faith dialogue, often as a much more personal way of incorporating the values of another religion into one's own spiritual make-up, but also through the facet of inculturation, which plays a large role it would seem in most of the case studies examined in this thesis.

The terminology used in this study can at times seem quite complex, so this section can hopefully act as a reference point to return to if need be. *Singular religious identity* is pretty self-explanatory, being the most identifiable type of religious identity. Either someone is a

Hindu, or a Christian, or belongs to another religion. There is never any question of identifying with another religion. *Non singular religious identities*, on the other hand, do involve other religions, the extent to which depends upon the type of non singular religious identity that it is. The type examined in this thesis, *double religious identity*, refers to someone who has two religious identities, for example a Hindu-Christian might have started off with a Christian religious background, and also taken on board a Hindu religious identity to some extent. The extent to which they took it on, is a matter of discussion within the analysis of the case studies themselves. However, some reasons for not switching completely from one religion to the other might include not completely agreeing with aspects of both religions, or because the present religion/culture is the religion/culture that they have been immersed in since birth and are therefore comfortable in. It might also be felt that studying or participating in the other religion would enhance their understanding of their own religion, perhaps through dialogue. By categorising the case studies using the terms outlined here and the facets in the introduction, the complexities and implications of embracing or using religious identity in different ways can be better understood.

Chapter 2: **The ambiguous nature of Hinduism and Christianity**

The religions which the case studies were familiarising themselves with would have shaped their ideas about religious identity, and also would have cultivated their attitudes towards other religions. However, to describe Hinduism as a religion is problematic in itself: is it really an adequate and authentic description? This question forms part of an endless hermeneutical circle concerning what Hinduism actually is; the first part of this chapter engages with this debate about how to define Hinduism in terms of religion, as well as reflecting on how Hinduism should be defined for this study. This is followed by an attempt to evaluate and understand the attitudes of Hinduism and Christianity not only towards each other, but towards other religions as well. Alan Race first used the categories of "...Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism..." (Race, 1983, p. 7) in order to do so, and this will be a good starting point for the present discussion; that said 'the typology' is worthy of a research project in its own right. There are a plethora of responses to both its usefulness and its adequateness in 'categorising' responses to the salvation of the 'Other'. Whilst Hinduism carries a stereotype of being 'pluralistic' and Christianity carries a stereotype of being 'exclusivist', I will dismantle these stereotypes through exploring the ways in which scholars conceptualise their approaches to the soteriology of the other.

In short, I will explore critically the typologies in relation to Hinduism and Christianity, showing how the typologies might restrict understanding rather than enhance it at times because it can lead to this 'stereotyping'. However, on the other hand the abundance of sub typologies, which will also be explored, are useful in clarifying the varying nature of Hinduism and Christianity towards other faiths. These are good approaches to exploring both religions, as preparation for understanding how the case studies can engage theologically with the religious other, and how such conceptions of the others' faith, as well as their own, has led in the direction of a double religious identity. However, the typologies should not be taken as authoritative; indeed Hedges claims that "Race's original exposition of the typology readily admitted the way people didn't neatly fit the categories" (Hedges, 2010, p. 18) and so hopefully I am not seen to be squeezing the case studies into a particular category. Rather, I am only drawing on the typologies to explain both double religious identity and the ambiguous nature of Hinduism and Christianity. On closer inspection (as one might expect), the 'stereotypical' views turn out to be skewed. Especially with regards to Hinduism, the ambiguity of the term contributes to the issues surrounding religious identity – if it is hard to define a community, say, Hinduism, then it is certainly difficult to define what each member of that community believes and practices! By discussing the ambiguous nature of Hinduism and Christianity, the case studies should be more comprehensible and will help to show how the people studied were

influenced by the ways in which they interpreted their religious communities and boundaries, and consequently their own religious identities.

Post-colonialism and defining the 'religion' of Hinduism

If colonialism gave a 'brand name' to capture all Indian religions, then post-colonialist methodology is concerned with addressing the inadequacy of that. At the same time, it is also concerned with developing or re-evaluating the original term in order to try and define Hinduism with greater clarity. Tied in with post-colonial attitudes are two major factors; the rising of Indian nationalism and the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity. These two factors are linked in that a rise in nationalism can sometimes lead to violence between Hindus and Christians in parts of India, such as Orissa (Isaacs, 2008), and this leads towards a breakdown in the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity. Post-colonially, it could be argued that Hinduism is not to be understood as a religion in the way one might understand Christianity or Islam, because it does not have a single reference point for what all Hindus believe and practise, unlike the Abrahamic traditions. During the British colonial period, Hinduism referred to anything Indian that was not of Abrahamic origin (Frykenberg, cited in Sharma, 2002, p.17), a rather sweeping definition. In more contemporary terms, an Indian religion is understood as 'Hindu' if that religion seeks authority from the Vedas, but even so this only applies to the 'twice-born', those Hindus who are permitted to access Holy Scriptures. What about dalits (and also Śūdras) who are forbidden to read the Holy Scriptures - where does their religious authority come from, if there is such a thing as dalit religious authority? These examples show how Hinduism is not really an adequate term for encompassing all that can be said about these religions, although it does remain the most familiar term for doing so.

Generally speaking, post-colonial methodology recognises the need to redefine what it means to say someone is a Hindu, or to describe Hinduism as 'a' religion. Brian K. Smith notes that:

> In recent years it has [thus] become an ironic, if not paradoxical, truism among many professional Western experts of Hinduism that the object of their expertise does not really exist (Smith, 1998, p. 316).

To say that one studies Hinduism is apparently problematic; for if it cannot be generally defined, how is it possible to study it? Nevertheless, this has not deterred people from doing so! If anything, the perceived complication of not being able to define 'a' Hinduism is probably one of the real appeals of studying it. Also, if Hinduism does not really exist, then how is Hindu identity to be understood? Smith suggests that the term "'Hinduism' should be pluralized – or even abandoned altogether – as a term with no real referent..." (Smith, 1998, p. 316). However, I think that abandoning the term Hinduism would leave a gap for another term

to be conjured up, but this would bring one right back round the hermeneutical circle again, resulting in endless arguing over what should be included in a new term and what should not. On the other hand, his suggestion that 'Hinduism' should be pluralized – to 'Hinduisms', or indeed 'Hinduism(s)'[56] (Smith, 1998, p. 316) – is something that some scholars do adopt, and is a good way of using the familiar term, but also allowing that term to convey the multitude of religions (which bear some familiarity to each other) that it actually needs to encompass.

However, David N. Lorenzen accuse Smith (amongst others) of failing to understand the true nature of the term 'Hinduism', arguing that Hinduism was a prevalent concept, as a religion, centuries before the British colonial period (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 631). He offers several points of evidence to substantiate his theory, which can be broadly divided into three main areas. First, he argues that even if Hinduism *was* a European invention, it was not a British, colonial one. For example, Henry Lord (a contemporary of de Nobili) published a tract in 1630[57] which was based on his interactions with Indian people and various translators. According to Lorenzen, "the basic outline of the set of beliefs and practices that came to be known as Hinduism is clearly visible" (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 646) in this tract. Hence, the definition of Hindu religion is set out around two hundred years before the start of the British colonial period. Secondly, Lorenzen argues that Hinduism could not possibly be a European invention, as no Western scholar ever worked alone; he always had translators and spoke to the Indian people around him (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 639). As such, the Western scholars were influenced by the Indian people as to what Hinduism really was and therefore if it was an invention, then it was invented by "European and Indian scholars working in tandem"[58] (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 639). Thirdly, Lorenzen argues that most scholars think that Hinduism was a colonial invention because they did not believe that Hindus had any sense of their own religious identity[59] (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 646). However, Lorenzen argues that they did, which is evident through "…a process of mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim Other" (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 648). Whereas the prevalent view is that Hinduism was invented through a need for a religious identity against

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[56] For an example, see Sugirtharajah, 1993 ,p. 3.

[57] de Nobili died in 1656.

[58] Ania Loomba makes a similar point when she asserts that "Colonialist knowledges involved a constant negotiation with or an incorporation of indigenous ideas" (Loomba, 2005, p. 61); knowledge was never simply one-sided, although colonisers may have thought it to be so. The truth was that because the culture was alien, whether the coloniser was superior or not is a moot point – direction or assistance of some kind was always needed to literally understand the lay of the land.

[59] It is also worth noting here that this is quite a derogatory remark!

Christian evangelism, what Lorenzen is proposing is that Hindu identity was defined against Muslim/Hindu rivalry between 1200 and 1500 (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 631) nearly three hundred years earlier than British colonialism. Lorenzen's work is important because it offers a different approach to the generally accepted view that British colonialism popularized the notion of 'Hinduism'.

The religion of Hinduism, then, is one long-studied yet not ever really studied at all, being a paradox in that for some scholars, at least, 'Hinduism' does not exist. For others, such as Lorenzen, the idea that Hinduism is a colonial invention by the British is little more than an absurdity, as there is strong historical evidence for Hinduism being used as a religious term long before the British colonisers landed on Indian soil. Julius Lipner sums up the argument well when he remarks that such terms as 'Hinduism' "...play a leading part in shaping a mind-set which assumes that there is a standard form of the religion denoted" (Lipner, 2006, p. 95). The problem, it would seem, lies in the assumption that there is always uniformity of beliefs and practices, when in fact it is difficult to identify a set of beliefs that concretely define 'a' Hindu. Also, it could be suggested that uniformity of belief is not such an issue for most Hindus as it is for Christians, for whom uniformity of belief has always been a pressing issue. Christians, especially historically, placed great emphasis on uniformity of belief – think of the struggles between Protestants and Catholics, as just one example.

How then, does this study recognize and understand Hinduism? As this study covers pre-colonial rule, as well as post-colonial rule and the period of colonial rule, when Hinduism is spoken about, it will obviously be referring to different conceptions of Indian religions during different periods of history. Lorenzen has already shown that there was a conception of Hindu religion, as distinct from Islam, during the time of de Nobili. For that purpose Hinduism in this study begins as Indian religions concerned with the authority of the Vedas, a social system based on the Ṛg Veda, (Brahmanism in particular) a belief loosely interpreted as reincarnation, a selection of gods including Rudra-Śiva and Viṣṇu and certain ethical rules. This is because these were specific issues that dominated de Nobili's (pre-colonial) interactions with the people he was trying to convert, especially the issue of caste, and importantly they are also some of the features that Henry Lord refers to in his tract (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 645) as identifiable of Hinduism around the same time period[60]. However, some of these features are also important in fourth century Hinduism: As the St Thomas Christian case studies will demonstrate, their religious community did not venerate images, which is supposed as a reaction to their cultural environment (Frykenberg, 1999, p.160). There are also adaptations of some Hindu rites of

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[60] Lorenzen notes that "this is one of the earliest known extended European descriptions of Hinduism" (Lorenzen, 1999, p. 646).

passage, such as the use of tali at weddings[61]. Also, regarding fourth century Hinduism, Gavin Flood dates the epic and purāṇic period from 500BCE to 500CE (Flood, 1996, p. 21), meaning that at the time of the St. Thomas Christians (from the 4th Century AD onwards) there is an emerging canon of Hindu scripture e.g. Rāmāyaṇa and Bhagavadgītā, Purāṇas, and of course the Vedas.

As for the colonial period, this study will cover a wide range of conceptions concerning Hinduism: these will include the Hinduism recognized by the British colonisers and Protestant missionaries, the Indian people themselves and Orientalist scholars such as Max Müller. The conceptions of the Indian people regarding Hinduism can be largely viewed from two perspectives, twice-born caste and lower caste. Dalit people are excluded from caste Hinduism, so their conception of what Hindu religiosity is will obviously be very different to those brought up within caste Hinduism. For example both śūdras and dalits are not allowed to study the Vedas (according to tradition). In reference to post-colonial attitudes, Hinduism will refer to the religious ideals that were popularized and emerged as important to the Hindu population after the impact of the Hindu Renaissance, which does of course vary depending on which reformer is the most important to the ideals held by an individual. For example, a Hindu who emphasizes the importance of Hinduism as one path among many might feel drawn to Gandhian conceptions of Hinduism, whereas those who feel strongly about removing superstitious elements from traditional Hinduism and replacing it with rationality might feel more affinity with some of Sarasvatī's ideas concerning what Hinduism is, or should, entail. Indeed, Sarasvatī is important because he demonstrates a nationalistic understanding of Hinduism, and his ideas have some affinity with certain Hindu fundamentalist groups in contemporary India, including the ideology of Hindutva. Post-colonial Hinduism must also be understood in terms of the debate it is locked in, as to whether or not Hinduism is a colonial umbrella term or was a term already prevalent in India long before British missionaries took their place there.

The ways in which Hinduism is defined, then, for the purposes of this study, varies depending upon the time period one is discussing, as well as who it is discussing it – people from the same time period may have disagreed over what Hinduism was[62]. However, the main features which

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[61] See chapter 4 of this thesis.

[62] Gavin Flood also decides to use 'Hinduism' as appropriate to the context he is discussing; "I shall use the term 'Hindu' to refer not only to the contemporary world religion, but, with the necessary qualifications, to the traditions which have led to its present formation" (Flood, 1996, p. 8). These 'necessary qualifications', in this study at least, will be those additional to the generic definition of Hinduism offered immediately after the footnote in this text.

run across these periods indicate that Hinduism is a type of Indian religiosity, with a variety of deity worship which at the same time is also understood as unified, and generally looks to a set of scripture (more often than not, the Vedas, especially for the higher castes). Hinduism reaches across jāti and varṇa in India, although it can also restrict it on occasion[63]. As for the caste system it is generally linked to Hinduism, although such a view is challenged by some modern theologians like Nadkarni who call it a "…myth that caste system is an intrinsic part of Hinduism" (Nadkarni, 2003, p. 4783). Finally, Hinduism is a religious system which understands time as cyclic, believing in transmigration as opposed to just one life for individuals; belief in mokṣa as liberation from saṃsāra (the cycle of re-birth) is also key to defining Hinduism. There are also features of certain rites of passages, (saṃskāras) such as the use of tali in marriage ceremonies. The important point to make with definitions of Hinduism is that they are not binding; some Hindus may agree with all of these features, whereas others (like Nadkarni, who opposes the religious basis of the caste system) would not accept certain aspects of the definition just outlined. However, the definition has tried to include features which have been generally characterised as being part of Hinduism. Other characteristics that might be marked out as Hindu are better explored in the context of the time period that they first emerged, and will therefore be discussed or referred to within that context.

Hindu and Christian Attitudes to Other Faiths

The case studies represented here had to start somewhere; for example, they might each have had a singular religious identity which became a double religious identity[64], and for that to happen they must have had opinions about the validity of other faiths. These opinions would have been very much formed, at least to start with, by what their own religious community believed about the validity and position of other faiths. Of the case studies covered de Nobili, Griffiths and Abhishiktananda were all part of Catholic religious orders (Jesuit and Benedictines respectively) which means that Catholic doctrine which addresses attitudes towards other faiths and attitudes towards religious (Christian) identity has been emphasised in particular parts of this study. Catholic doctrine was extremely significant for de Nobili, a devout Jesuit. His dealings with Hinduism, as Vincent Cronin reflects, led to great controversy even as far as the Vatican itself, culminating in de Nobili having to fight for his missionary methods to be practised (Cronin, 1959, p. 156). By contrast, Griffiths (who died in 1993) was still alive after changes that had been instigated by The Council of Vatican II, which amongst

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[63] For example, prohibiting the Vedas being read by certain jātis.

[64] This is certainly true of Abhishiktananda and Robert de Nobili, but not of all dalit Christians, some of whom may have been born into both Hindu and Christian religious traditions.

other things published the document *Nostra Aetate*, declaring that the "Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions" (Vatican Council, 1965, p. 662). It is important to remember that because the case studies covered are sometimes whole centuries apart, the religious communities that they belonged to will have developed in its theology and therefore the contemporary Catholic attitudes to other faiths is not what it was, for example, in de Nobili's time.

Doctrine aside, the obvious point to make is that each of the individual case studies represented here will have had an accepting attitude towards other faiths; by their very nature the case studies were involved with another religious perspective. It is perhaps fair to assume that official religious doctrine and personal spiritual belief will have both had an influence on the formation of each case study's attitudes towards other religions. In terms of the religions themselves, Hinduism is stereotypically portrayed as having a tolerant and pluralistic attitude towards other religions; in part this may be due to associating Hinduism generally with the view of Hindus such as Gandhi who took a tolerant view towards other religions. However, as will be explored, there are some Hindus and indeed Hindu ideologies which do not take a tolerant or even pluralistic approach to other religions. Such absolute claims concerning 'the way' in which 'Hinduism' approaches other religions does not do justice to the wide array of religious beliefs which encompass Hinduism. It will be argued here, therefore, that it is unfair to suggest that Hinduism is always pluralistic when for some their Hinduism is decidedly inclusivist, or even exclusivist in some cases.

The same applies to discussions about the nature of Christianity: whilst an aforementioned stereotype exists, other scholars and believers see Christianity as inclusivist, and others still might claim to be Christian pluralists. The cliché of 'Christian exclusivism', whereby only Christ is the true and proper path to salvation, has at times been linked to European imperialist attitudes. However, post-colonial study tries to deconstruct such simplistic ideas, and examine more closely the attitudes of Hinduism and Christianity towards other religions, which are not quite as concrete as might have been first supposed. Also, different denominations might have different things to say regarding the presence of other religions in the world, which Ursula King refers to as "internal pluralism" (King, 1986, p. 21). That is, within Christianity there is a plurality of responses to the fact that other religions exist alongside Christianity. With regards to Christian denominations, this study will concern itself with both Catholic and Anglican doctrine, because the case studies fit that remit in one way or another[65]. What this section will try to do is to discuss the different approaches – exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist – that

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[65] The founders of Shantivanam and de Nobili are from Catholic religious backgrounds, dalit theology is predominantly examined as evolving out of Protestant theology.

Hinduism and Christianity have used in order to try and make sense of the presence of other religions, paying particular attention to attitudes which the selected case studies have represented themselves, offering a summary of Christian and Hindu belief regarding attitudes towards other faiths.

Critical Approaches

One might question why I should bother referring to these typologies at all, if they are indeed problematic terms. For example, Schmidt-Leukel says some theologians, such as Gavin D'Costa, rejected the typology (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 13). However, eight years on from Schmidt-Leukel's chapter being published[66], the typologies, in some form or another, are still being explored. Therefore they are relevant in the ways in which sub-typologies have developed, and how peoples' personal theology is affected by how they perceive their own faith in terms of the salvation of the Other.

As aforementioned, one of the dangers of the typology is in their use as stereotypes – i.e. all Christians are exclusivists and all Hindus are pluralists. However, such stereotypes will only arise if the typology is rigidly stuck to. As Hedges correctly notes:

> The main danger comes when we reify (caricature?) the typology, and suggest that the terms either tell us all we need to know about any one person's theology...or else see it as something to direct the encounter with those of other religions (Hedges, 2010, pp. 19-20).

In regards to this thesis, there would be a definite danger in me using one typology to describe the theological approach of one of the case studies, as it would limit understanding of that person or place's theology. Instead, when I do refer to typologies I will normally do so with this chapter in mind; seeing the typologies as guidelines, not boxes to strap people into. For example, with Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths I will use many typologies as a way to explore their theological double religious identities, as this will help to clarify their vast thinking concerning soteriology and the place of other, particularly Hindu, religions. In some ways, being flexible with the typologies is a reflection of the feminist methodology which I claim to draw on, but it is also a reflection of this entire thesis seeing religious identity itself not as an absolute, but as open to development and change.

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[66] The chapter is 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed', in Paul Knitter's edited volume *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration* [2005], pp. 13-27.

Schmidt-Leukel outlines eight criticisms of the typology (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, pp. 14-17) including that the threefold typology is "too narrow" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 14) and that it is "misleading", because it "…does not do justice to the radical diversity of the religions" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 16). These two criticisms in particular are relevant to the subject matter of this thesis; I have already mentioned, in reference to Hedges' own position, that it would be dangerous to try and box one of the case studies into a particular 'ism'. But also, the case studies demonstrate in this thesis that their approach to their own faith is different to others. For example de Nobili's idea of Christian identity is obviously different to Abhishiktananda's. Whilst obviously historical context plays into this, their approach towards the religious other is also conditioned very much by their own theological stances. If the typology is to be any use at all, which it undoubtedly can be, it is wise to heed Hedges' own assertion that "…the typology is a tool to help us make sense of the range of options that have been presented" (Hedges, 2010, p. 19). Seeing them as 'tools' allows me to be guided, but not restricted by the typologies. Doing so will help me, and the reader, to appreciate how the case studies in this thesis understood their own faith, and also the faith of others in terms of salvific potential. It is also important to have a very clear cut definition of each of the three typologies; I will use Schmidt-Leukel's definitions as they are crystal clear and make complete sense and I will refer to them as and when necessary. Also, Schmidt-Leukel comments that the typology 'can be used by any religion to define its relationship to the other' (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 21) and so despite the Christian origins of these terms, I will be using them to explain Hindu approaches to other faiths as well.

Hinduism – The 'Pluralistic' Religion

Not only is Hinduism 'the religion' regarded as a myth by some scholars, but its traditional association with religious pluralism (as a typology) is mostly a dubious stereotype. Schmidt-Leukel defines pluralism in the following manner:

> Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them), and there is none among them whose mediation of that knowledge is superior to all the rest (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 20).

I like his definition a lot, because it does not presume that to be a religious pluralist is to have a blanket approach to all other religions as 'mediating salvific knowledge'; this in itself is a stereotype of a typology! Also, it leaves room for error – for example by Schmidt-Leukel's definition you are able to define *for yourself* which religions mediate salvation. So it would be perfectly plausible for a religious pluralist to acknowledge that Hinduism mediates salvation along with Christianity, but that other religions do not. This then is the definition of religious pluralism I have in mind when discussing the stereotype that is 'pluralistic, tolerant Hinduism'.

However, I will also bear in mind that sometimes 'religious pluralism' is characterised as an approach which sees all religions leading to the same Truth.

So why does Hinduism have such a pluralistic stereotype – is it a colonial myth or is it considered pluralistic because there is an element of truth in it? Essentially, it is linked to the argument about whether Hinduism is a religion or not. If it really is a collection of various religions under an umbrella term, then by its very nature Hinduism must be pluralistic – in both a geographical sense (i.e. many religions are present in a particular space) and a theological sense (any 'religion' which is actually a collection of religious ideas, beliefs and practices must be theologically pluralistic in order to operate harmoniously, and indeed this is probably where the stereotypical perception of Hinduism as [a] tolerant and accepting religion/s comes from). On the other hand, reformers such as Vivekananda worked hard to portray Hinduism as a world religion, equal to or exceeding other world religions. Many of the problems associated with defining Hinduism also arise in terms of understanding its attitudes towards other faiths; in reality it is likely that because Hinduism seems to be a collective term, the attitudes towards other religions found in Hinduism will be just as diverse as the religious attitudes found within Hinduism itself. Therefore it is difficult to say whether Hinduism is absolutely pluralistic or not, but the fact remains that for Hindus both of these ideas are a possibility, and therefore both attitudes need to be given close attention here.

Certainly contemporary references are just as hard to judge. If one takes the attitude of Hindutva, this is very different to the 'pluralistic' and 'tolerant' face of Hinduism. Contemporarily, "Hindu Political parties demand that *Hindutva* become the criterion for citizenship in a Hindu nation" (Klostermaier, 1998, p. 82). However, Collins warns his reader that "The conceptuality of *Hindutva* is by no means uniform, indeed there are various and sometimes conflicting prescriptions of how it is to be achieved and what is to be the outcome" (Collins, 2007b, p. 106). This should really come as no surprise; if it is hard to define what a Hindu 'is', then naturally there will be disagreement over what constitutes a Hindu in terms of nationalism. I will briefly make reference to Savarkar, its most prolific proponent, and in doing so hopefully offer some evidence to substantiate Collins' remark. In short, I hope this brief discussion will add weight to my opinion that the idea that Hinduism is generally accepting of religious plurality is nothing short of stereotyping. However a brief aside before that; Chetan Bhatt points out that "...revolutionary nationalism and Hindu nationalism were distinct and largely occupied separate spheres of activity..." (Bhatt, 2001, p. 78). Therefore whilst one can speak of Gandhi, in particular his Hind Swarāj[67], as nationalist, his Hindu nationalism is very

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[67] 'Home-rule', Gandhi's manifesto for Indian self-rule (i.e. free from British colonialism). Rudolf C. Heredia's article 'Gandhi's Hinduism and Savarkar's Hindutva' [2009] is an excellent paper for comparing Gandhi's nationalism to Savarkar's. For example, he states that "In spite of its pretensions to

different to say, Upadhyay's[68], but especially to Savarkar's. This mainly hinges around the use (or not) of violence[69], and Bhatt further claims that Savarkar had a "...bitter hatred of Gandhi" (Bhatt, 2001, p. 83).

Hindutva as an ideology envisions Hinduism as a cultural definition, whereby an Indian person is culturally Hindu. As Chetan Bhatt explains:

> The distinctive ideology of Hindutva that animates contemporary Hindu nationalism was expounded at length during the early 1920s by the Indian anticolonial revolutionary, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (Bhatt, 2001, p. 4).

VD. Savarkar originally set out his parameters of Hindutva in his 1923 pamphlet, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* He outlines three "…essentials of Hindutva–a common nation (Rashtra), a common race (Jati) and a common civilization (Sanskriti)" (Savarkar, cited in Sharma, 2002, p. 22). This 'common civilization' is essential to understanding Savarkar's definition of Hindutva, because it actually means that he uses 'Hindu' in an overarching sense, by including "...all the four religions of Indian origin – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism" (Sharma, 2002, p. 22) Whilst at first it might appear that this makes being 'Hindu' an inclusive cultural identity, he excludes Christianity and Islam from his definition; this is because he does not believe that India counts as their holy land (Bhatt, 2001, p. 98). It makes the defining feature of being Indian as being (culturally) Hindu, and this has obvious consequences in terms of Hindu perceptions of faiths which do not have sanskriti origins. In Flood's definition of Hindutva, this ideology is "…the socio-political force to unite all Hindus against foreign influences" (Flood, 1996, p. 262) and therefore non-Indian religions, particularly Christianity with its strong colonial links, are construed as being such 'foreign influences. As Sharma explains:

> According to the concept of Hindutva as elaborated by Savarkar, Hindu nationality would be restricted to "Indian religions", in contrast presumably with Indian nationality which would be shared by the followers of all religions (Sharma, 2002, p. 23).

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be nationalist and modern, its militant chauvinism and authoritarian fundamentalism make Savarkar's Hindutva the antithesis of Gandhi's Hinduism" (Heredia, 2009, p. 63). It could not be clearer that Hindu nationalism is a wide and varying term, and what's more that Gandhi and Savarkar were at odds in their religious and political ideologies.

[68] Upadhyay was a political revolutionary in his later life, and this is explored in chapter 7, as it shapes a *political* double religious identity for him.

[69] Although Bhatt also adds that Gandhi's objected also "...focused on the innocence that is claimed through an identity of nationalism during a period of colonial victimhood, and the consequent will to power that is indissociable from a strategy of violence" (Bhatt, 2001, p. 83).

So to take into account Sharma's explanation and the above discussion as a whole, I will suggest that Savarkar's position of seeing Christianity and Islam as being outside of Hinduness is one way of disproving the stereotype that Hinduism (or all Hindus) is absolutely pluralistic and tolerant of other faiths.[70]

Hinduism is perhaps more defensive of its faith post British colonialism; some Christian missionaries had rather disparaging views towards Hinduism, and this (to some extent) triggered the Hindu renaissance. Hence, Hindu reformers had to answer criticisms directed at Hinduism but at the same time defend the integrity of the particular Hindu beliefs and practices which they (as reformers) held to be valid. Hinduism certainly has an association with religious pluralism, much more so than Christianity ever has. However, it is important to point out that not all Hindus conform to this pluralistic stereotype and we can see this even in the Renaissance; for example the Renaissance reformer Vivekananda gave over to inclusivist, even exclusivist, ideologies. [71].This may be due to changing attitudes about what Hinduism actually is, be that a world religion or many religions under one collective, or it may also be to do with protecting Hinduism and its claims to Truth. Whatever the reasoning, in the same way in which Hinduism is considered as 'a religion' or 'religions' based on the context of the period in question, perhaps the same might also apply for conceptions of Hindu attitudes towards other faiths, for the purposes of this study at least. Certainly the stereotype of Hinduism as 'pluralistic and tolerant' is exactly that: a stereotype. However, it is not only historical context which might concern us here, but also individual context: Hinduism for Ramakrishna is clearly pluralistic[72], whereas Vivekānanda gives it a certain amount of superiority above other religions. For the case studies at least, Hinduism must have had an inclusivist approach, if not pluralistic, otherwise engagement of Hinduism with another religion (in their cases, Christianity) would have been impossible. Hinduism is not uniformly pluralistic, yet whilst the

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[70] For further readings on Hindutva, see Jyotirmaya Sharma's *Hindutva: Exploring the Ideas of Hindu Nationalism* [2003] and chapter 7 of Parekh's *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principle for an Interdependent World* [2008].

[71] For example, Vivekānanda stated "You hear claims made by every religion as being the universal religion of the world. Let me tell you in the first place that perhaps there never will be such a thing, but if there is a religion which can lay claim to be that, it is only our religion and no other…" (Vivekananda in Richards, 1985, p. 80). Here, it is clear that if such a 'universal' religion exists, it must be his religion, hence there is an elevation of Hinduism above other religions as the 'universal religion'.

[72] e.g. "Having practised and, according to Rāmakrishna, realized the goals of these religions, he concluded that all religions are true. All religions are different paths to the One, the eternal undivided being which is absolute knowledge and bliss". (Flood, 1996, p. 257)

case studies examined have an open attitude towards other faiths, some Hindus or Hindu ideological groups immediately go against that grain.

Is Christianity always exclusive in its attitudes towards other faiths?

Whilst Christianity has been perceived as exclusivist, inclusivism and pluralism have also become options for contemporary Christians. But is this really a true reflection of Christian values and teachings? The *Nostra Aetate* document of the Catholic Church certainly advocates a more inclusivist stance, and *Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue: an Anglican theology of inter faith relations*, a key report from the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON), also leans more towards inclusivism. Both of these documents seem to draw a line under an exclusivist heritage and advocate a greater appreciation of the Truth which can sometimes be found in other religions. However, pluralists among Christian circles have certainly been reviled for their views. John Hick, as a well-known example of a religious pluralist, was of the view that Christianity should see itself as one lamp amongst many, which reveal the true Light[73] (Telegraph, 2012). His religious pluralism led to him being, in his own words, "...attacked from different quarters as anti-Christian, as too narrowly Christian, as an atheist, a polytheist, a postmodernist, and as not postmodernist enough!" (Hick, 2002, p. 321)[74] However, despite the supposed controversy of non-exclusivist approaches like Hick's, it is probably fair to argue that most Christians can at least see the problem with asserting the superiority of one's religion over another. For example, Paul Hedges writes that all major churches "…have adopted a more open, generally inclusivist, approach, and as such the portrayal of other religions as demonic or utterly false (exclusivisms) has become a fringe belief" (Hedges, 2010, p. 11). However, it should not be taken from such statements that exclusivism ceases to operate as a viable option for some people; Dan Strange defends his Christian exclusivist viewpoint in the publication *Only One Way?* [2011]. However, as *Generous Love* expresses it:

> Many Christians are torn between wanting to affirm the importance of dialogue and not wanting to compromise their allegiance to the one Lord and Saviour whom they proclaim as the desire of all nations (Williams in NIFCON, 2008, p. v).

This leaves Christianity in a bit of a predicament; it must be seen to not be arrogant with its truth claims yet at the same time must not compromise the integrity of its own beliefs. This is

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[73] See the obituary for John Hick (Telegraph, 16 February, 2012).

[74] See *John Hick: An Autobiography* [2002] for a wonderful insight into Hick's life and theological convictions. The final chapter, in which he constructs his own 'pre-obituary' and from which the quotation in the text is taken, offers Hick's viewpoint on his own experiences.

perhaps what inclusivist and pluralist models of Christianity attempt to advocate, that the Church must stay true to its beliefs regarding Christ as unique Saviour but at the same time be aligned with contemporary society through its attitudes towards other faiths. Even so, these approaches are not without their flaws and there are Christians who argue for an exclusivist outlook. Schmidt-Leukel defines exclusivism as the viewpoint that "Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by only one religion (which naturally will be one's own)" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 19). Essentially this would imply that other religions are false, but it depends on the exclusivist themselves the impact they believe this has on salvation. Later on in his chapter Schmidt-Leukel does concede that there are "Soft or moderate exclusivists" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 21) who, for example, "…could hold that there are ways by which God could save non-Christians as *individuals* (for example, through a post-mortem encounter with the gospel)" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 21). So although there is only one saving religion, soft/moderate exclusivism allows Christians to reconcile this with the idea that all could be saved finally. It should not be imagined that, because I have presented other alternatives to exclusivism, that this branch of the threefold typology is defunct; it is very much an option. For example, Dan Strange (mentioned previously) declares that "…non-Christian religions are essentially an idolatrous refashioning of divine revelation…" (Strange, in D'Costa, Knitter and Strange, 2011, p. 93). Also, exclusivists claim that their position is scriptural, for example, famously drawing on John's Gospel, where Jesus declares "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no-one comes to the Father except through me" (John14: 6). Exclusivists interpret this as meaning that Christianity is the only valid path to God, through Jesus Christ the Son, and therefore the only path to salvation. Exclusivism, then, may be seen by some Christians as the cornerstone of their faith, and the notion that other religions could even partially represent the truth about the Divine could seem unfathomable, because Jesus is the unique Son of God and only through him can salvation come (cf Acts 4: 12). Nevertheless, Christian exclusivist claims are uncomfortable for some Christians, and certainly are for this author. So how do Christians who reject exclusivism express their theological convictions concerning other faiths, and their relation to Christ and Christianity?

On the surface, inclusivism seems like a feasible and realistic alternative to exclusivism; it concedes that truth may be present in other religions but at the same time this is only the case if that truth is incorporated into their own framework. To give Schmidt-Leukel's definition here, inclusivism is of the view that:

> Salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them) but only one of these mediates it in a uniquely superior way (which…will naturally be one's own) (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 19).

That final disclaimer 'which…naturally will be one's own faith' sums up the very essence of Christian inclusivism for me; whilst salvific knowledge can be mediated by an/other religion, Christianity remains the 'uniquely superior' way. What is meant by this is that other religions are only recognised as holding some aspect of the Truth if they come under a Christian umbrella – the Truth in those religions is the Holy Spirit at work. With this typology Christianity retains its uniqueness but appears to be more open than an exclusivist approach, because it concedes that other religions (which religions specifically will depend on the individual's own standpoint) can 'mediate salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality'. Theologians such as Panikkar and Farquhar have expressed fulfilment ideologies[75], a branch of inclusivism, whereby Hinduism will come to fruition only through its encounter with perfect religion, Christianity. For example, Panikkar describes this as meaning that Hinduism already "...has a Christian seed" (Panikkar, 1964, p. 59). Paul Hedges gives examples of the Biblical basis of fulfilment theology (Hedges, 2001, p. 17), in particular Matthew 5: 17, "Think that I am not come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil" (in Hedges, 2001, p. 17). Christianity could (using inclusivism) concede that Truth is present in other religions, because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Fulfilment theology might further lead towards defining Hindus as "anonymous Christians", famously linked to Karl Rahner's own theology (Rahner, 1969, pp. 391-392). But M.M. Thomas makes an interesting point here: "If Christians can speak of an unknown Christ of Hinduism, Hindus can speak of an unknown Vedanta in Christianity" (Thomas, 1969, p.145). The question here, of course, is just how pleased Hindus might be with such an interpretation of their own faith as merely part of a Christian whole! Küng raises a similar objection that Christians could be uncomfortable with being seen as "anonymous Buddhists" (Küng, 1974, p.98). It would seem that inclusivism, and the ideology of fulfilment, cannot be two-way traffic because those theologies are only comfortable with the 'other' being anonymously Christian; the suggestion that they themselves might be viewed as an 'anonymous other' is an unsettling one.

The alternative to both exclusivism and inclusivism is religious pluralism. This ideology does not emphasise Christ as unique saviour but rather as one among others. For example, John Hick argued that Christ had been at the centre of the Church's universe of faiths, but he stressed the need for the Church to return to thinking of *God* at the centre. Essentially, this requires:

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[75] Although Paul Hedges stresses that "…Farquhar did not popularize these ideas – they were common currency well before his day" (Hedges, 2001, p. 133). He later gives Sen (Hedges, 2001, p. 141) as one example of someone who espoused fulfilment theology before Farquhar, and suggests that Upadhyay went beyond fulfilment theology in his attempt to build an Indian Christian theology (Hedges, 2001, p. 153).

> ...a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is *God* who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him (Hick, 1973, p. 131).

However the problem with this ideology is that it might be seen as too liberal in its approach towards other faiths, especially by those who affirm Christ's uniqueness and see this as pivotal to (Christian) soteriology. Of course, those like Hick argue that the typology of religious pluralism is the only plausible alternative to the imperialist values of exclusivism and inclusivism. Religious pluralism certainly *sounds* convincing; it does not concede that only one religion or religious path has monopolised the Truth, and recognises that other paths might also be valid in their equality, each only partially conveying the Truth about the divine. But is it really as equal as it sounds, or do religious pluralists end up assigning themselves to a particular religious identity anyway, so that in the end they view themselves as Hindu or Christian pluralists? If so, it could be argued that religious pluralism (and indeed, inclusivism) are just "…sub-types…" (D'Costa, 1996, p. 225) of exclusivism. As D'Costa stresses elsewhere, the problem with Hick's theory is that by advocating a return to *God* it automatically rules out those religions that do not have a fixed idea of deity in the same way as Christians have (D'Costa, 1986, p. 30) (e.g. Buddhism). Therefore the argument has come full circle; by putting one type of religious understanding at the centre (theism) he opposes another (non-theism). Hick then falls prey to his own argument: is he really a pluralist if he advocates theism over non-theism? I agree with D'Costa's criticism of Hick's religious pluralism, and personally do not find religious pluralism a convincing theological alternative to exclusivism or inclusivism. Yet at the same time, Hick's religious pluralism certainly changed the ways in which people approached other faiths in their own theologies, exposing the inadequacies of exclusivism (and inclusivism) in a religiously plural world[76].

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[76] There are many excellent sources which map the arguments between scholars and the validity of the typology they side with. The theology of religions is an important topic for interfaith dialogue (and of course in its own right!) because a person's theological understanding of other religions is pivotal in determining why, or why not, they entertain interfaith dialogue, and to what extent. The original typologies of 'exclusivism, inclusivism and religious pluralism' as theological responses to the diversity and plethora of religious traditions were devised by Alan Race in his *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* [1983].There are many classic books dealing with particular stances, John Hick of course being the first name which springs to mind, and his sparring with Gavin D'Costa and Paul Knitter, as well as many others. To offer a few varied examples there are works such as Michael Barnes' *Religions in Conversation: Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism* [1989], Kevin Meeker's article 'Pluralism, Exclusivism, and the Theoretical Virtues' [2006] and Kenneth Cracknell's *Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faith* [1986] which all provide solid and in-depth analysis of the theology of religions. Jeannine Hill Fletcher provides a brilliant feminist interpretation in 'Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism' [2003]. A good contemporary authority on the theology of religions is the volume by D'Costa, Knitter and Dan Strange called *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses on the*

The typologies of exclusivism, inclusivism and religious pluralism certainly offer space for reflection, but it is a possibility that these terms are too broad (another of Schmidt-Leukel's criticisms; see 2005, p. 15) and in need of refinement when it comes to trying to conceptualise Christian and Hindu attitudes towards other faiths[77]. This problem has been commonly recognised and new ways of adequately encompassing Christianity's attitudes towards other faiths have been attempted. As is becoming a recurring theme in this study, it is difficult to pin down or use a specific term to denote what Christian attitudes to other faiths are, as approaches vary. However, by giving an outline of some of the arguments involved hopefully it should give an introduction to understanding the religious contexts of the case studies. Paul Hedges' assertion that typologies be seen as tools, previously mentioned, is one that I will side with here, and I will use the typologies to enhance understanding of a case study's double religious identity, rather than to enforce a label upon them.

Moving forward from Christian Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism

I will explore some of the 'sub-typologies' here which have arisen and explain how the theology of religions is evolving and moving forward from Race's original typology. Doing so will help to shed light on how the case studies in this thesis were able to be open to other religions to varying degrees and how this contributes to the theology of double religious identity. It will also demonstrate how the typologies are still, even in more detailed forms, not completely adequate for describing a person's entire theological response to other religions. As the reader will see from the next section, some of the sub-typologies seem to have combined some of the original typologies, demonstrating how they overlap. As a short aside, Schmidt-Leukel says that there are 'four' options in the theology of religions; but as the first is really atheism/naturalism, it can be discarded because for a typology to work, it assumes belief in some form of divine Truth (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 21). According to the definitions he gives – his chapter is a 'clarification and reaffirmation' of the threefold typology –there is no further option left' (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 24). What this means for him is that "…it forces the scholarly discussion to focus on the arguments for and against each of the three viz. four positions. The typology thus focuses, sharpens, and thereby helps the discussion" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 24). Therefore the sub-typologies I am about to explore essentially fall under these categories in some way (cf Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 24) but I will explore them nevertheless. This is because I believe that my use of the typologies as one way of exploring a

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Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Plural World [2011] in which the authors engaged in a dialogue with one another's positions.

[77] Whilst these categories were first introduced in order to examine Christian attitudes, they have since been adopted to consider all sorts of different religious attitudes towards other faiths.

case study's double religious identity will only be enhanced by being able to pool from a range of typologies.

Sub-Typologies

The danger of trying to conceptualise new ways of describing Christian attitudes towards other faiths is that the terms may become bogged down in complex terminology, which seemingly becomes meaningless. However, as outlined above the basic set of terms – exclusivism, inclusivism and religious pluralism – do not really do justice to what is being conveyed, or what the approach actually signifies. So there is some need for different terms. It is also worth reiterating that these terms are not concrete; their meanings can change but also some terms may be considered more accurate than others. Just as important is the way in which these terms are used by different academics; Schmidt-Leukel argues that "…one cannot assume that every author who speaks about exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism has precisely, or even broadly, the same understanding of these terms" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 17). That is why it was important for me to side with particular definitions of the threefold typology, and as I have already pointed out Schmidt-Leukel's definitions wok for me and so I have stuck with those. The sub-typologies I am about to explore are done so through particular scholars, and therefore it should be assumed that these are their definitions only, and someone else may define a sub-typology in a different way. Hopefully what this overview will do is lend itself to giving a slightly broader and more precise analysis of the many different ways in which Christianity deals with the presence of other religions, many of which may contradict their own truth-claims.

Hans Küng speaks of a Christian universalism which is unique, rather than exclusive; in particular with a mission activity based on a dialogical encounter rather than amassing converts (Küng, 1974, pp. 111-112). He elaborates further, adding that:

> The truth of the other religions would be acknowledged, honored (sic.) and appreciated; but the Christian profession of faith would not be relativized or reduced to general truths (Küng, 1974, p. 112).

This form of Christian universalism is concerned with allowing for the validity of other religions but at the same time not permitting the core message of Christianity to be watered down. It seems like Küng is more positing a question here, rather than offering a solution; what he has just described is the crux of the problem for all types of inter-faith dialogue – conceding that other religions may have their say, and that what they are saying may even be true and relevant, but that ultimately our faith should not be compromised in the process. An inclusive,

Christian universalism is all very well, but in theory it is very similar to general Christian inclusivism.

Dupuis has spoken of an "inclusive pluralism" (in Phan, 2003, p. 504). It is also advocated by Phan; he requires that God's salvation and grace are "not limited to Judeo-Christian history but is extended to the whole of human history" (Phan, 2004, p. 65), via the work of the Holy Spirit. This is of course, very much in line with *Nostra Aetate*, but Phan goes beyond it so that religious pluralism appears to be part of God's divine plan for humanity[78] (Phan, 2004, p. 65). He further extends his position, which is leaning more towards an exclusive understanding of Jesus' role in the world, by declaring that Jesus is the one mediator, but other religions have what he calls "participating mediators" (Phan, 2004, p. 67). Phan has combined effectively the two standpoints of inclusivism and pluralism. The important point that Phan makes however, is that if his position of 'inclusive pluralism' should be taken up by Christians, then it ultimately compels them, as a necessity, to engage in inter-faith dialogue and reap the rewards of that (Phan, 2004, p. 67). He also believes that multiple religious belonging can often be perceived by others as "a dangerous fruit of interreligious dialogue" (Phan, 2004, p. xxv). This is despite not only the importance of their work and the success of previous pioneers, but also the crucial factor that "...their religious quest was deeply rooted in their Christian faith" (Phan, 2004, p. 72). One of the biggest contentions with double religious identity is that it might be viewed as being incompatible with having a deep faith – Knitter refers to some of his students likening it to "spiritual sleeping around!" (Knitter, 2009, p. 213) There is a serious point in that comment though, as Knitter also points out (Knitter, 2009, p. 213); Abhishiktananda also had similar problems with people accepting his Christian faith as authentic. To hold more than one religious identity may be seen as being unfaithful to one's religious tradition; particularly in Abhishiktananda's case, unfaithful to the monastic vows he had made, to the extent where his double religious identity was frowned upon.

Race used the terms exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism "as a broad typological framework within which most of the current Christian theologies of religions can be placed" (Race, 1983, p. 7). Notice the disclaimer, *most.* Likely, Race never intended for these terms to be all encompassing and recognised that some attitudes towards other faiths, from a Christian perspective, simply would not fit into any of these categorizations. And this was over twenty years ago, before these terms had many criticisms levelled at them or before they had even begun to mature. If anything, these terms are ways into discussion about inter-faith dialogue,

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[78] In his introduction to *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Inter-Faith Dialogue*, Phan argues that "religious pluralism is part of God's providential plan" (Phan, 2004, p. xxiii).

and a section from the end of Race's book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* is worth referring to here:

> Truth, especially in religious matters, belongs within a whole context of life and culture. To say that the divine is manifest in different ways in different cultures is not to side-step the issue of truth in a religiously diverse world, but is to pave the way for a dialogue in which the cognitive discrepancies can be better evaluated in a wider setting (Race, 1983, p. 144).

For him, inclusivist and pluralist typologies still deal with Truth, but do so within the important contexts of life and culture. And this is exactly what the case studies do too; they are not inclusive or pluralist in order to fit neatly into ideas about how Christians can best approach another faith, but they realise that more open attitudes towards other faiths open up paths to dialogue. This might be through their own lives or through different cultural understandings, as with some of their methods which can be understood as pioneering inculturation. And by opening up to dialogue, 'cognitive discrepancies' (i.e. those discrepancies which make people think, or involve thinking about the divine) can be discussed in fruitful ways.

Kenneth Cracknell's *Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faith* (1986) details an inclusivist position towards other faiths; indeed the book itself gives a brilliant overview of the attitudes towards the theology of religions which have been discussed here. Part of his argument involves reading some of those texts mentioned earlier which are commonly associated with Christian exclusivism, most notably John 14: 6 "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (Cracknell, 1986, pp. 69-70). 'The Way', in Cracknell's opinion, is a good starting point for dialogue, for lots of religions talk about 'the way' or 'ways', including Hinduism with its three ways of bhakti, karma and jñāna (Cracknell, 1986, pp. 79-84). As for the text itself, he stresses the need to read it in context as a response to Thomas's question "How can we know the way?" (John 14: 5. Cracknell, 1986, p. 71). He also refers to Justin Martyr and William Temple, amongst others, to make his point about Christian inclusivism (Cracknell, 1986, pp .98-104). Ultimately, Cracknell's position can be summed up, in his own words, as "…the visions of a pluralist religious eschatology and especially an inclusivist Christology…" (Cracknell, 1986, p. 110). By that, his position can be understood as believing in a God who saves everyone, but that God is Jesus Christ, through which salvation comes.

Cracknell's theology, whilst an inclusivist approach, also bears the influence of pluralism and is just one example of how the original typologies have been developed and have interacted. M.M. Thomas argues that it is not possible to categorise Christian approaches under the labels of pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism (Thomas, 1990, p. 58) and to an extent he is right.

They can form the basis, and indeed do, for new categorizations of Christian approaches to other faiths but is it really just a case of terms breeding new terms? Certainly Dupuis' typology of an 'inclusive pluralism' will be incredibly useful for this study, as is Kenneth Cracknell's definition of an 'Inclusivist Christology and pluralist eschatology' especially because it links in well with ideas about how people with double religious identities approach or understand different faiths. However, Phan's position that religious pluralism is part of God's divine will is quite a controversial one. On the whole, the case studies in question would have been familiar, if at all[79], with the more simple categories of inclusivism, pluralism and exclusivism, although it is important to remember that their scope is limited. With this in mind, the approaches of the case studies will not be fitted neatly into typological boxes, because in reality the individual case studies (as human beings!) are much more flexible and complex than that. Instead, this study will try to demonstrate their own perspectives and attitudes about other faiths and how this leads into their double religious identities, whilst still occasionally referencing where they might sit in this rather broad and complex field of the theology of religions, because it is still important to understand the significance and validity of other religions to them.

Concluding Remarks

There is a vast difference in attitudes between Hindus and Christians, and within Hinduism and Christianity, regarding the importance of religious pluralism and retaining one's own religious identity. For Hindus, it could be argued that pluralism has always been more of a necessity than for Christians, because of the abundance of different religions in India and the necessity to understand and be tolerant towards one's neighbour. John Hick's theology of religious pluralism heightened awareness of pluralistic attitudes, particularly amongst American and European *Christians*. However, for those Christians who perceive Christianity as exclusivist in terms of its soteriology and understand Christ as unique Saviour, religious pluralism is seen as deviating from orthodoxy.

With regards to religious identity, it is intriguing that when people such as Griffiths and Abhishiktananda moved to India from European countries they were much more open to inclusivist/pluralist interpretations, perhaps again because of the abundance of religions in one geographical space. But there is also the argument that Hinduism has tended to be much more tolerant of the validity of other religions, and that one cannot help being impressed by that if one witnesses the fluidity of movement (across boundaries) and the tolerance (to some extent)

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[79] Remembering of course that this terminology is largely twentieth century, and that the older case studies in this study would not be familiar with such terms. For example, they might believe in the exclusivity of Christ's message, but would not have labelled it as 'Christian exclusivism', as such.

which exist between religious cultures in India. Hindu and Christian attitudes towards other faiths have certainly changed dramatically across centuries; de Nobili and his contemporaries would probably never have imagined that such a document as *Nostra Aetate* would ever exist, where other religions are at least conceded to have some elements of validity and truth because the Holy Spirit may be at work in them, too. Within Hinduism, there is also the change that colonialism has brought about in the ways in which Hindus respond to missionary religions, especially Christianity, and nationalist movements such as the BJP have responded to other faiths in rather negative ways.

Closing Remarks

The ambiguous nature of Hinduism and Christianity has been considered from three perspectives here. First, Hinduism has been identified as a problematic term, encompassing many religious traditions for some, such as Smith, but also viewed as a singular world religion by others, such as Vivekananda. Because this study covers a spectrum of history, obviously Hinduism has been evolving and it is therefore hard to pin down a concrete definition for a religion which is ironically not simply 'a' religion, with the use of the term 'religion' being recognised as problematic for Hinduism anyway. However, a generic outline of Hinduism has been offered for this study, referring to common features recognisable as Hinduism to the majority of the case studies presented here. Additional features of Hinduism, as Hinduism evolved and the way in which it was understood changed, will be referred to accordingly in each case study. This is in the hope that by doing so it will account for not only the evolution of Hinduism as a particular religious perspective but also the recognition of Hinduism as an umbrella term. Hinduism, then, will be offered as a topic for contextual reflection in this thesis. Secondly, the attitudes of both Hinduism and Christianity towards other faiths have been examined and this chapter has recognised that whilst there are stereotypical understandings of each (Hinduism being synonymous with pluralism and Christianity being exclusive in its approach) these understandings are not shared by all Hindus and all Christians. Hindutva and the inclusivist Hinduism of Vivekānanda are examples which offer a different perspective from which to understand Hinduism. Likewise, Hick's conception of the Christian pluralist, as well as inclusivist doctrines such as Rahner's 'anonymous Christians' and Panikkar's *et al.* fulfilment theories, represent different ways to consider Christianity as something other than simply exclusivist. The ambiguous nature of Hinduism and Christianity, then, lies in the wide variety of inter-denominational or personal and spiritual differences between Christians and also between Hindus.

Thirdly, these attitudes towards other faiths feed into the validity and necessity of inter-faith dialogue for Hindus and Christians. Inter-faith dialogue is an important aspect of multicultural

living, but it is also important in learning about and from different faiths. This is not simply as a checklist of knowledge but about being open towards what people of other religious perspectives have to say and being open to learning from that. Whilst for some there is no such thing as a necessary call to engage in inter-faith dialogue for others the call is a great one, because it presents opportunities to learn from past mistakes and demonstrates a willingness to engage with another on an equal footing. Dialogue should not be about conversion in its present day form, although it may once (and sometimes still is) have been instigated to try and find common ground on which to converse about Christianity for the sake of conversion. The case studies which will be examined in Part II learnt about Hinduism and Christianity but also involved themselves in a practical way, being open and willing to engagement and recognizing issues which needed addressing.

Race concludes in his work *Interfaith Encounter* that "...the momentum of interfaith dialogue in many forms is generating a 'new way of thinking' about the nature of religious commitment and identity" (Race, 2001, p. 165). However, what this study is suggesting is that this is not necessarily new; starting with the early Christian community of St. Thomas in India right down to the present century, the case studies will demonstrate how the nature of religious identity and the ways in which it is understood between Hinduism and Christianity have already been challenged by Hindu-Christian dialogue. This is showcased through a selection of case studies intended to highlight where religious identities may have changed or even become blurred through their engagement with another religious perspective, but nevertheless have still contributed to inter-faith dialogue in ways which can be used to enhance understanding of Hindu-Christian dialogue and double religious identity.

Chapter 3: **Inculturation as mission, and the relationship between religion and culture**

This thesis understands inculturation as a type of double religious identity because, through its appropriation of symbolism from other religions and cultures, it confuses the *aesthetics* of two religious identities. Even if the second religious identity is perceived as 'cultural' and not 'religious', the argument still holds that the aesthetics of religious identity have been confused, because (especially in relation to India and Hinduism) culture and religion are not easily separated concepts, if it is possible to separate them at all. Therefore, what one inculturation advocate might see as the use of a secondary 'cultural identity' is in fact a secondary 'religious identity' or, more than likely, a mixture of both. Some of the case studies, particularly those who were pioneers of inculturation through Christian mission, were challenged by this problem. For example, whilst de Nobili understood certain symbols (such as kāvi and decorating the forehead) as purely cultural, those who opposed him and his missionary methods saw these symbols as religious ones. In many ways, this argument over what symbols can and cannot be adopted for the purposes of inculturation has never really been settled, nor is it likely to be unanimously agreed.

The relationship between religion and culture, and the ways in which an individual interprets that, is essential to understanding inculturation – if, as de Nobili claims, certain cultural elements can be separated completely from religion, then inculturation (in theory) is a viable mission strategy. On the other hand, inculturation and its practitioners are criticised for dichotomising religion and culture: that interpretation of the relationship between religion and culture is criticized in the first part of this chapter. Those who criticize inculturation often feel that it involves a fair amount of deception, whereby people are tricked into converting because of the extent to which Christianity has been wrapped up in Hindu symbolism. Inculturation might be seen to cause problems for Hindu-Christian dialogue – mission and conversion are sensitive issues in India, and if inculturation is perceived as trickery or an insensitive use of Hindu culture and religion, then it can strain Hindu-Christian relations. The second part of this chapter will look at criticisms which come specifically from the dalit community – in particular that inculturation is not always welcomed or favoured because of the way it automatically assumes that Hindu culture is the best culture to appropriate from. Some dalits would not even recognise Hinduism as their own culture, saying that dalit culture and religiosity have its own distinctive forms. This issue of whether or not dalit religions and cultures should be understood as 'Hindu' is an important topic for Hindu-Christian relations – does it then warrant a distinct dialogue, say between dalits and dalit-Christians, as Taylor suggested back in 1989[80], or

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[80] See his chapter 'Current Hindu-Christian Dialogue in India', in Coward, H. (1989) *Hindu-Christian dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters.* pp. 119-128.

should dalits be included under the umbrella of Hindu-Christian dialogue? Once again, 'Hinduism' is shown to be a simplistic term which actually covers a complex area of religious expression, belief and practice.

Inculturation – Appropriating Christianity in non-Western cultures

The Church recognizes that if Christian faith is to be enriching outside of the predominantly European culture it is steeped in, then the Church must adapt itself to these different cultures. This can be through architecture, dress, symbolism and even liturgy and worship. A very basic example of this would be that in India, it is a sign of respect to remove one's shoes before entering a place of worship; therefore Christians in India should also adopt this before entering a Church, because it is part of Indian culture. Amaladoss argues that this is not inculturation, but adaptation (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 13). My argument is that there is no point in adaptation being made if it is not seeking after an authentic, inculturated Indian church. Why else would adaptation be made? This thesis, then will argue that so called adaptations are inculturation. However, in order to distinguish, these will be called a 'spontaneous inculturation', as they arise from the needs and cultural context of the church. This is to be distinct from directed inculturation, which is directed by missionaries like de Nobili as a means to an end.

Inculturation relies on knowledge about different cultures, especially regarding the way in which the culture views the sacred and religious life; according to Race it must be understood as "necessarily dialogical in its method" (Race, 2001, p. 150). To adapt itself the Church must engage in dialogue, to appreciate and learn about the cultural and religious norms of the society in which they are trying to preach the Gospel, and deconstruct the Western image it has framed itself within. For example, the Greek philosophy that the Church adapted should not be presumed as immediately familiar to other cultures, especially where other complex philosophies are pre-existent. The point has been made (take Upadhyay, for example) that an authentic Church in India will need to build itself around Indian philosophies, such as Vedānta, rather than Greek. However, an important criticism is that replacing one culture (Greek) entirely with another (Vedānta) still leaves the problem that Christianity is fully immersed in one particular culture; it is just that that culture is now Indian rather than Hellenistic. The idea that Greek ideas can be separated from Christianity without changing it entirely is one of the contentious claims of inculturation.

An important criticism of this comes from Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI). In his address *Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures* [1993], Cardinal Ratzinger defined culture as "…the historically developed common form of expression of the insights and values

which characterize the life of a community" (Ratzinger, 1993). Importantly, he says that definition of culture must also include religion; this forms a general criticism of inculturation whereby he asserts:

> For it is difficult to see how a culture, living and breathing the religion with which it is interwoven, can be transplanted into another religion without both of them going to ruin. If you remove from a culture its own religion which begets it, then you rob it of its heart (Ratzinger, 1993).

Very clearly, this speaks of a relationship between religion and culture which cannot be broken, for to do so is to deny culture its 'heart'. He argues that the definition of inculturation, where a cultureless faith is fused with a different culture, is both "…artificial and unrealistic…" (Ratzinger, 1993) and furthermore "…difficult to envision…" (Ratzinger, 1993). Ratzinger offers a strong critique, and his aversion to separate religion and culture as distinct concepts is visible here. His remedy is two-fold; to speak of the "meeting of cultures" (Ratzinger, 1993) instead of inculturation, and to see that "…all cultures are potentially universal and open to each other…" (Ratzinger, 1993). There are then, both those who see the possibility and advantages in dichotomising culture and religion, but there are also strong critiques like Cardinal Ratzinger's which view inculturation not perhaps negatively, but certainly as difficult, because they view the relationship between religion and culture in a very different way; that is, as relational, and either incapable of being separated, or at least an undesirable notion.

The relationship between interfaith dialogue and inculturation

Despite the link between inculturation and dialogue, there is an important distinction which needs to be reinforced here; dialogue is a process which is about learning from and initiating understandings between different viewpoints, perhaps in view of social justice issues. Inculturation on the other hand, works from the assumption that something needs to be changed, i.e. the way in which the Church presents itself in different cultures so that it is not so alien. In this case the way in which the Church is grounded in other cultures (and the way it works from that by adapting its liturgy and styles of worship to a more familiar culture) needs to be changed. This can be achieved initially through the process of dialogue and then through implementing it in very concrete ways, like for example using āratī at Mass. Inter-faith dialogue, then, is an essential step towards inculturating the Gospel; indeed Catherine Cornille argues that:

While inculturation and interreligious dialogue have often been explicitly distinguished – for instance, in documents of the Roman Catholic Church – inculturation cannot but be regarded as a form or aspect of interreligious dialogue... (Cornille, 2003, p. 46).

Her point is that "...to attempt to reformulate a religion in categories or symbols belonging to a different cultural context implies engagement..." (Cornille, 2003, p. 46) and it is this engagement with culture and religion that brings together the concepts of inter-faith dialogue and inculturation. Whilst Cornille is right to infer that the two should not be completely distinguished, it is also vital that the two are not seen as interchangeable. Inculturation is a concept in its own right, albeit one that that has used dialogue as its foundations, and also dialogue is not entered into solely for the purposes of inculturation. It too is a concept in its own right; they are perhaps better understood as related rather than identical.

It could be suggested that de Nobili started that journey of dialogue and inculturation (Kim, 2003, p. 111); although his motives for doing so (i.e. conversion) certainly do not reflect most contemporary attitudes – that is, it seems inappropriate to enter into dialogue with the sole view of trying to gain converts. Bede Griffiths and Abhishiktananda have come under fire from some critics, most noticeably from Sita Ram Goel, for their efforts at inculturation, with Goel accusing their pioneering Christian āśrama and means of spirituality as "…no more than normal mission stations hiding behind a false facade" (Goel, 1994, Chapter 5, paragraph 22). That, one supposes, is the fine line between inculturation and conversion tactics: Inculturation tries to make a religion more culturally comfortable and accessible, whereas conversion tactics conceal a different religion in a religious-cultural setting. Seemingly, both can be misunderstood and it can be argued that the biggest stumbling block for inculturation is the possible mistrust which it can create[81].

Deliberate and spontaneous inculturation

Inculturation is broken down into two parts in this thesis, and for this it will be necessary to draw on Paul Collins' own distinctions – he says that there are two types of inculturation, the *intentional* and the *unintentional* (Collins, 2007b, p. 118). He sees the former in terms of any twentieth century mission which is "…rooted in the deliberate quest to make Christianity appear more Indian" (Collins, 2007b, p. 118) and the latter as attempts which "…pre-date that quest" (Collins, 2007b, p. 118). However, I am going to deviate slightly from Collins' definitions, because I see de Nobili's inculturation (which is pre-twentieth century) as an

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[81] See in particular Goel's critique in the chapter on Saccidananda ashram.

intentional form of inculturation, because he set out to make Catholicism more Indian. Therefore I will suggest that inculturation which is initiated from above (i.e. by missionaries or other individuals such as monastics, and their churches or monasteries) is an 'intentional' or *deliberate* mission practice. In particular, whilst distinct from inter-faith dialogue, this missionary practice has used dialogue as a stepping stone in its work to inculturate the Gospel and the Church and therefore aid conversion and/or encourage a genuinely Indian Christianity. I will define this as *deliberate* inculturation because it purposefully sets out to inculturate. On the other hand, inculturation which seems to have naturally arisen (i.e. not out of direct missionary work) will be designated as *spontaneous*. This is because such inculturation is not based on a particular approach to mission, but has arisen through engagement with the local culture. This engagement is not dictated from above but instead it comes 'from below', from Christians of that community whose engagement with their faith and their local culture is on-going[82]. By using Collins as my starting point, I have articulated a distinction between 'deliberate' and 'spontaneous' inculturation to demonstrate that whilst there is a deliberate method called inculturation, often associated with Vatican II but also practiced by the likes of de Nobili[83], the concept is also much broader and more historical than that, as a means of engaging Christianity with local culture 'from below'. These two 'sub-facets' of inculturation will be reflected throughout this thesis in the diagram, as separate branches of the overall facet, 'inculturation'.

It could be argued that, because the ashram was founded prior to Vatican II and its emphasis placed on inculturation, Saccidananda ashram cannot really be used as a model of deliberate inculturation. However, even though the ashram precedes deliberate inculturation as emphasised at Vatican II, in my view Saccidananda can still be viewed as embodying such inculturation; this makes Jules Monchanin and Abhishiktananda pioneers, in the same way that de Nobili (and other Jesuit missionaries like Ricci) can be considered as pioneers. Whilst the *term* 'inculturation' is largely linked to Vatican II, on the other hand the actual *practice*, as we have seen, goes as far back to de Nobili – in this thesis – in its deliberate (missionary) form. To offer one piece of evidence to support this claim, Monchanin does speak of "Christianizing

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[82] Likewise, Collins describes his unintentional inculturation as "…the product of a shared cultural heritage in which 'borrowing' and 'cross-over' occurred and existed in an un-self-conscious way". (Collins, 2007, p. 118) I am indebted to Collins for his distinctions, which have helped to shape my own.

[83] Paul Hedges' *Preparation and Fulfilment* [2001] is just one example of a text that explores inculturation prior to the 'concept' embraced at Vatican II as a missionary method. For example, he examines the contributions of Indian Christian fulfilment theologians such as Krishna Mohun Banerjea (p. 144f), saying that Banerjea was "...the first major Christian interpreter of Christianity into Indian terms in the subcontinent itself" (Hedges, 2001, pp. 144).

Indian thought" (Monchanin, cited in Rodhe, 1993, p. 16) a term closely related to the Vatican II emphasis on inculturating the Gospel by adapting the Church to the culture of that land. Monchanin displays a strong urge which, whilst pre-Vatican II, is in line with later emphases on deliberate inculturation and indeed dialogue in mission. Therefore it could be argued that the founders, especially Monchanin, were not entirely blind to the concept of inculturation. Monchanin himself in 1950 presented a paper at a conference in Chennai about 'inculturation' (de Sauvebien, 2002, p. 85) and therefore his methods should be recognized as having such intent. What is more, their efforts certainly paved the way for further Catholic āśramas in India, which is mainly understood as an inculturative movement.

One of the biggest problems facing Christian āśramas (as a type of deliberate inculturation) is how they are understood; if they are viewed as inculturative rather than disguising true intent then so much the better, but unfortunately there are accusations that Christian āśramas are more concerned with trickery and conversion than inculturation[84]. Barnes highlights another criticism, from the perspective of:

> ...those, especially in India, who argue that ashramic spirituality is to be dismissed as an irrelevant bit of religious colonialism, packaged spirituality for the irredeemably bourgeois tourist (Barnes, 2001, pp. 61-62).

Whilst Barnes is not advocating this particular position himself, he is right to highlight that 'ashram spirituality' (and he refers to Saccidananda as his example of this (Barnes, 2001, p. 61)) is not always popular. Indeed, Oldmeadow points out that "…not a solitary Indian monk became a permanent member of the ashram" (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 6) under Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, although there were Indian Christian monks during the time of Bede Griffiths. If it is the case that 'inculturation' does not inculturate yet attracts Westerners as pilgrims, then it is perhaps at least understandable why there is an attitude that 'ashramic spirituality is to be dismissed as an irrelevant bit of religious colonialism'. That said, Bede Griffiths' successor, Br. Martin, is an Indian Christian and there is a community of Indian Christian monks who reside at the ashram. Whilst they welcome guests who wish to share in the life of the ashram for a period of time, be that a week or for longer, there is a strong sense that at the heart of the ashram is this Indian Christian monastic community (at least, that was my experience as a guest).

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[84] Again, Sita Ram Goel is a particularly vocal critic of Christian ashrams; this is explored in the post-colonial case studies but for a particular reading of Goel's work where he criticises Christian ashrams see Goel's *Christian Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* [1994, 2nd edn]; chapters 5 and 8 in particular.

As for *spontaneous* inculturation, this will be focused on in the first and last case studies of this thesis. To draw on Collins again, he explains that:

> In the years prior to the twentieth century I want to suggest that the phenomena to be seen are the product of a shared cultural heritage in which 'borrowing' and 'cross-over' occurred and existed in an un-self-conscious way (Collins, 2007b, p. 118).

Collins recognises that a distinction needs to be made between types of inculturation, and my doing so will add strength to my faceted approach to double religious identity, but I would disagree slightly with him on another point. For me, spontaneous (or as he calls it, unintentional) inculturation is 'a product of cultural sharing and borrowing' but I don't think that it has to be restricted to occurrences pre-twentieth century. Therefore I will also categorise the crossovers I see in some of the examples of contemporary South Indian churches (explored in chapter 11 of this thesis) as spontaneous inculturation. This is because it is not being initiated by a) European missionaries and b) because this kind of inculturation *does* seem to 'exist un-self-consciously'. However, I do agree with Collins categorising the "St Thomas/Syrian traditions" (Collins, 2007b, p. 115) as unintentional inculturation (in my own terminology, as 'spontaneous') and so the first, early case study (St Thomas Christians) will be explored through this sub-facet.

Before moving on, I want to very briefly comment on inculturation in Protestant traditions. It is possible to point to individual Protestant missionaries in India prior to the twentieth century, such as Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg[85] (1683-1719) who was engaged in mission in Tranquebar. For example, Ziegenbalg translated the New Testament into Tamil (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 150) and established many schools, including ones where "Tamil disciples were trained as pastors and teachers" (Frykneberg, 2008, p. 149). Yet Collins maintains that Ziegenbalg is one of the few exceptions, as "Generally speaking Catholics have been more open to the concept of adaptation than Protestants have" (Collins, 2007b, p. 17). To turn to Anglicanism, Paul Collins suggests that inculturation was a much later priority for the Anglican Communion than it was for Catholicism and the World Council of Churches [WCC] (Collins, 2007b, p. 42) and Phillip Tovey even goes as far to suggest that the outcomes of Vatican II were influential upon the

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[85] For a good overview of Ziegenbalg in Tranquebar, see chapter 2 of *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians, 1706-1835* by D. Dennis Hudson [2000]. Also, Daniel Jeyayraj's article 'The Struggle of Dalit Christians in South India for Their Identity and recognition' [1997] mentions that "Ziegenbalg never permitted caste distinction in the church because it was against the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jeyaraj, 1997, p. 244). This attitude to caste in the church puts him in direct contrast to de Nobili's own attitude.

Anglican Communion (Tovey, 2004, p. 149). For example, whilst the very first Lambeth Conference [1867] recognised that there should be 'the right to adapt and add to services as circumstance required' (in Collins, 2007b, p. 30) this is certainly much later than, say, the stance of the Jesuit Order concerning inculturation: e.g. with the inculturative missions of Robert de Nobili and Matteo Ricci[86]. So it is clear why Collins says that the Anglican Communion was slower on the uptake with embracing the deliberate concept of inculturation. However, other Protestant traditions such as the Lutherans should not be forgotten. Whilst this thesis has drawn predominantly from the Catholic traditions, that is not to deny the significance of Protestant inculturation or their contributions, it just so happens that the case studies I selected from Christian traditions were Catholic[87].

Methods of deliberate inculturation as expressed by Church documents and initiatives

As far as the methodology of deliberate inculturation goes, it is backed by Vatican II and other such documents in the Catholic Church[88], and the principle is similarly backed by the Anglican Communion. To look at just one example, one of the Constitutions from the Second Vatican Council gave permission for liturgy to be in the vernacular, rather than solely in Latin. This document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, marked a huge change for the Catholic Church[89]. In section C, it is acknowledged that "...the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people..." (Ch.III,C,36.2; see Vatican Council, 1965, p. 150). With this in mind, the document authorises the use of vernacular languages where appropriate and where properly authorised; the use of the vernacular not only has to be approved by Bishops but also by the Holy See, that is, the Vatican directly. This is not just for readings, prayers and chants, but also for "Translations from the Latin text into the mother tongue which are intended for use in the liturgy…" (Ch.III,C,36.4; see Vatican Council, 1965, p. 151). The use of local language,

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[86] See chapter 4 of this thesis for more detail on Ricci.

[87] This does relate back to my earlier point in the methodology that I would not simply select a case study for the sake of balance, and I said that Protestants such as Bishop Azariah had initially been considered, but not made the final eight case studies selected.

[88] It was a particular outcome of Vatican II; to name but a few of the documents that address inculturation and the issues surrounding it *Mediator Dei, Evangeli Praecenes*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (see Collins, 2007b, p. 23f).

[89] This is not just in terms of inculturation. However, for the purposes of this study, the nod towards the use of the vernacular can be seen as a certain step towards inculturation, for one of the most significant outcomes of inculturation is the use of local language.

then, is to be officially overseen, and this is further acknowledged in section D: "Because liturgical laws often involve special difficulties with respect to adaptation, particularly in mission lands, men who are experts in these matters must be employed to formulate them" (Ch.III,D,40.3; see Vatican Council, 1965, p. 152). This section deals specifically with adapting the liturgy to cultures and traditions, and the above excerpt demonstrates that change in language is not a simple move, but this is perhaps to safeguard and preserve the teachings, doctrines and liturgy of the Catholic Church. It is then a well-thought out and careful process. Perhaps the most significant part of this document for inculturation however is in Section D, part 38:

> Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is maintained, the revision of liturgical books should allow for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, religions, and peoples, especially in mission lands. Where opportune, the same rule applies to the structuring of rites and the devising of rubrics (Ch. III,D,38; see Vatican Council, 1965, p. 151).

Not only is the Catholic Church authorising the use of vernacular, it also agrees to 'legitimate variations and adaptations', whilst still stressing the unity of the Roman rite. This document is just one among many that would lead towards affirming the *deliberate* method of inculturation in mission post Vatican II. Presumably the emphasis on preserving unity and the thorough checks of adaptations they wish to make are made to avoid charges of syncretism. The World Council of Churches, as an example of an organisation of denominations rather than an example of just one church denomination itself, refers to Syncretism in Section E of its *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, [1979] which looks at the dangers of taking inter-faith dialogue too far. It recognizes that "There is a positive need for a genuine 'translation' of the Christian message in every time and place" (Section E, part 25. WCC, 1979) which certainly fits the remit of the work that inculturation/contextualization engages in. The danger lies in syncretizing two religious traditions, and thereby "compromis[ing] the authenticity of Christian faith and life" (Section E, part 27. WCC, 1979) and this is something that Saccidananda ashram has been accused of. It particularly refers to the Church in India in part 29, referring to the fact that inculturation is an evolving process:

> There is need within the ecumenical fellowship to give one another space and time, for instance, in India or Ghana to explore the richness of the Gospel in a setting very different from that of "Hellenized" Europe (Section E, part 29. WCC, 1979).

This is an important consideration of the work of inculturation; its methods vary depending on the culture and the extent to which that is problematic may only be apparent once the Church begins to be inculturative. For example, inculturation may be seen as going too far in its efforts to inculturate, perhaps through its incorporation of offering flowers during the Mass for example. Inculturation, then, is certainly backed by the Anglican and Catholic Churches as well as important bodies like the WCC; however Collins remarks that "...while the churches were explicit in their statements that change should occur, the imperatives underlying this remain largely implicit or ignored" (Collins, 2007b, p. 23). However it should be noted that inculturation, at least as recognized by the Church in some capacity, is a relatively young initiative and therefore still in that experimental stage, and may eventually evolve to a point where the imperatives (which Collins believes are currently only implicit) (Collins, 2007b, p. 23) are still working towards becoming explicit. Interestingly, *Ecclesia in Asia* argued that "The test of true inculturation is whether people become more committed to their Christian faith because they perceive it more clearly with the eyes of their own culture" (Pope John Paul II, 1999, Chapter IV, Section 22). If that is the case, then inculturation can really only be judged by its fruits, and this will certainly take time to come to the fore.

Collins remarks that the Church of South India does not approve of the language of inculturation, preferring to talk rather of "inter-cultural" experimental liturgy (Collins, 2007b, p. 159). This is because as far as they are concerned inculturation is a similar process to Sanskritization[90] (Collins, 2007b, p. 159) – it is a conscious effort to be socially mobile by adopting Hindu culture which is associated with Brahminical Hinduism, like the ritual use of the four elements in worship. However, the methodology employed is similar, as is that of the Catholic Church, involving the adaptation of liturgy or materials used during worship according to Hindu cultural norms. For example, The 'All Indian Meetings', beginning in 1968, gave twelve examples where they felt it would be authentic to use Indian-style symbolism and actions in the liturgy (Collins, 2007b, p. 145). These included the use of oil or camphor lamps instead of candles, semi-prostration rather than genuflection and the use of chapatti instead of wafer during the Mass (Collins, 2007b, p. 145). This was approved by the Holy See (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 8). Semi-prostration as opposed to genuflection is a really good example of inculturation, as both offer the same purpose (to revere something holy) but genuflecting is a

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[90] Sanskritization is a process whereby Hindus of lower caste or of no caste (dalits and adivasis) mimic the lifestyles and rituals of higher castes (Brahmins in particular) in order to become more socially mobile. Johnson offers examples such as becoming vegetarian (Johnson, 2009, p. 289) and identifying their local deities with those found in Brahminical Hinduism (Johnson, 2009, p. 290). He also points out that this term is originally an anthropological one, developed by M N Srinivas (Johnson, 2009, p. 289).

Western notion, and one that might not convey reverence as well as semi-prostration, something common to most Indian religious traditions.

The Church and the Caste System

Mosse makes the interesting point that inculturating the Church in India meant that the Church, knowingly or not so, allowed certain aspects of Hindu religious-culture to be retained, such as allowing the caste system to flourish within its walls (Mosse cited in Kim, 2003, p. 120). This was certainly the case with de Nobili who not only allowed caste practice but indeed encouraged it by setting himself up as a Brahmin and only converting the high caste Hindus, leaving the Pandâraswamis to convert the lower castes. Dalit theology, it would logically follow, is then not supportive of inculturation which "...draws on high-caste or Brahminical traditions, and would probably characterize the Hindu-Catholic synthesis arising from de Nobili's mission as simply a Christian form of high-caste Hindu hegemony" (Mosse, in Kim, 2003, p. 120). Inculturation, at least from Mosse's point of view, 'was resented because it used Brahminical or other high caste sources to draw upon' (Kim, 2003, p. 121). Therefore the Church needs to move away from inculturating at least those aspects which merely reflect Hindu religious-cultural elements, such as the caste system and the stigmatization of dalithood which goes hand-in-hand with that. Geoffrey A. Oddie also points out that perhaps the reason why Indian Christians were not particularly welcoming of inculturation is that "...they had already rejected 'Hinduism' and, being in many parts of India in a small minority, feared losing their distinctive identity as Christians" (Oddie, 2001, p. 354). This is a key issue; inculturation seeks to alter the *aesthetic* religious identity of the Church from 'Western' to 'local', and in doing so in India it has drawn upon Hindu elements of culture. However, by doing this it is claimed that it is watering down Christian identity, which is already in the minority, when perhaps Indian Christians may want to be distinct in their religious identity. This is of grave importance to persecuted Christians in India, whose religious identity is a symbol of resistance against right-wing Hindu ideologies but at the same time is also something which marks them out as vulnerable.

Amaladoss points out an important need for balance here. He argues that whilst it is true that the use of the dominant Hindu culture in inculturation does sideline dalits who make up the majority of the Church, the Church in India still has a responsibility towards Christian mission amongst Indian people generally (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 11). Hence, the dominant culture cannot be completely ignored; Amaladoss claims that the dominant culture "...it has its own positive elements and [which] determines the overall life of the country" (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 11). It would be far more sensible to call upon an Indian Church which reflects the cultural context; if

a particular Church is made up of dalits then of course any inculturation that occurs should reflect that. However, a blanket ban on using non-dalit culture would sideline the minority of caste Christians, the other thirty per cent. Of course, the extent to which dominant culture is assimilated into the Church has to be carefully considered, especially concerning issues of caste – caste discrimination has no place within the Church.

Inculturation, then, in its more deliberate form, is a recent priority or initiative of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, supported by various bodies like the World Council of Churches as well as its own legislative documents. Places like Saccidananda ashram are perhaps best understood as inculturative, even if Monchanin and Le Saux did not set out with such a schema in mind as this is essentially post-Vatican II language. Whilst inculturation is still in its experimental stages, as are the theology and language of inculturation, it seems that with the backing of the Church inculturation may well be an initiative that continues to try and make the Church more adaptable to the culture it is situated in. However, it is vital that the criticisms it evokes must be answered carefully and with humility. The importance of the methodology of inculturation for this study lies in the controversy and problems it has evoked at (as well as the success of) Saccidananda ashram and various examples of inculturated Christianity since then, with particular relevance to issues of religious identity. But it must also be weighed against dalit theology, and the less desirous outcomes of a deliberate inculturation in India which involve a continuing relationship with at least some aspects of caste within the Church.

The relationship between religion and culture in India

Hindu, in the modern sense, is used both as a cultural identity (especially re: Hindutva) and a religious one, albeit as a very broad descriptor of religious identity. Upadhyay certainly took the line that 'Hindu' could be used as a marker of culture, thereby permitting him to describe himself as 'Hindu-Catholic' (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 25). Yet the numerous criticisms which inculturation can evoke highlight the ways in which the relationship between religion and culture is variously understood, particularly with regard to the Indian context. The understanding of this relationship is vital for this study, because it has been shown that inculturation tends to borrow at least the *aesthetical* religious identity of Hinduism. Are these aesthetics to be understood as merely cultural? Or is it that inculturation tends to be criticized because there is little distinction between religion and culture in India? There are real, tangible examples of religion and culture crossing over in India, for example the use of āratī in both religious and non-religious settings, one to invoke the presence of the deity and the latter to welcome guests. This sort of cross-over is not evident in Britain for example; it is not

customary to welcome someone into your home by offering them a Eucharist! So how is the relationship between religion and culture to be understood?

Chris Jenks expounds a four-fold typology of culture, and the third and fourth categories relate to my own definition of culture and how I will be defining it in this thesis. The third, "Culture as a descriptive and concrete category" (Jenks, 1993, p. 11) is "viewed as the collective body of arts and intellectual work within any one society" (Jenks, 1993, pp. 10-11). The fourth category, 'social', regards culture "…as the whole way of life of a people" (Jenks, 1993, p. 11). In particular this fourth category can be linked to the argument concerning religion and culture, as I will argue that 'a way of life' in a culture can be religiously based. Indeed, he later argues that "Theology frequently presumes that the beliefs, symbols, and practices of the believing community are a culture…"[91] (Jenks, 1993, p. 24). To return to my own definition of culture outlined in the introduction, I argue that 'culture refers to the social environment of the case study in question' and for me, religion is very much a key aspect of those environments. Furthermore, Terry Eagleton writes that "Culture is not only what we live by. It is also, in great measure, what we live for" (Eagleton, 2000, p. 131). Religion cannot only provide moral guidelines to 'live by', but for people of faith their religious beliefs and practices are something of intrinsic value to them. In terms of the relationship of religion and culture, Sheila Greeve Davaney says that "Religious beliefs, practices, identities, values, institutions, and even texts are all now seen as elements within and products of cultural processes" (Greeve Davaney, 2001, p. 7). Whilst these religious things are 'elements within cultural processes', at the same time it is important to point out (perhaps somewhat obviously) that there are other aspects of culture which are non—religious; in my definition in the methodology I gave examples such as language, customs, structure of society. If an aspect of culture is, say, the way in which society is structured, then the debates over whether the caste system is a religious or culture structure perfectly illustrate my point – that it can be hard to categorise something as *either* cultural *or* religious. Essentially, what I hold to is that the view that religion and culture are not easy to distinguish between. Greeve Davaney further argues that "The study of religion…is making a claim on being an important, if not always recognized, component of the study of cultures" (2001, p. 8). By studying inculturation, I am necessarily involved in studying culture, the way it is adapted or borrowed from for Christian usage but I also recognise that inculturation can be controversial for *appearing* to be syncretic; such a criticism is only possible if religion is understood as an aspect of culture. Therefore, throughout this thesis I will side with the opinion

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[91] To contextualise that statement, Jenks is referring to culture in 'a modern sense' (Jenks, 1993, p. 24); he had earlier defined the modern concept of culture "focused on culture as an ordered system of meanings informing social practices" (Jenks, 1993, p. 24).

that religion and culture are not distinct concepts, but related: there is more to culture than religion, but as my facets suggest the 'cultural facet' is only one aspect of (double) religious identity. However, the case studies (particularly those who are involved in inculturation) do at times see a distinction between the two, and this is important to realise in order to understand their double religious identities.

The case studies' understanding of religion and culture

de Nobili, Sen and Upadhyay all contributed to the debate about the nature of the relationship between religion and culture in India; for them Christianity could be authentically Indian (in terms of culture), without losing the integrity of (spiritual) Christian truth-claims. Each of these case studies can be understood as contributing in their own ways to this debate about how religion and culture can interact with each other whilst still retaining their Christian integrity. For example, de Nobili saw the merit in understanding some Hindu practices as purely social – this was vital to his missionary work, in order that people would not be dissuaded from converting on the grounds that doing so would mean estrangement from their culture. Sen, as much as he was a supporter of Western thinking and indeed British colonialism, wanted Jesus recognised as Asian, not Western, and in turn the Church as possible of being grounded in Indian culture. Upadhyay was perhaps the most pro-active in terms of his efforts to establish an Indian Christianity, even if such steps as a Catholic maṭha were tentative. His distinction of samaj and sadhana dharma gave him grounds to retain Hindu culture even after his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Their efforts ultimately have led to what are recognised as some of the aims of the inculturative movement now, but some of their legacies are not so welcome, in particular their focus on 'caste' Hinduism and their attitude to the caste system itself.

Upadhyay completely distinguished between Hindu culture and Christian faith; more contemporary scholars such as Hans Staffner[92], and H.L. Richard[93] also make such a distinction. David C. Scott, however, questions the realism of such a claim:

> Even though some Hindus accept a distinction between culture and religion, the distinction between samaj dharma or religio-social identity and sadhana dharma or private subjective religious experience would not be acceptable to most Hindus, as

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[92] He sees Hinduism as purely cultural (See Robinson, 2004, pp. 186-187).

[93] e.g. see his article 'Evangelical Approaches to Hindus' [2001]

there is no such distinction for them. In the Hindu tradition all is social and all is religious (Scott, 1990, paragraph 52).

That aside, Scott goes on to argue that "…in the context of the past where converts had been forcefully drawn from their community and made outcastes, this approach has much to its credit" (Scott,1990,paragraph 52). The issue of religion and culture and the degree to which they intersect, if at all, is what seems to lie at the heart of the imperative to inculturate. If, as Scott argues, the majority of Hindus would see no separation between religion and culture then this at least explains why inculturation of the Church has, on occasion, been accused of disguising Christianity as Hinduism. Whereas deliberate inculturation recognizes itself as borrowing from Hindu culture rather than religion, and consciously makes such a distinction, Hindus who do not see any distinction therefore might be led to assume that Christianity is being deceptive by trying to make itself look and feel Hindu, in a religious *and* a cultural sense (which are one and the same from their perspective). Quite possibly then, the view one takes on the impact (be that positive or negative) of deliberate inculturation hinges upon the understanding one has of the relationship between religion and culture. This is a vital consideration for perceptions of (double) religious identity, because the taking on of a 'Hindu cultural' identity might be construed by someone else as taking on a 'Hindu religious identity'. Bearing that in mind, 'culture' and 'spiritual' facets of religious identity needed to be represented separately in this thesis, but it is also important to emphasise that there is a strong link between the two.

Thomas Thangaraj takes the complete opposite view and argues that inculturation makes a:

> …*clear distinction*[94] between religion and culture. While religious beliefs and practices are shunned as non-Christian, the cultural milieu is accepted as that which enhances the liturgical and spiritual life of Christian communities (Thangaraj, 2008, pp. 161-162).

In that sense, for the purposes of deliberate inculturation, there is no relationship, as religious elements are separated from cultural practices; such an attitude clearly validates the work of pioneers like Robert de Nobili who sought to and indeed did make such distinctions themselves. Nevertheless, there is also the underlying, quiet discomfort in that only taking on board what other *cultures* have to say, and not their *religions*, suggests an understanding of religion and culture which has a slightly exclusivist echoing, an unwillingness to learn from the

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[94] Emphasis is mine.

other. It also gives the impression of a one-way borrowing, and if deliberate inculturation is indeed related to dialogue, then surely a deeper more successful dialogue and inculturation should be two-way. There has to be a link perceived between religion and culture if dialogue, be that through inculturation or something else, is to be more than just a one way borrowing, a vague understanding or even a possible a dismissal of what 'the other' has to say. Brian Stanley remarks that, unlike in the West, "In most non-western societies…it is much more difficult to delineate the boundary between what may be labelled 'culture' and what may be labelled 'religion'" (Stanley, 2007, p. 26). Perhaps then this is why Upadhyay took his vision further than de Nobili: as an Indian rather than a Westerner Christian, Upadhyay was more comfortable borrowing from Hindu culture, even those parts which seemed overtly religious to others. However, being so comfortable with doing so is surely what must have led people like Zaleski – who opposed Upadhyay's desire to found a Catholic maṭha (Lipner, 1999, p. 223) – to distinguish between religion and culture. Because the boundaries are more porous between culture and religion in India than in Western countries, inculturation can sometimes be seen as going too far down the road of borrowing from other religions or, in the circumstances of these case studies, borrowing from Hinduism.

Concluding Remarks

The crucial detail here is that the way in which one interprets the relationship between religion and culture is what informs one's reaction to the praxis of inculturation. This is certainly the basis for K.P.Aleaz's criticism of inculturation as a whole, that:

> Inculturation goes against the Indian vision of integral relation between religion and culture…This is because it separates religion and culture and then tries to take in some cultural aspects, after Christianising these (Aleaz, 1994, p. 62).

Aleaz sees an "integral relationship" (Aleaz, 1994, p. 54) between Indian culture and Indian religions which is forced apart in the process of inculturation[95]. Specifically regarding the Indian context, religion and culture are not easily separated; rather they appear to be hand in hand.

Understanding the relationship between religion and culture is indeed difficult, but for the purposes of dialogue and inculturation in the Hindu-Christian sphere it will be argued that the two cannot always be separated. Certainly there exists a link between them, which explains the

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[95] He does note that "the case of the West may be different" (Aleaz, 1994, p. 61).

occasionally hostile reception to attempts at Christian inculturation in India. Amaladoss stresses that the relationship between religion and culture is a dialectical one (Amaladoss, 1998, p. 62) and this tension is nowhere more explicit than in arguments about the adequacy of inculturation. Hinduism, being a variety of beliefs, practices and religious communities, is a meeting point of religion and culture. This continuous overlap means that when inculturation has been attempted or has naturally arisen it has been greeted with varying degrees of positivity – there are those who attempt, like Upadhyay, to theologically separate the two, and de Nobili is another example of someone who took great pains to do so. People like Goel, on the other hand, take great offence at the religious and cultural elements of Hinduism being used in a Christian way, arguing that to separate Hindu culture from Hindu religion would do "…irreparable damage to both" (Goel, 1994, Chapter 2, Paragraph 15). That a link exists does not mean that it is not possible to completely separate the two, it is just that in India they do appear to be naturally intertwined. de Nobili did manage successfully to separate some cultural and religious elements, by convincing Rome of the purely cultural aspects of certain practices, like the use of sandalwood and the sacred thread, but that was a concentrated and difficult effort to do so, which others dismiss or criticise at times. However, to dismiss a link altogether would be to ignore the areas of Hinduism where religion and culture, like in the use of āratī, obviously overlap and to dismiss too easily the critics of inculturation, who see inculturation as nothing more than a devious disguise for proselytizing. This is surely a point of Hindu-Christian dialogue in its own right.

Hindu or not? Dalit culture and Religiosity

This question about whether or not a dalit would see Hinduism as their own religo-cultural paradigm is complicated but essential to understanding why inculturation, at least in its early and colonial forms in India, is not always welcomed. The main issue is the debate over identifying dalits as 'Hindu' in the first place. Many dalits reject key Hindu principles like karma, and the associated notions of purity and pollution, seeing these principles merely as justification for their continued mistreatment and oppression. Prabhakar comments in the chapter on 'Mission and the Dalit Issue'[96] that Hindu culture has been "…paradoxically equated with Indian culture" (Prabhakar, 1995, p. 106). This means that one of the big contentions is trying to understand just what religious-cultural background dalits have left behind them, if it is not a 'Hindu' one. This is why it is important to recognise dalit culture and religiosity as separate identities in their own right to Hinduism, as does (for example) James Theophilius Appavoo.[97] Wilfred also argues that some dalits outrightly reject the label of

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[96] In Sumithra and Hranghkhuma's edited volume, *Doing Mission in Context* [1995].

[97] e.g. see his chapter in Massey, 1994, pp.111-121.

Hindu, and along with it ideas about karma and rebirth (Wilfred, 2007, p. 133). Wilfred is explicit in his comment that dalits "...would not like to be identified as Hindus, but would speak about a distinct Dalit religion which interrogates the dominant Hindu religious tradition as upheld by the upper castes" (Wilfred, 2007, p. 133). So there is a conscious reaction against Hinduism, in this expression of a distinct dalit religiosity.

Perhaps the most obvious criticism of inculturation or the desire for an Indian church as it stands now is that there is a tendency for ideas of what defines Hindu culture to strictly revolve around 'traditional' understandings of Hinduism, or caste Hinduism. Inculturation is criticised for drawing solely or heavily on Brahminical structures or sanskritized forms of Hinduism; however as approximately seventy per cent of the Christians[98] (Louis, 2007a, pp. 7-8) "in India are estimated to be dalit, this Hinduism is not 'their' Hinduism, not their "own culturally familiar worlds" (Robinson and Kujur, 2010, p. 8) but those of caste Hindus. The Hindu culture being drawn upon to build the Indian church that de Nobili *et al.* were advocating and taking the first tentative steps towards, is one that is actually deeply alienating to the majority of Indian (dalit) Christians. However, as Robinson and Kujur seek to present in *Margins of Faith*, this Brahminical emphasis on inculturation has at least been recognised for what it is and there are examples of dalit/tribal communities being part of an inculturated church that adheres to their own experiences of and expressions of 'Hindu[99]' religiosity, which is mainly a reaction against caste Hinduism and more an expression of dalit religiosity. This is because the symbols being used in the inculturated church were drawn:

> …from the dominant religions and cultures. To the tribal context, this made little or no sense, thereby calling for a different process, which would be sensitive to tribal ethos, values and culture (Kujur, 2010, p. 47).

Inculturation in India then has had to become more holistic with the recognition that early attempts at inculturation (and the pioneers who followed this work up) were drawing from a

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[98] Also, "It is estimated that out of the 20 million Christians in India, comprising 2 per cent of the total population, nearly 70 per cent, that is, 14 million are Dalits" (Louis, 2007a, pp. 7-8). Rajkumar takes a slightly wider view, suggesting that between "50 and 80 per cent of all Christians in India were of dalit origin" (Rajkumar, 2010, p. 38). Either way that is at least half by the lowest estimate, which is a significant proportion.

[99] If one bears in mind the all-encompassing nature of the term Hinduism.

'Hinduism' that was predominantly caste Hinduism, and had side-lined the 'Hindu' religiosity and culture of dalits and adivasis[100], even though they populated the church in general.

Closing Remarks

The interactions of the Church with Hindu culture and the problems that brings, as well as the fruits of such actions, are pivotal to each case study. Whilst inculturation may deliberately come about through dialogue it can also be spontaneous, like with the St. Thomas Christians, as a result of the interaction of Hinduism and Christianity which was necessary because of inhabiting the same geographical space; this study is concerned with both. The church's deliberate attempt at inculturation, which whilst not always well received (particularly by their own colleagues as well as by some Hindus) it is still in its preliminary stages, being a priority of the Church only within the last fifty years or so. The process of inculturation is not welcomed by all, in particular by some dalit Christian communities, because of its tendency to borrow exclusively from caste Hinduism. It is felt that such a reliance neglects the religiosity of dalits and adivasis whose own religious expressions are very different to caste Hinduism; indeed their religions and even their deities may be seen as reacting against caste Hinduism. However, Amaladoss' point about the need for the Church to be able to participate in Christian mission means that it is not sensible to completely ignore elements of the dominant culture in inculturation, either.

This borrowing from high caste Hinduism is evident in both de Nobili's and Upadhyay's works, and both of them were also determined to use caste to their own advantage. Thomas accuses Upadhyay of 'emptying Christianity of its social ethical content' (Thomas, 1969, p. 257) by claiming that caste and Christianity could work together, and we have also seen how de Nobili is blamed for caste entering the church initially. Sen was a reformer caught up in ideas about hierarchy within society – just his attitude towards the British as purveyors of the Truth (in their role of bringing Christianity to India) is testament to that. de Nobili, Sen and Upadhyay are pioneers of the search for an Indian church in their own right, and in doing so they usually created confusion concerning their religious identities, the latter two more so than de Nobili, whose *aesthetical* identity caused a stir more than his religious beliefs and practices. Amongst others, they laid the foundations for the process of deliberate inculturation, and in that sense have contributed a great deal to the ways in which the Church should be seen as both willing and capable to adapt to a different context. By its very nature, inculturation blurs the aesthetics and externals of religious identity; so often cultural expressions are religious ones and therefore by taking on Indian cultural aspects the Church may appear to some to be taking

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[100] Adivasis is the term used to refer to tribal people of India.

on religious connotations as well, some of which are not always welcome, such as the prominence of caste discrimination in the Church in India. It is for this reason that inculturation has been included as a facet of double religious identity.

Each of the case studies will be shown to have religious identities which were blurred because of their interacting with Hinduism and Christianity in various ways. However that is not to say that their spiritual identities were eschewed, but rather that they had double religious identities in other ways, for example *culturally* and *politically*, (Upadhyay) *aesthetically* (de Nobili) and *theologically* (Sen). They made many important steps towards expressions of an Indian Christianity, despite the majority of them relying on caste Hinduism and at times the caste system itself in their various approaches. Jose Kalapura comments that "Indian Christian history has shown that wherever Christianity gradually gained ground without coercion under colonial dispensation, it assimilated indigenous customs and traditions and assumed local colour" (Kalapura, 2010, p. 91). This is evident from the case studies put forward in this thesis. This study is also concerned with a particular outcome of inculturation, which happened before during and after Vatican II, the ashram of Saccidananda; Collins even claims that Saccidananda ashram and Kurisumala ashram "…contributed extensively to the understanding of inculturation in the Catholic Church in India and by extension at Vatican II" (Collins, 2007b, p. 52). Inculturation, it will be argued, could be a reason for the occurrence of double religious identity, but only if the terminology is expanded to include various understandings of how double religious identity occurs, (exhibited here as the various facets, outlined in the introduction) rather than focusing solely on a spiritual crisis, cultural norms or synthesis.

Introduction to Early Case Studies

Christianity was not simply a colonial import to India; in fact it has (in some form or another) been present in India since the fourth century AD, attributed to St. Thomas' missionary activity there. However much debate may arise over the authenticity of such a claim, it still remains that Western colonisers were not the first to bring Christianity to India; when the first monastic missionaries arrived, they found, to their surprise, that Christianity was already present; not only was it present, but it had adapted certain indigenous practices, and also had a liturgy in the vernacular[101]. Frykenberg also remarks that "Europeans were shocked by the strange beliefs and practices of Indian Christians, many of which they attributed to 'heretical Nestorian' ideas preserved by the Church of the East" (Frykenberg, 1999, p. 159). Finding that they were not needed to introduce Christianity *per se*, but rather to rid it of the 'superstition' and 'heretical' practices it had acclimatized to, the western missionaries set about communicating their version of 'true' Christian belief and practice.[102] In Kerala, the Thomas Christians had become so much part of Indian culture that they were handed a high place in the caste system, and abided by the rules of purity in pollution, in particular those which governed the relationship with untouchability.

Some churches in India claim to have descended from the missionary activity of St. Thomas the Apostle, and are collectively known as the "St. Thomas Christian traditions" (Collins, 2007b, p. 116), including the Indian Orthodox Church, the Mar Thoma Church and the Syro-Malankara

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[101] Pre Vatican II, Latin was the language of Catholicism, and hence all doctrines, liturgies etc were in Latin. That is with the exception of St. Cyril and St. Methodius; Cyril "…created the Slavonic alphabet…" (Tristram, 2003, p. 91) and used it to translate scripture and liturgy (Tristram, 2003, p. 91) in the 9th century AD. Their Saints' day in the Latin Church falls on the 14th February, and hence they are often overshadowed by the other, more famous Saint remembered on that day, St. Valentine. Vincent Cronin also adds one other exception, that of Mandarin being used in China by Matteo Ricci (Cronin, 1959, p. 173).

[102] Perhaps the most famous Indian missionary was Francis Xavier, who is both criticized and applauded for his conversion methods. Duignan argues that Xavier "…failed to show respect for the Hindu religion" (Duignan, 1958, p. 726). On the other hand, however, Xavier ignored caste practices and associated himself with the Paravas, a low caste fishing group who had converted en masse to Catholicism out of political necessity (they sought protection under the Portuguese) (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 138). Through his catechisms, Xavier taught these Christians about their faith. (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 138).

Catholic Church[103] (Collins, 2007b, p. 116). From that viewpoint, it puts them among the oldest Christians in India. Collins remarks how:

> ...it is generally agreed that the rite used by the St Thomas Christians of the Malabar coast prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century was the East Syrian or Chaldean Rite of Addai and Mari, which in the West has been traditionally associated with the Nestorian heresy (Collins, 2007b, p. 141).

This means that from the earliest time its liturgy and practice were Eastern and not Western; the implications of the association with Nestorianism[104] will be explored in this chapter also.

By the seventeenth century, the Jesuits were having little success in communicating Catholicism to their South Indian neighbours, especially the high-caste Brahmins, and as a consequence were making very few converts. Upon his arrival in India, Robert de Nobili recognized that the few Christian converts that had been made were despised by their neighbours and families for associating with the Portuguese[105], who were called *Paranghi*, a derogatory term referring to their penchant for meat, alcohol… in short, their perceived immoral behaviour. de Nobili also observed very quickly that the caste system made it difficult to converse with people, and that the Brahmins were incredibly influential people when it came to religion/ritual and therefore needed to be reached with the Gospel first in order to influence the lower castes (Saulière, 1995, pp. 455-456). de Nobili eventually decided to become a *Sannyāsin*, adopting the *cultural* and *aesthetical* practices that he felt would enable him to converse with the Brahmins about Christianity, and which would allow Hindus to become

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[103] See Collins' excellent table on this page for a greater overview.

[104] Nestorianism is the belief that Jesus Christ had two separate persons, one human and one divine (Cross and Livingstone, 1997, p. 1138). Catholicism rejects Nestorianism as heresy – it was rejected at the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD – believing in the two natures of Christ as both fully human and fully divine, united in one person (Cross, 1957, p. 259). Nestorius, through his condemnation of the term theotokos ('Godbearing') (Hall, 2005, p. 212), which relates to Mary, "…was seen as making Christ a mere man…" (Hall, 2005, p. 213) and was in turn condemned. However, it is important to point out here that "With few exceptions, modern scholars, Roman Catholic, Protestant and in some cases Orthodox, acknowledge that he was orthodox in his thinking by the standards of Chalcedon, and not a 'nestorian' in the conventional sense: he clearly did not hold, as was alleged, that the man Jesus and the divine Word were two distinct persons, 'adding a fourth to the blessed Trinity' or that Christ was a 'mere man'" (Hall, 2005, p. 220). Nestorianism, then, is a complex heresy which the Western missionaries would have viewed negatively and as in need of erasing.

[105] At that time, the Portuguese were the ruling colonial power in the South.

Christians without having to give up their caste or important cultural practices. de Nobili's inculturation, then, is a deliberate process, rather than a spontaneous one. Of course, such an ideology was, and still is, not without its share of controversy and de Nobili, as will be seen, is often blamed for the infiltration of the caste system into the Indian churches because he so readily accommodated it.

What these chapters hope to show is that even before the modern period, there are concrete examples of people who had double religious identities within Hindu-Christian dialogue, but *not* on a spiritual level. For example de Nobili is an obvious *aesthetic* and *cultural* example of double religious identity in Hindu-Christian dialogue. Secondly inculturation, centuries before it was used in mission by Western Christians, was flourishing through the ways in which the St. Thomas Christians had naturally incorporated elements of Indian culture with Eastern Christianity. This meant that some of the *aesthetics* of Eastern Christianity in India, through the St. Thomas Christians, might come across as doubly religious in its identity to some, as it did to some Western missionaries, who accused them of syncretism. They are also a good contrast in that they represent two approaches to inculturation; one which spontaneously occurs, (St Thomas Christians) and the other which is directed for the sake of mission (de Nobili). These examples serve to strengthen the conviction that double religious identity is an umbrella term that needs clarification if the term is to do justice to such complex identities, in reference to those involved in Hindu-Christian dialogue.[106]

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[106] To attempt an all-out historical overview and analysis is not the point of the St. Thomas chapter. Robert Frykenberg's book *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* [2008] is an invaluable guide for those wishing to trace, historically and theologically, the history of the Church and Christianity in India.

Chapter 4: **The St. Thomas Christians – Early Christianity in India and its relationship with Indian culture (circa fourth century AD)**

St. Thomas seems to be a good place to start discussing the presence of the Church in India, particularly as some churches claim to have descended directly from his first converts. These St. Thomas Christians[107] were originally one community but the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, (who succeeded in claiming some of these St. Thomas Christians into the Latin Rite, and therefore the jurisdiction, of the Catholic Church) led to the first of many factions which would result in the formation of separate churches[108]. Contemporarily, these churches come under different communions (Catholic, Anglican, independent, Orthodox) and therefore have different liturgies and practices, following different rites including the Latin Rite, the East Syrian Rite, the West Syrian Rite and local adaptations of these. Although the account of St. Thomas the Apostle visiting India may only be viewed as legend by some, there are others who are more convinced of its authenticity, and whose entire church communities have based themselves around such a premise.

This study is not concerned with weighing up the evidence for St. Thomas' being in India (or counter arguments – which will be examined later – concerning Thomas of Cana and St. Bartholomew) but rather is concentrating on how some of the earliest forms of Christianity in India link themselves to him and, most importantly, how this Christian community was perceived and naturally developed as churches that were culturally Eastern, not Western; in particular the association with Syrian Christianity through Thomas of Kana means that Church authority would have come from the Syrian churches, not the Latin rite. They are indigenous churches in their own right, preceding the deliberate forms of inculturation which are the basis of some other case studies here. The St. Thomas Christians naturally borrowed from their own surroundings to express Christianity, but it should also be remembered that the Eastern Christianity that they knew was very different to the Western Christianity the European missionaries knew. Essentially, the St. Thomas Christians had a double religious identity because of the way in which the Church was *aesthetically* expressed, and the way in which their Christianity was suited to India. It is this which ultimately led to charges of heresy and

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[107] Variably known as Syrian Christians or Orthodox Christians.

[108] These include the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Church of the East in India, Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Jacobite Syrian Church and the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. (Nasrani Foundation, no date. See the following website - http://www.nasranifoundation.org/articles/historicaldivisions.html) The website cited here displays an excellent diagram relating to the history and divisions of the St. Thomas community into different churches, as well as an historical overview.

syncretism by Western missionaries – not only was the language different, but some of the practices and rituals were more familiar to Indian culture than Western culture, and indeed to the Eastern branch of the Church than the Western Church. This was something that the missionaries could not fathom. Perception, then, plays an important role in understanding the religious identities of the St. Thomas Christians. Their double religious identity is a result of blurring the *aesthetics* and *culture* of their religious identity, not their spirituality, and is best considered a type of *spontaneous inculturation.*

The hagiographies of St. Thomas, the 'other' Thomas and St. Bartholomew in India

The legend of St. Thomas in India is perhaps the most popular hagiography used to support the origins of the early Christian community there; however as will be seen other explanations have been offered, notably through St. Bartholomew and an Armenian man called Thomas of Cana. There are several stories relating to how St. Thomas (and, sometimes, St. Bartholomew) actually came to be in India; whilst they share basic themes, characters and plot, the execution of the stories reflect different local legends and attitudes. There are three notes of importance to be made initially; first, that St. Thomas is believed to have arrived in North West India first and then travelled to the south, to the coast of Malabar. Secondly, that various texts attest to his arrival, including apocryphal and gnostic books, historical testimonies by travellers and the writings of some Early Church fathers. As for the legend of St. Bartholomew, it is both lesser known and believed, however his role is still an important one in the understanding of how a Christian community is believed to have flourished in India since earliest times. As for accounts of Thomas of Cana, his coming is linked to the establishment of a Syrian Church in India, through his arrival with a small Syrian Christian community.

St. Thomas is believed to have founded seven churches in North West India, and converted some Brahmins there, performing many miracles as he did so. He then travelled to Malabar, possibly via China! (Thomas, 1954, pp. 15-16) The Acts of St. Thomas tell a slightly different story, albeit one where Thomas does end up in South India. It records that the apostles drew lots to determine where in the world each of them should go in order to spread the Good News of Christ; Judas Thomas is chosen to go to India but refuses, even when Jesus appears to him commanding him to do so. After being sold into slavery (by Jesus!) (Frykenberg, 2008, pp. 94-95) Thomas ends up in India, as the carpenter of the King Gundaphorus. (He was in fact sold to a merchant called Abban, who was looking for a carpenter on behalf of the King) (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 94). A variation on this story is that Jesus appears with Thomas when Thomas is talking to Abbanes (the trade agent of the King) about finding a suitable architect; Jesus then recommends Thomas to Abbanes, and "…Thomas, who recognized the Master took the hint and agreed to accompany Abbanes to India" (Thomas, 1954, p. 19). However, most if not all

accounts concur that when Thomas arrived in India, rather than build the earthly palace he was instructed to, he distributed the money amongst the poor[109], for which he was put in prison when the King discovered his actions. Later Gundaphorus and his brother are converted, and Thomas goes on his way making converts, through both his preaching and his performance of miracles. However, he incurred the wrath of another King, Misdaeus, when he converted his wife (Tertia) and son (Ouazanes) and is put to death for it, by being run through with spears[110]. The place of this martyrdom is believed to be St. Thomas Mount (in Chennai) and is a popular place of pilgrimage in the present day. However, there are other accounts of his death; that St. Thomas makes Kālī run out of her temple, and for this a Brahmin stabs him with a spear (this occurs in Mylapore) (Thomas, 1954, pp. 17-18) or that he was shot by a hunter shooting peacocks, who hit the meditating saint by accident, a story which is relayed by Marco Polo (Thomas, 1954, p. 28).

As for the arguments surrounding the historical authenticity that St. Thomas travelled and preached in India, the sources themselves are often scrutinized, and oral traditions (of particular significance in Indian cultures) are dismissed as mere legend. *The Acts of St. Thomas* was rejected as a gnostic text, and St. Thomas' travels into India are not mentioned in the Acts of Apostles or the Gospel writings. However, there are historical writings which attest to the presence of St. Thomas in India, or at least to the legends. Marco Polo, who has already been mentioned, witnesses a St. Thomas community (interestingly, of both Christians and "Saracens") who attend his shrine around the 13th century (Thomas, 1954, p. 27). Furthermore, the sixth century Christian writer Gregory of Tours writes about St. Thomas that he "...is declared to have suffered in India" (Gregory of Tours, cited in Thomas, 1954, p. 22). What is also of historical importance was the discovery of coins in the 19th century during excavations, which revealed that Gundaphorus was in fact a real King (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 98); such historical authenticity adds weight to the possibility of the story being grounded in historical fact.

And what of St. Bartholomew? According to St. Bede, this saint dressed as a sādhu when conducting his missions[111] (in Thomas, 1954, p. 26). Pantaenus and Eusebius of Caesarea both

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[109] By doing so he built a spiritual palace in heaven for the King – this can be paralleled with Matthew 6: 21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". This is the idea that spiritual wealth should take precedence over material wealth for those seeking after the Kingdom of God.

[110] See online source, *The Acts of Thomas* (1924, paragraph 164).

[111] There are obvious connotations here with de Nobili, Upadhyay and the founders of Saccidananda ashram, who all employed similar methods.

mention Bartholomew's mission in India, and a Christian community he founded, but interestingly do not mention St. Thomas (Thomas, 1954, p. 23). A contemporary of Pantaenus, called Rufinus, does however claim that part of India was given to St. Thomas to mission in, and St. Bartholomew in another (Thomas, 1954, p. 25).

Another issue that arises when trying to put together a summary hagiography of the St. Thomas Christian communities is that scholars talk of 'another Thomas' of India – this Thomas is referred to as Thomas of Kana or Cana (presumably a reference to Cana in Galilee, where the Gospel of John – chapter 2 – records that Jesus performed his first miracle, at a wedding). His presence is attributed much later than St. Thomas; in 345 AD it is believed that Thomas of Cana, an Armenian, landed on the Malabar Coast with a group of Syrian Christians. The evidence for this, according to Frykenberg, is that:

> Syriac documents indicate that it was the Catholicos of Babylon who sent 'Thomas of Jerusalem' (alias Thomas of Kana), and that when he arrived at Malankara, he was accompanied by a bishop, deacons and a group of men, women and children (Frykenberg, 1999, p. 155).

These Syriac documents that Frykenberg refers to then suggest that Christianity came to India not directly from an Apostle but rather through a group of Syrian Christians (headed by Thomas of Cana) who settled in India, having brought Syrian Christianity with them on a mission.

The variations to this story focus on who 'Thomas' was; is he the same Thomas who was the Apostle of Christ, or an Armenian merchant who brought Syrian Christians to India with him and proceeded to settle there? Furthermore, was St. Thomas accompanied by St. Bartholomew? After all, in an example of early mission practice from the New Testament, whilst Jesus was still believed to be with his disciples, he sent them out in *pairs* to heal and preach the word of God. (Luke 10: 1) If St. Thomas did indeed come to India, did he travel in the North or the South and, how did his death came about? The Church rejected the Acts of Thomas as heretical, which means it is not part of the accepted canon of Christian scripture, and is largely regarded as a Gnostic text. However, the legend of St. Thomas is of particular significance to early Christian churches in India, who claim to descend directly from his original converts, and hence serves as a myth of origin for the presence of the Christian faith in their own culture. The actual historical authenticity is not of concern to us, but the extent to which these Christian communities base its own history in the coming of St. Thomas to India is, as is the importance of that for them.

Historical Context and Church History

Missionaries who arrived in India from the West found Christians there, but none that they recognized as being orthodox, at least according to their own terms! For example, Br. Jordan, a Dominican, found Nestorianism rife among the Christians he discovered in India in 1321. He referred to these Christians as "…a scattered people, one here, another there, who call themselves Christians but are not so, nor do they have baptism, nor do they know anything about the faith" (cited in Neill, 1970, p. 23). The missionaries, then, would have seen it as their duty to have corrected the beliefs of the 'wayward' St. Thomas Christians. Under the Portuguese, some of the Thomas Christian communities would be brought under the wing of the Catholic Church, heralding a series of schisms among this early Christian community. However, Neill points out that the Thomas Christians "were incensed at being accused of Nestorian heresy" (Neill, 1970, p. 34) and Frykenberg suggests that this term was used to refer to ecclesiastical and geographical location rather than terms of belief (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 105). Nevertheless, the Synod of Diamper in 1599 ruled over and above the Thomas Christians, condemning "…the errors of Nestorius" (Atiya, 1968, p. 367) amongst the St Thomas Christians, asserting submission to Rome, a celibate priesthood was made absolute and whilst they were allowed to retain the Syro-Chaldaen language in their liturgies, everything else was purged and their heretical books and records burnt (Atiya, 1968, p. 367). Just over fifty years later in 1653, some Thomas Christians swore the Koonen Cross Oath, swearing that they would "...never again allow themselves to be subjected to rule by Catholic prelates from Europe" (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 368).

There was strong disagreement, then, about the 'right' and only way to be Christian and to be a Christian community in line with the orthodoxy of the (Roman Catholic) Church. The Western missionaries believed in the superiority of their own Christianity, and also believed it to be their duty to bring heretical Christians into line with their own Church, in this case, the Roman Catholic Church. The St. Thomas Christian communities, however, had survived in India for centuries without the Vatican, and those that made the Koonen Cross Oath seemingly saw no reason for entering into communion with them. Rome, however, had many reasons. One, they saw themselves (and still do) as the direct line of Apostolic succession, from the first (St. Peter) to the current Pope. Therefore, their Church is directly related back to Christ through Peter, and is therefore the only authentic Church according to them. Secondly, numerous disagreements had arisen between the Latin rite (Roman) Church and the Eastern churches. One such example is the issue of how Mary was to be theologically understood. The Latin rite Churches (then and now) believe Mary to be *Theotokos*, that is, "... 'Godbearing'; not quite the same as 'Mother of God', but very nearly" (Hall, 2005, p. 212). However, the Nestorians believed her to be *Christotokos*, which means "'…Christbearer'" (Hall, 2005, p. 212). Frykenberg states clearly

that the St. Thomas Christians refused to accept Mary as Mother of God, recognising her instead as Mother of Christ (Frykenberg, 1999, pp. 159-160) and this was a bone of contention for the Papal authorities. They perceived such a view as (Nestorian) heresy needing immediate remedy. Frykenberg also notes that other disagreements centred around the refusal of the St. Thomas Christians to venerate images, which he says is surely a reaction to being in a Hindu culture which explicitly venerated statues and other images of the gods and goddesses. He refers to this as being "...surrounded by Hindu idolatry" (Frykenberg, 1999, p. 160) but also because of their "...close proximity if not solidarity with Islamic and Jewish communities[112]..." (Frykenberg, 1999, p. 160). Hence they "...abhorred icons, idols or images of any sort..." (Frykenberg, 1999, p. 160). Islam is well known for not depicting Allah or the Prophet (although there are some exceptions[113]) and Judaism has enshrined it in one of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not make for yourself an idol..." (Exodus 20: 4) and the Pentateuch is littered with references to dire consequences for doing so[114]. What this demonstrates as well as is that the St Thomas Christians do not have a double religious identity on spiritual grounds –it seems that they resolutely ignored image veneration because it was too akin to Hindu worship of deities; there was a discernment process then of what was appropriate to integrate culturally (through a spontaneous inculturation) and what was not.

Local practice and liturgies: 'spontaneous' inculturation

Unsurprisingly, given the destruction of many works of both historical and religious significance during the struggle to make the St. Thomas Christians come under Papal authority, not much is known (or can be proved) of the worshipful community, its liturgies and the activities of the early Christian communities in India. Their liturgies, as already mentioned, were in the language of Syriac[115], and some of their practices had also become indigenized. One example is a birth rite, which is where a sixth month old baby is first fed rice, normally a rite associated with Hinduism, but according to Atiya was also performed by Christians in the Church (Atiya, 1968, p. 377). Frykenberg also cites the marriage ceremony of the St. Thomas Christians as including the traditionally Hindu custom of the tying of a tali around the bride's

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[112] If I sided with the view that St Thomas brought Christianity to India circa 1st century, then it could be argued that of course the issue of not venerating images has Judaic roots. This is because early Christianity was not clear-cut in its separation from Judaism, and so not venerating images would be very clearly linked to one of the Ten Commandments, as referenced above.

[113] For example, see O Grabar's article, 'The Story of Portraits of the Prophet Muhammad' [2003].

[114] See for example, the episode with the Golden Calf in Exodus 32 – verse 35 refers to their punishment.

[115] Syriac is a form of Aramaic, and therefore links them back to the early Church.

neck by her husband; he makes an important aside that this tali had a cross attached to it (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 113). Traditionally, a tali (in Hinduism) is a sign of auspiciousness, and "...is adorned with the insignia of the god the family worships" (Narayanan, 2002, p. 92) and therefore the cross substituted the image of the Hindu deity when it was used by the St. Thomas Christians in Christian marriage ceremonies. This is extremely significant; it shows that the St. Thomas Christians were not just incorporating the rites of local cultures and religions into Christianity but they were also *adapting* them as necessary. This important addition of a cross distinguishes the bride and groom as Christians, and the wedding itself as Christian. At the same time, it also enables the incorporation of an important local custom (in accordance with South Indian culture) into the Church, allowing the Christian community to continue being part of South Indian culture, rather than being external to it.

The St. Thomas Christians also shared strict rules regarding pollution, so for example the "family of a deceased person remains under pollution after burial until, like Brahmins, they bathe in the river on the occasion of the first feast to follow" (Atiya, 1968, p. 378). There are other ways in which the St. Thomas Christians incorporated the local cultures; Frykenberg notes that they had rituals for the removal of pollution which used ghee and ghur, plus "...their ways of handling food and drink and utensils, were very similar" (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 113) to the local Nayars. Atiya also notes simple gestures which show a oneness with Indian culture, like the removal of one's sandals at the door of the Church (Atiya, 1968, p. 384), as is custom in Indian temples be they Hindu, Buddhist or Sikh; this simple action is something which has continued up to the present day. As far as celebrating festivals go, they are "…marked with the Hindu paraphernalia, although the main feature remains the Christian *Qurbana*" (Atiya,1968,p.385)[116] and includes the use of umbrellas, canopies and flags in procession. As chapter eleven will examine, the borrowing of symbolism is quite common contemporarily (especially in the South of India) and perhaps it is to these early forms of indigenous Christianity that they are indebted to for that legacy.

What is important about these remarks on adaptation to elements of religious culture is that they do not appear to be 'forced' interactions, rather they seem to be natural developments by the Thomas Christians to the religious climate of India. The language is not Western, and neither are the liturgies, or its various indigenous practices, because the community of the St Thomas Christians was based on an Eastern Christianity. Whether that is through contact with the Church in the East or through the Apostle Thomas himself, the communities of Christians that the Western missionaries encountered were already well-established before they had even arrived in India. In their own establishing and understanding of Christianity, the St. Thomas

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[116] Qurbana is the Syrian term for the Eucharist (Atiya, 1968, p. 384).

Christians had brought in elements of Indian culture, which *aesthetically* echoed a very different Christianity to the one which Western Christian missionaries knew. Indeed, Podipara describes the St. Thomas Christians as "…Hindu in culture, Christian in faith and Syrian in worship" (in Amaladass,1989,p.16).[117]

Amaladass[118] claims that "There seems to be an overenthusiasm to read late twentieth-century theological reflection into the early Christian community in India". (Amaladass, 1989, p. 16) Rather, he says it is important to remember that they are simply reliant on a different Rite, the Syrian Christian rite, which was much more 'Eastern' in its approach to liturgy and theology. (Amaladass, 1989, p. 16) The influence of Hindu culture can be seen only in externals, according to Amaladass (Amaladass, 1989, p. 16) – because their "...form of liturgy and theology remained that of East-Syrian Christians of Persia" (Amaladass, 1989, p. 16). Hence, this thesis argues that the St Thomas Christians show a *spontaneous* form of inculturation, based on both their Syrian Christian rite (which was much more open to cultural influence) and the ways in which they altered the *aesthetics* of Christianity to fit in with Indian culture, which led to charges of heresy from the Western missionaries.

However, unlike Michael Amaladoss[119], I would be willing to place these (earliest) St. Thomas Christians under the broad term of 'double religious identity' – not because they were Hindu in spirituality as well as Christian in spirituality, but because they were perceived as having incorporated Hindu symbols and 'paraphernalia' (what is referred to in this thesis as 'aesthetics') into Christianity. The aesthetics of another religious identity (Hindu) had been incorporated into the religious identity of not only Christians but the Church. It is clear then that in order to understand the sheer scope of such a label as 'double religious identity' it is important to appreciate that it can be perceived as being blurred, because of the borrowing of the aesthetics of the religious other. However, that is not to downplay the significance of the tumultuous relationship between the European missionaries' understanding of what and how Christianity should be represented and ordered (i.e. as the Catholic Church) and the Indian Christians reliance on Eastern Christian forms.

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[117] Although Amaladass also notes that Podiapa has been criticised in turn for making such a broad remark (see Amaladass, 1989, p. 25)

[118] Amalad*ass* is not to be confused with Amalad*oss*.

[119] See the discussion in chapter 2 of this thesis where Amaladoss says "I am not a Hindu-Christian because I pray in an Indian language, even if some of the words I use are also used by the Hindus in their own religious context" (Amaladoss, 2009, p. 41).

Caste

There is one other adaptation to culture which has yet to be mentioned, one which may be considered a more negative consequence of integrating with local cultures and religions: There was also an adherence to caste; for example there is evidence of the infiltration of caste into Christianity in Kerala among the Thomas Christians. However, it could be argued that it was less an infiltration and more simply an acceptance of Indian culture. The St. Thomas Christian communities were granted a high position in the caste system, notably because they abided by its rules. Forrester observes that:

> …the caste system seems to have made it possible for Christianity to survive in Kerala, but on condition that it observed the norms of the system, in particular the prohibition on recruitment from 'other castes' and the acceptance of the rules of a radically hierarchical society (Forrester cited in Amaladass, 1989, p. 18).

Forrester makes two interesting points here. First, he implies that being Christian is linked to also being of a certain caste, as recruiting from other castes was 'prohibited'. Secondly, the St. Thomas Christians abided by the 'rules of a radically hierarchical society', i.e. the hierarchy of the caste system. This suggests nothing less than a complete acceptance of the caste system as part of Indian culture and indeed, as intrinsic to Christianity subsisting in Kerala. It is probably worth noting here that the St. Thomas Christians who have a high place in the caste system trace their lineage back to Thomas of Kana, the Armenian man who headed the group of Syrian Christians who came to settle on the Malabar coastline, rather than Saint Thomas. Brown suggests that, in the earliest days of the St. Thomas Christians, "The reason given for Christian observance of untouchability is thus pure expediency, so that the caste people would trade with and give or rent land to the Christians" (Brown, 1982, p. 174), which would make sense if the St. Thomas Christians were originally merchants like Thomas of Kana. They also shared much in common with the Nāyars. For example, Brown suggests that some of the wives came from that community and that they partook in each other's customs such as offerings made in Temples or offerings made to the Cross of St. Thomas (Brown, 1982, pp. 171-172).

By abiding by the rules of purity and pollution, including that which governs proximity to untouchability, the St. Thomas Christians (if indeed of Syrian Christian descent through the arrival of Thomas of Kana) were accepted into the caste system and were granted a high place within it. However, perhaps the most important reason given for the respectful place of Christians in Keralan caste society was because of "…the honourable place given by the rajas to the Christians, and of their assimilation in social custom to their Hindu neighbours" (Brown, 1982, p. 173). Brown goes on to describe their exact place in the caste system as:

...ranked after the Brahmans and as equals of the Nāyars. Many Christians would claim that there was Brahman convert blood in the community and that for this reason they were superior to Nāyars (Brown, 1982, p. 173).

It is interesting that these Christians wanted to prove that there was Brahmin ancestry among them, so as to be superior to the Nāyars – this sort of behaviour shows a real lasting integration with the caste system where they are constantly trying to show themselves as socially above the Nāyars, who are indigenous to India. To be ranked as just below the Brahmins and equal to an indigenous caste proves that the Thomas Christians must have been fully socially integrated and abiding by purity and pollution laws that constituted the new culture they had embedded themselves in; this demonstrates that the *cultural* facet to their double religious identity had interacted with Hinduism. The next case study, Robert de Nobili, is often blamed (especially by dalit theologians of the present day) for allowing the caste system to prevail in churches in India. However, it has been demonstrated here that even in the earliest days of Christianity in Kerala, one Christian community in particular were viewed not only as part of the caste system but as high up within it. Perhaps de Nobili is criticised for being a Western missionary and failing to act, but that would be a rather colonial remark, implying that the Western missionary de Nobili should have known better than the Syrian Christians (i.e. colonial attitudes would argue that because he is Western he is therefore 'superior', hence de Nobili should have acted with greater clarity) and that is certainly not an acceptable conclusion. What it does show, however, is that the relationship between caste and Christianity is one that begun from an early stage, and only in recent centuries has there been an impetus to severe such a relationship. For the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala, perhaps one of the earliest Christian communities in India, the caste system was advantageous for them, however uncomfortable that may be to hear now.

Closing Remarks

Frykenberg comments that "Nowhere in the world today are existing non-Western forms of Christianity older or more complex than in India" (Frykenberg, 2008, p. viii), which must be due to the legends associated with St. Thomas, Thomas of Cana and St. Bartholomew. Christianity's arrival in India led to thriving Christian communities that awaited Western missionaries upon their arrival in India. Some St. Thomas Christians claimed to be descended directly from the Apostle and his converts, and had localized their Church, using the language of Syriac, and had borrowed elements of Indian religious culture, even if in very basic ways, or in ways which contemporarily might be negatively perceived i.e. by adhering to caste rules, even becoming an accepted part of the caste system.

Whether or not the legend of St Thomas spreading the Gospel in India is fact or fiction, the point remains that a very early form of Eastern Christianity flourished in India until the arrival

of the Portuguese and their demands[120] that the Thomas Christians become part of the Catholic Church, distorting and in some cases destroying elements of an indigenous Christianity that had dwelt in India. However, through various schisms and even under the Catholic Church (who allowed them to retain their Syro-Chaldean language in the liturgy) the community of St. Thomas Christians still exhibit a spontaneous inculturation of Eastern Christianity with Indian culture in the early centuries. This is clearly in *aesthetics* and *culture*, for example in their use of the local language, paraphernalia and even the symbolism found in some rituals, like the birth rite which takes on a nominally Hindu aspect of rice-feeding and incorporates it in to Christian liturgy. Hence their use as an example of 'double religious identity' in this thesis should not be taken as a slight on their Christian faith but rather an observance of the extent to which they used elements of Hindu culture in Indian Christianity, (through a *spontaneous inculturation*). The ways in which their religious identities were perceived was as a result of some of the facets of their religious identity becoming blurred, incorporating both Hindu and Christian elements. It is not the same thing as being spiritually or theologically Hindu – they have not adopted the worship of Hindu deities or adopted a theology of darśan, they have instead adapted forms of Hindu worship for their own, Christian usage. Hence, they demonstrate how changing one or two facets can lead to perceptions of double religious identity.

Gradually, the idea of adapting Church to culture began to catch on, becoming more of a deliberate process rather than one that might just naturally occur. Inculturation was not always Indian led, however, (as it had been among the Thomas Christians) and indeed deliberate, Western-led inculturation has been criticized for being just another form of imperialism. The earliest nod to deliberate inculturation in India finds its roots in the work of a seventeenth century Italian Jesuit, Robert de Nobili, who found that Christianity was despised in Madurai because it was associated with the Portuguese, colloquially known as *paranghi*.

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[120] Albeit well-meaning, from their perspective.

Chapter 5: Robert de Nobili (1577-1656; in Madurai from 1606)

Robert de Nobili's methods for encouraging converts among the people of Madurai might be called bold and visionary, yet at the same time his handling of caste issues (in order to facilitate those conversions) are often negatively viewed, representative of the point at which caste discrimination was allowed to prevail within the Church in India. He acknowledged that Hindu converts to Christianity needed and wanted to stay within accepted Hindu society, which included the regulations of caste. Also, de Nobili realised that Christianity in Madurai was synonymous with Western customs, and was not seen in a positive light because of that. His missionary method, then, was concerned with identifying *cultural* customs that his converts could still adhere to after their conversion, and he took it upon himself to be a living example of how one could be *aesthetically* Hindu and yet spiritually Christian.

The policy of accommodation was by no means unique to de Nobili, although very few actually engaged in it[121]. Rudolf C Heredia remarks that "...the early Jesuit missionaries from the 16th and to the 18th centuries were men of dynamism and daring, pioneers at the cutting edge of change, pushing to the very limits the new frontiers of mission..." (Heredia, 1992, p. 19). For example, another Jesuit who engaged in adaptation (prior to de Nobili) was Matteo Ricci,[122] who used the policy of accommodation widely in his dealings with the Chinese people he was trying to convert, to no less amount of controversy. Peter Duignan cites an excellent example of how, in China, crucifixion "...was regarded as a disgrace..." (Duignan, 1958, p. 728); therefore to try and initiate conversions through speaking about Christ's crucifixion was problematic! However, rather than attempting to change cultural attitudes the Jesuits:

> ...accepted the situation; they neither denounced nor announced Christ's crucifixion, but waited until the converts had attained a deeper understanding of Catholicism before explaining to them the meaning of Calvary (Duignan, 1958, p. 728).

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[121] Indeed, "The church that the first Jesuits sought to introduce in India was to be a replica of the European church. Xavier and his colleagues did not consider in India the strategy of accommodation that their successors would pursue in China" (Cohen, 2008, p. 206).

[122] Cronin claims that de Nobili was aware of Ricci's methods in China and "hoped to apply similar methods in India" (Cronin, 1959, p. 91). For further readings concerning the Jesuits in China, and Matteo Ricci, see Nicolas Standaert's chapter, 'Jesuits in China', in Thomas Worcester's edited volume, *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits* [2008] and Yu Liu's article in *Journal of Word History*, 'The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy of Matteo Ricci' [2008]. There is also an interesting chapter by M. Antoni. J. Üçerler in Worcester, 'The Jesuit enterprise in sixteenth- and seventeenth- century Japan', pp. 153-168, which explores Jesuit mission practice in Japan.

de Nobili, then, was not the only Jesuit to engage in such mission practice, and he is of course a product of his Order[123]. As de Nobili points out when defending his methods he always worked with permission from his Superiors, exemplifying how the Jesuits could be sensitive in the ways in which they conducted their missions. However, that is not to say that some Jesuits did not agree with de Nobili's strange way of doing things! For example, Hollis reports that "Father Fernandes complained of him as a conniver in idolatry" (Hollis, 1968, p. 55). Whilst a hallmark of Jesuit mission was adaptation to culture, nevertheless some pioneers like de Nobili and Ricci were seen to go too far in this by some of their colleagues.

Interestingly, Clooney argues that de Nobili is an example of a missionary who offers "…a glimpse of the pre-history of comparative theology" (Clooney, 2007, p. 656), commending his theology as "…strikingly engaged works of scholarship" (Clooney, 2007, p. 656). It is important to remember that de Nobili is ahead of his time; by engaging with Hinduism he is engaging in a type of interfaith dialogue and for that he was perceived as having become idolatrous and of tainting Christianity with Hinduism. de Nobili's double religious identity is rooted in his aesthetical adaptations to Indian culture; in fact he sided with the theory that you could extract religion from culture. Despite this assertion that the elements he adapted were purely cultural, others perceived them as religious, or superstitious, and this led to a blurring of his religious identity. Like the St. Thomas Christians, his double religious identity is rooted in the perception of his actions as heretical, due to the use of (what he perceived to be) Hindu *culture* and *aesthetics.* Unlike the early St. Thomas Christian community however, de Nobili can be viewed as a pioneer of deliberate inculturation. This is because de Nobili made a conscious decision to adapt Christianity to Indian (specifically, Madurai) culture and therefore the inculturation of Christianity as advocated by de Nobili was not a spontaneous response – it was carried out as part of an overarching mission strategy, in line with his Jesuit background.

Background

So what exactly *was* de Nobili's missionary method? Upon arriving in Madurai, he became aware of certain problems, such as the rules and regulations of the caste system. In particular, there was the problematic label of *Paranghi*, a derogatory term which had been applied to westerners and therefore to Christianity by association (Saulière, 1995, p. 43). This made it difficult, if not near impossible, to converse with the Hindus in Madurai about Christianity. Initially, de Nobili refrained from eating beef as one way in which to distance himself from the

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[123] Clooney points out how Francis Xavier and other Jesuits "...dressed and ate differently, spoke and wrote new languages, and lived by different cultural customs" (Clooney, 2009, p. 88). Robert de Nobili, then, should not be understood as a unique missionary among his Order, as inculturation was prevalent among the Jesuits in different places, such as China and India.

paranghi label, and tried to speak Tamil rather than Portuguese (Cronin, 1959, p. 51). Also, as de Nobili came from a high-class Italian background, he thought that should he adopt a caste, the one to be was a Raja, one of the high castes of Indian society, on the basis that it was similar to his own [Italian] background (Cronin, 1959, p. 56). This new step, and that his partner who opposed his methods (Fernandez) was sent away for sake of "…a fair trial…" for de Nobili's method (Cronin, 1959, p. 57), opened the door for dialogue with the higher castes, who saw him observing caste rules and, crucially, saw him to be no longer associating with paranghi.

Most significantly, he later decided to became a sannyāsin, one who renounces the world in pursuit of mokṣa in Hinduism; Collins suggests it is possible that de Nobili felt that sannyāsa was akin to his monastic vocation as a Jesuit. (Collins, 2007a, p. 326) Aesthetically, this meant adopting the robes of a sannyāsa, and so he disposed of his cassock and wore kāvi instead (Cronin, 1959, p. 70). He also adorned his head with sandal, because he believed Indians to consider "…a bare brow naked and indecent…" (Cronin, 1959, p. 70). Later on, he would decide to present himself as a Brahmin sannyāsin. As a consequence of becoming a sannyāsin, he also disposed of the sacred thread, as is the custom upon renouncing the world in Hinduism, (he removed it sometime between the end of 1609 and the beginning of 1610 (Saulière, 1995, p. 111)) although the controversy of adopting the thread in the first place would prove difficult for him a long time after its disposal. He also allowed his neophytes to retain certain caste practices and customs which he believed were merely *cultural* and not religious.

The crux of de Nobili's missionary agenda was that he wanted to prove that certain Hindu customs were merely *cultural* ones, and therefore should not have to be given up on conversion to Christianity. He believed, furthermore, that by being allowed to retain such customs, the stigma of *paranghi* would be severed from Christianity, as change in spiritual belief did not then have to mean a change in culture also – this is something which inculturation essentially embraces. His missionary methods would bring him into conflict with some of his colleagues in Madurai. Whilst some would happily defend him and attest to the good of his work and indeed his Christian character, an Inquiry in 1610 (Cronin, 1959, p. 139) believed that "Father Robert's way of acting was a negation of the true faith, that his converts were not true Christians…" (Cronin, 1959, p. 154). He was also accused of being 'schismatic' (Cronin, 1959, p. 153). In short, de Nobili was seen as a heretic and they made official complaints to Rome about his behaviour, including his adoption of the sacred thread and his disassociation with his fellow missionaries. It is these two points which will now be examined[124], not only to discuss

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[124] There are many instances of de Nobili's missionary method that caused controversy; just two will be dealt with here, not as exhaustive examples but because they are of particular significance to this study.

how he justified them as cultural rather than spiritual practices, but also to analyse why doing so caused so much controversy. Essentially, altering the aesthetics of his religious identity and to a large extent embracing the local culture, in particular caste, could have led to perceptions of him, as an example, of being an idolater[125] hence the 'double religious identity', which is actually a reflection of culture and aesthetics, rather than spirituality.

Points of Controversy

Sacred thread

The sacred thread was a fairly turbulent adoption by de Nobili. At first, his decision to mark himself out as a raja meant that he needed to adopt the sacred thread, because a raja is of the twice-born castes, the higher castes, and the sacred thread distinguishes them as such. In traditional Hinduism, the sacred thread is conferred upon a young man during the Upanayana ceremony, an initiation which marks the beginning of his journey as a student; he can now study the Vedas (scriptural access is the privilege of the high castes) and the thread is to be worn for the rest of his life except for if/when he becomes a sannyāsin, at which point the thread must be discarded. Other than that, removal of the thread for a Brahmin removes him from his caste[126] (Cronin, 1959, p. 105).

de Nobili saw the thread primarily as a distinction of caste.[127] According to Cronin, he draws this idea from Aquinas, who said that actions could be either: equally religious and civil, primarily civil and secondly religious, or purely civil (Cronin, 1959, p. 107). de Nobili decided that the sacred thread was primarily civil (as a distinction of caste) and secondly religious (because the sacred thread gave Brahmins authority to perform rituals and recite scripture) (Cronin, 1959, p. 107). In his own writings, for example *The Informatio*[128], he gave eight reasons for why he considered the thread as civil and not religious; this included that

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[125] Quoted previously (Hollis, 1968, p. 55).

[126] de Nobili adopted the thread once he had become a sannyāsin however, against tradition, but Cronin points out that it was hidden under his ochre robes anyway (Cronin, 1959, p. 80); that is until he discovered that sannyāsin dispose of the sacred thread and followed suit (Cronin, 1959, p. 118).

[127] Indeed, the *Informatio* (from which the previous quotations were taken) also points out that Nobili undertook "there years of further study (1610-1613)" (de Nobili, in Rajamanickam, 1970, p. 231) to ascertain whether or not such customs were religious or civil.

[128] In the *Informatio*, de Nobili refers to it as '"The Brahminical thread" (de Nobili, in Rajamanickam, 1970, p. 240).

"Brahmins, who changed their religion, are forbidden to wear the marks of the religions they professed before. But they are not forbidden to wear the thread" (Rajamanickam, 1970, p. 241).

It seems that of all of his adaptations, the sacred thread was the most controversial; indeed he devotes considerable space to it in his *Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation*, which he wrote to the Father General to defend such adaptations (de Nobili, 2000, p. 53). Regarding the sacred thread, he argues that it is "...sign of their rank and office..." (de Nobili, 2000, p. 148) and of their educational status (de Nobili, 2000, p. 148). Perhaps the most important section here though is when de Nobili remarks on the attitudes of other people that the converts have to face:

> And yet, despite the resentment the heathens entertain against our brahmin converts, until now no one has ever asked them, "Why do you wear the brahmin thread?" Nor have they forbidden them use of it, which they surely would have done if the wearing of it had a superstitious significance... (de Nobili, 2000, p. 160).

A central concern of de Nobili is to establish the sacred thread's meaning by referring to the attitudes of other people in the community;' the fact that the converts have retained it without opposition suggests to him that this is a cultural marking, rather than a religious one, and it is on such grounds as these that he attempts to prove to the Father General that the sacred thread should be allowed to be kept by the converts. Regarding the actual composition of the thread, he remarks:

> ...just as a thread prepared from cotton yarn denotes the office of a Brahmin, so does a thread made from wool symbolize the function of a king, and made from hemp represent the occupational duties of a merchant (de Nobili, 2000, p. 151).

Furthermore, to back up this observation of his he refers to The Laws of Manu 2.44 (de Nobili, 2000, p. 152). According to Cronin, de Nobili extracted from this passage that the thread was primarily a matter of culture (Cronin, 1959, pp. 107-108). It is possible that this observation is what led to de Nobili adapting the sacred thread for his converts; if different sacred threads are used for different groups of society, then maybe the Christian converts could have one to represent theirs. His converts did not keep their old sacred thread, but were given a new one by de Nobili which had been carefully adapted for Christian usage. This included altering the appearance of the thread: Aesthetically, the sacred thread is made from three fibres, and it is worn across the body by Hindus, and as demonstrated above, made of different materials according to caste. de Nobili made his thread from three strands rather than five[129], and in

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[129] NB: The sacred thread, in traditional Hinduism, is made from five strands

different colours. Three of the strands were gold, symbolising the Trinity, and two were white, for the body and the soul of Christ (Cronin, 1959, p. 80). He also attached a crucifix to it (de' Nobili, 1881, p. 650). However, after all of this effort, he discovered sometime between 1609-10 that Sannyāsins discarded the sacred thread anyway, and so did likewise (Cronin, 1959, p.118). Cronin also claims that converts' relatives were angered by the crucifix hanging off the thread, and so this was worn separately around the neck (Cronin, 1959, p. 118).

The sacred thread that de Nobili wore was recognizable as such, but it had been adapted to reflect a Christian rather than Hindu ethos. Although the thread was perceived as being such an obvious marker of Hindu (religious) identity (and had caused quite a commotion among his contemporaries) this method was eventually authenticated by Rome.

Pandâraswamis

The Pandâraswamis were a late addition to de Nobili's missionary method, coming seventeen years after Pope Gregory's Bull[130] which authenticated and accepted de Nobili's missionary methods, in 1640 (Heredia, 1992, p. 30). This Bull granted them permission to continue using their methods, including wearing the thread (Saulière, 1995, p. 341). Therefore, this move did not create the furore that other methods (such as the paste and thread) had created, because their missionary methods had been formally authenticated by the Pope. However, it is important for this study because their introduction heightens the adherence to caste practices already distinctive of de Nobili's methods and his Madurai Mission[131].

In the Hindu tradition, Pandâraswamis were one of the highest Śūdra castes, who had low caste disciples but, crucially, were respected by the high castes (Saulière, 1995, p. 397). de Nobili decided to allow some of his own missionaries to imitate the practices of the Hindu Pandâraswamis, in the same way he had imitated the lives of the Brahmin Sannyāsins. The role of his Pandâraswamis was to convert the low castes to Christianity and provide encouragement to them after their conversion. Having the Pandâraswamis as a separate mission accentuated the already obvious distinctions that had been made between the old mission and de Nobili's,

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[130] This Bull came in 1623, but did not actually arrive in India (and therefore was unknown to de Nobili) until December 1624 (Saulière, 1995, p. 341).

[131] Saulière refers to an 'Annual Letter of 1643', which saw the pandâraswamis as distinct from de Nobili's method (Saulière, 1995, p. 415); indeed this letter saw Fr.Balthazar da Costa – the first pandâraswami – (Sauliere, 1995, p. 400) as founding a new mission (Saulière, 1995, p. 416). Nevertheless, Saulière argues that de Nobili's companion Fr. Martin sought to point out that this mission was founded by de Nobili, and therefore Fr. Balthazar was continuing his work (Saulière, 1995, p. 417).

that is, that the two missions should not mix so as to preserve caste distinction. The positive aspect of having this separate group of missionaries is that the high castes did not feel polluted (because their teachers were not associating themselves with the low castes) and still saw the sannyāsas as preserving caste distinctions. On the other hand, it made sharper the bridge between the low and high caste converts, and heaps more criticism (contemporarily) upon de Nobili for preserving caste in the Church[132].

Some of his methods, for example the adaptation of the sacred thread, caused such controversy because de Nobili's critics viewed them as religious, rather than cultural, symbols. For example, in its original form the thread seems like a religious mark, although de Nobili went to great lengths in his writings to prove that the thread was a marker of caste distinction, for example in his *Report Concerning Certain Customs of the Indian Nation* (see de Nobili, 2000, pp. 53-231) and therefore *cultural*, rather than religious. The adaptations he made, including attaching a crucifix, are ways he adapted them to make them appear Christian. With the thread, the argument is almost defunct anyway because de Nobili eventually removed his own thread in accordance with the life of a sannyāsa. However, he allowed his neophytes to wear the adapted sacred thread so that they did not seem to be renouncing their caste on embracing the Christian faith; this had been one of the problematic areas that de Nobili had pinpointed for neophytes and hence his decision to keep some form of a sacred thread was a direct effort to ease the cultural difficulties associated with becoming a Christian in Madurai. Indeed, preserving adherence to one's own culture if converting to Christianity is an area of missiology which is still fraught with complications contemporarily, possibly because of this ambiguous relationship between religion and culture. de Nobili's desire to keep caste regulations, both of his own accord and for his converts, seems to be at the heart of his missionary methods, in particular his desire for Pandâraswamis to convert the low castes. This plays, historically, to his strong desire to inculturate Christianity but at the same time it is also (at least contemporarily) his biggest stumbling block, for his readiness to accept caste rather than challenge it is seen as the starting point of Christian acceptance of caste within the Church.

Defending the Mission – The Goa Conference and its consequences

de Nobili's missionary methods were more than just frowned upon by some of his contemporaries; complaints were made to Rome and for that reason de Nobili needed to convince the authorities that his methods were not heretical, but were instead authentic and legitimate – within the scope of Christian faith – as a means of conversion. In February of

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[132] Saulière notes that the pandâraswamis took priority over sannyāsins and that this was seen as the future of the Madurai Mission (Saulière ,1995, p. 416).

1619, de Nobili was summoned to defend his missionary methods in Goa; The Goa Conference was specifically designed for the Archbishops and Inquisitors to pass on their opinion of the matter to the Holy See[133] at Rome (Saulière, 1995, p. 288). The Goa Conference, then, was a place "where the two Archbishops[134] and the Inquisitors would discuss the whole affair with a view to finding a solution that would facilitate conversions" (Saulière, 1995, p. 288), and hence was a key moment in de Nobili's career which would either make or break his Mission entirely.

The Archbishop of Cranganore was fully supportive of de Nobili's missionary methods, and told the Goa Conference that his method had been borrowed from "Apostolic times" (Saulière, 1995, p. 294). This is a clear reference to St. Paul's mission to the Greeks, and his desire to "become all things to all people", which de Nobili had consistently used himself to defend his method.[135] However, the opposition claimed that St. Paul's method had been distorted by de Nobili "...by mixing with it pagan rites and ceremonies" (Saulière, 1995, p. 296). de Nobili further stated that "I preach Christ openly, without fraud or disguise" (cited in Cronin, 1959, p. 219) for another charge made against him was that he was being deceitful in his Mission. de Nobili also wrote a letter to the Pope, pleading for the continuation of his Mission, claiming that "There is very little hope of reaping any harvest if the neophytes are not allowed to live according to their customs and keep the badges of their caste" (de Nobili cited in Saulière, 1995, p. 301). For de Nobili, the methods he had developed, which allowed the retention of *cultural* customs (which for him included caste practices) were the only way to really convert the people in Madurai to Christianity, and he felt vindicated in doing so by looking to St. Paul as his example, and also to the number of converts he had made, which he linked to being a blessing and authentication of his mission from God.

The conference itself ended in May 1619, but they would not receive word that their Mission had been authenticated by Rome until over five years later, in December 1624. In the meantime they were forbidden from making further converts. The extent to which de Nobili had to go to get his methods vindicated, resulting in the Bull *Romanae Sedis Antistes*, (January 31, 1623)

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[133] Whilst the Pope who ordered the conference was Paul V, he died in 1621. But his successor, Gregory XV still "...gave orders for the speedy settlement of the controversy" (Saulière, 1995, p. 325). It is perhaps worth mentioning here that until the matter *was* officially settled the Mission were banned from making further converts.

[134] The Archbishop of Goa and the Archbishop of Cranganore

[135] Cronin cites a letter to Laerzio (December 1608) from de Nobili in which he states – "Thus I adapt myself to their ideas just as Saint Paul adapted himself to the ideas of the Athenians, regarding the unknown God" (de Nobili cited in Cronin, 1959, p. 90).

(Saulière, 1995, p. 510) demonstrates just how controversial his methods were, such seemed its distance from mainstream mission ideology. However, it also demonstrates Rome's willingness to support de Nobili (tentatively), as a mission which was succeeding and which they were did not see as deviating from the Christian faith. However, it is important to mention that the Order of the Society of Jesus would eventually be suppressed in 1773. Whilst many reasons are given for this suppression[136], one of them is that it was fuelled by 'the Malabar Rites Controversy' (the broader name given to this episode in mission history when some Jesuit missions, like de Nobili's and his successor Father John de Britto, were attempting to bridge the gap between Christian faith and Hindu culture).

The Caste System and the Church

de Nobili faced difficulties from both Hindus and Christians for his pioneering work, and has also come under heavy criticism in recent years for his methods, most notably for his handling of caste issues and practices. Leonard Fernando, as just one example, suggests that de Nobili's method "...left behind deep scars of double oppression suffered by the dalit brothers and sisters" (Fernando, 2007, p. 188). But accusations against de Nobili run deeper than his treatment of dalits; Manickam claims that:

> Nobili sowed seeds of dissension in the Church and did a lot of damage to the unity of the Indian Church. In his attempt to win high caste Hindus Nobili betrayed the cause of Christ in India (Manickam, 1983, p. 53).

This is quite a strong charge – that his biases towards high caste Hindus, in his efforts to convert them, were actually a betrayal of not only his faith but also of Christ. The debate over caste discrimination in the Indian Church, and indeed the extent to which Christianity is seen to be accommodating caste practice in India, was problematic for de Nobili then (in terms of the reaction of some of his colleagues, such as Fernandez, who thought his missionary method was "scandalous" (Saulière, 1995, p. 64) almost as much as it is in the present day. However, Heredia points out that such accusations are "…a judgement based on hindsight" (Heredia, 1992, p. 36) presumably because of de Nobili's cultural and historical context. As far as de Nobili was concerned, the caste system was a cultural construct, and he recognized the consequences for Hindus who became Christians, i.e. the loss of caste and therefore their standing in society, and often the loss of family ties. From his perspective, accommodating the cultural ideology of the caste system into Christianity meant that more people were willing to

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[136] For further reading, see Wright, J (2008) 'The Suppression and Restoration', in Worcester, T. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 263-277 (especially p.264)

converse with him and therefore more people were likely to be open to conversion. However, by doing so de Nobili did two rather controversial things. Firstly, the chapel he built was segregated (as were Hindu temples) according to caste. This included separate seating for low castes, and a divisive wall[137]. The second thing he did was that his Mission eventually evolved into partaking of two types of missionaries; the Brahmin Sannyāsins that de Nobili emulated and the aforementioned Pandâraswamis.

It is perhaps unfair to heap all of the blame on de Nobili for the presence of the caste system in the Church today; Collins remarks de Nobili most likely saw parallels with his own social society back in Italy (Collins, 2007a, p. 329). Negative judgements of de Nobili's acceptance of caste are in that light anachronistic – de Nobili should be understood as a product of his time. If he did see parallels with his own European society, then of course he would have thought it wise to continue the cultural hierarchy in India regardless of religious conviction. In fact, doing so would be perfectly in line with his intention to help converts to Christianity remain culturally Indian, and not convert to European culture and therefore be seen as paranghi. Also, the efforts de Nobili made were bold and visionary at that time, he had attempted to both understand and immerse himself in a different culture, its religious makeup, its language...This was an unusual approach to take in mission, for he instigated dialogue, but one he took nevertheless and ultimately he achieved his end goal of making Christianity more approachable and possibly less stressful to convert to from Hinduism. Yes, in hindsight accommodating caste practices that continued to segregate people, be that in the Church building or in separate missions, is unacceptable from the vantage point of the contemporary context, but on the other hand de Nobili was one of the first successful missionaries to India and the Church has had a few hundred years since then to do things differently. It is not de Nobili's fault that caste practices have continued within its walls. Whilst he may have encouraged the practice, contemporary criticism has the advantage of hindsight - the fact that the current historical context is very different means that the responsibility to do something about caste discrimination within the Church lies in the present moment. Indeed, David Mosse comments that recently:

> …a Dalit-focused, caste-based approach to social activism gradually became the predominant form among activists within the priesthood, beginning with Jesuits of the Madurai province whose anti-caste 'social action ministry' inverted the social

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[137] This issue of divisive walls in churches and even in church graveyards is still prominent today, including in some parts of Tamil Nadu (See Natarajan, 2010; http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11229170).

'accommodations' of their 17th – century founder Roberto de Nobili (Mosse, 2010, p. 237).

It would seem that attitudes to caste discrimination within the Church are coming full-circle, beginning and ending in the very place where de Nobili started such a relationship. [138] By taking an 'anti-caste' approach to social justice, the Jesuits who are leading the way in dalit 'social activism' are to some extent undoing the separation of caste and church that de Nobili advocated and practised.

Identity and Dialogue

Despite his rather unique approach to dialogue and conversion, there is no way in which de Nobili can be seen as being both spiritually Hindu and Christian. However, he does have a double religious identity of sorts, through being Hindu in means of dress and custom; de Nobili serves as a great example of someone who has an *aesthetical*, and even acquired a *cultural*, Hindu identity, whilst remaining spiritually Christian, all for the sake of a Christian mission which would ease the stress of Christian conversion. He is an example of how two facets, *aesthetical* and *cultural*, can overlap in practice. The significance of his historical context should not be overlooked, as the Catholicism of the day was exclusive, much more so than it is now because (as previously discussed) Catholicism post Vatican II is inclusive (rather than exclusive) in its ideologies and attitudes towards peoples of other faiths. The Hindu *aesthetics* he adopted are what enabled him to spread the Gospel news, but they in no way reflect his spiritual religious identity; rather they were the means to the end of bringing people to faith in Christ, a faith which he himself never deserted. de Nobili, then, demonstrates the role that double religious identity can play in Christian mission, shown by his efforts in entering into dialogue and the conscious use of his *aesthetical* religious identity for the purposes of conversion. Whilst some might feel that de Nobili's actions were misguided, nevertheless this was once a good reason for entering into dialogue and therefore should be examined in a study of this nature[139]. The various accusations levelled at him are proof that the pioneering method which defined his career was indeed "marked by controversy" (Hedlund, 2008, p. 6) because of the way in which his religious identity was perceived.

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[138] However, Thangaraj argued that out of approx. 300 Jesuit priests, only 18 were dalits (Thangaraj cited in Mosse, 2010, p. 239) so were their intentions actually being lived out?

[139] However, some church bodies do still like to see and use dialogue as a tool in mission.

Closing Remarks

Centuries previous to Vatican II and the language of inculturation, de Nobili had been acting upon his vision for a Church that fitted the needs of the local culture, by allowing converts to retain *cultural* customs that were not damaging to their new faith as Christians, through adapting Hindu *aesthetics*. Although in line with Jesuit accommodation policy, "...his theoretical and theological methodology... is rooted in both the New Testament witness and the Catholic tradition" (Collins, 2007a, p. 326) also. Therefore his methods have historical and spiritual backing, not least of all in St. Paul[140] but also by Pope Gregory XV who in his Bull *Romanae Sedis Antistites* finally granted full backing and permission for all of de Nobili's missionary methods in 1623 (Heredia, 1992, p.27; also cited in Cronin, 1959, p. 229).

de Nobili's approach is both thought-provoking and provocative; his contributions to Hindu-Christian dialogue at a point in history when exclusivism was the agenda of the day are remarkable, although of course his contributions must be contextualised against the background of his Order who emphasised the importance of the policy of accommodation. By adopting a Hindu *aesthetic* religious identity, which in his own mind were simply *cultural* elements of Hindu identity, he did not impinge on (or make heretical) his own certainty of Christian conviction but rather attempted to make his faith more accessible, which was his desire in making converts. If de Nobili demonstrates anything here, it is that an *aesthetical* religious identity does not always mean that someone has to have a spiritually double religious identity too. That is why it is necessary to extend the terminology of double religious identity into various facets; just changing one of these facets can lead to a perception of double religious identity, but it is actually more complex than that. de Nobili's adoption of *culture* and *aesthetics* to put across the point of his own beliefs do point in the direction of some of the methods associated with inculturation, such as Indian Christian monastics who adopt kāvi and abide by the rules necessary for the life of a sannyāsin. Whilst the shadow of the caste system in the church does somewhat overhang his legacy[141], on the other hand his dialogical contributions and use of religious identity to help ease the cultural impact and shock of Christian conversion were bold and pioneering steps, which should not be overlooked.

The culture of India became de Nobili's own, so that he was not just suggesting ways for Indian Christians to be aesthetically and culturally Hindu, he also took it upon himself to demonstrate

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[140] St. Paul wanted to be "…all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some" (1 Corinthians 9: 22). See de Nobili's reference to St Paul (Cronin, 1959, p. 90).

[141] However, do not forget that in Kerala the St. Thomas Christians had also integrated Christianity with caste.

such ways in his own manner and mode of living, through the adoption of certain Hindu aesthetics, like kāvi, sandalwood and the sacred thread. However, by doing so he was perceived to have a double religious identity. By referring to his *cultural* and *aesthetical* changes, it has been argued that de Nobili's double religious identity lies not lie in matters of spirituality, but in the desire to allow Indian converts to retain their culture post conversion. Hence, de Nobili is a good example for demonstrating that by expanding the terminology of double religious identity, his own actions and identity can be better interpreted. Double religious identity, then refers to a much wider experience than a spiritual syncretism, yet this is how double religious identity can often be perceived.

The first case study grounds Christianity in India historically; its arrival was not a Western missionary enterprise, but could have sprung from the work of the apostle Thomas or a delegate of Syrian Christians (headed by Thomas of Kana). Not only that, but its adaptation to the local culture shows that inculturation can arise spontaneously, without western dictate; it also demonstrates how the Eastern Church is different in its liturgy and practices to the Western Church. In short, Christianity in India is not as new as might be first expected.

These factors all contribute to the designation of a double religious identity; Frykenberg argues that "Nowhere has such a double identity been clearer than in the legacy of ancient Thomas Christians" (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 458). However, he does not talk of their spirituality here, but of their 'community and theological outlook' (Frykenberg, 2008, p. 458) which this thesis has also done. The St Thomas Christians case study has demonstrated how a double religious identity is not always a case of spiritually engaging with Hinduism and Christianity. Their 'theological outlook', as Frykenberg calls it, is perhaps reference to that distinction between the Western founded Church and the Eastern ones; the reason why Western missionaries found their Christianity abhorrent was because it was not under the jurisdiction of their own. As for 'community', it was summarised how caste was adopted or integrated into Indian Christianity in Kerala because of the need to be part of the local community, in particular because of trade. Indeed, they also took from their community other aspects of the local culture, which was incorporated into Christian practice, such as aesthetics which also had religious connotations, and adapting old cultural/religious customs and liturgies, such as the birth rite and the marriage ceremony. However, their refusal to incorporate 'image worship' also demonstrates a sensitivity to not adapt anything from the local culture which might have been construed as idolatry.

The St Thomas Christians then, might be seen to have a double religious identity because of the ways in which they interact the *cultural* and *aesthetical* facets of their religious identity (as Christians) with 'Hinduism', in what might be described as an early form of *spontaneous inculturation*. The first case study has already discovered the complications of talking about religion and culture as separate entities, which was anticipated in the second and third chapters. They demonstrate that religion and culture are not easily separated, for taking on 'Hindu' cultural elements which were in fact so readily associated with Hindu 'religion' caused charges of syncretism from Western missionaries. This first case study supports the argument for a need to think more holistically about what 'religious identity' constitutes when applying the theology of double religious identity to Hindu-Christian case studies, for whilst the St Thomas Christians

might be understood as having a double religious identity, it is certainly not rooted in their Christian spirituality, but was because of their adaptation of Hindu cultural elements.

Robert de Nobili's case study highlighted the problem of cultural alienation not only for new converts to Christianity, but also its missionaries who were viewed as *paranghi*. de Nobili recognised this barrier and broke it down by adapting himself to the local culture, particularly through the adoption of sannyāsa. However, this adaptation to the culture did not mean that he had become a Hindu in faith or religion, although it did cause problems with some of his colleagues, particularly his adoption of the sacred thread and his refusal to ignore caste distinctions.

Robert de Nobili's double religious identity is a consequence of engaging the *cultural* and *aesthetical* aspects of his Christian identity with Hinduism in Madurai, all as a means to an end – conversion to Christian faith. For a missionary of his time, de Nobili was incredibly sensitive to the cultural needs of those converting to Christianity. Although his adherence to caste distinctions, particularly through the pandâraswamis, is questionable it still remains that it is likely that de Nobili simply saw the parallels between the way Madurai culture was structured, and the way his own Italian society was structured. In engaging with the cultural and aesthetical facets, de Nobili was pioneering an early attempt at inculturation, which reflects his Jesuit background to some extent. However, this attempt at inculturation was for the purposes of mission and conversion, and did not occur as a natural flourishing as it did for the St Thomas Christians. In order to distinguish the two, the difference will be marked on the arrows of the diagram, (see below) one as 'mission-based', and the other as 'spontaneous inculturation'. This distinction will be carried on throughout the thesis, as these are two very different examples of aesthetics and culture being engaged in inculturation; it shows if there was motivation behind the double religious identity, and therefore why the double religious identity came about. These two case studies, early on in the thesis, have already demonstrated that the *spiritual* facet was not a factor in these double religious identities, and hence for Hindu-Christian studies, it would be best to expand the terminology of 'double religious identity' into different facets so that differences in occurrence and manifestation are made clear.

Hyphenated/Double Religious Identity

Politics | Aesthetics | Theology | Spirituality | Culture | Inculturation

St. Thomas Christians

Robert de Nobili

Personal | Public

Spontaneous | Deliberate
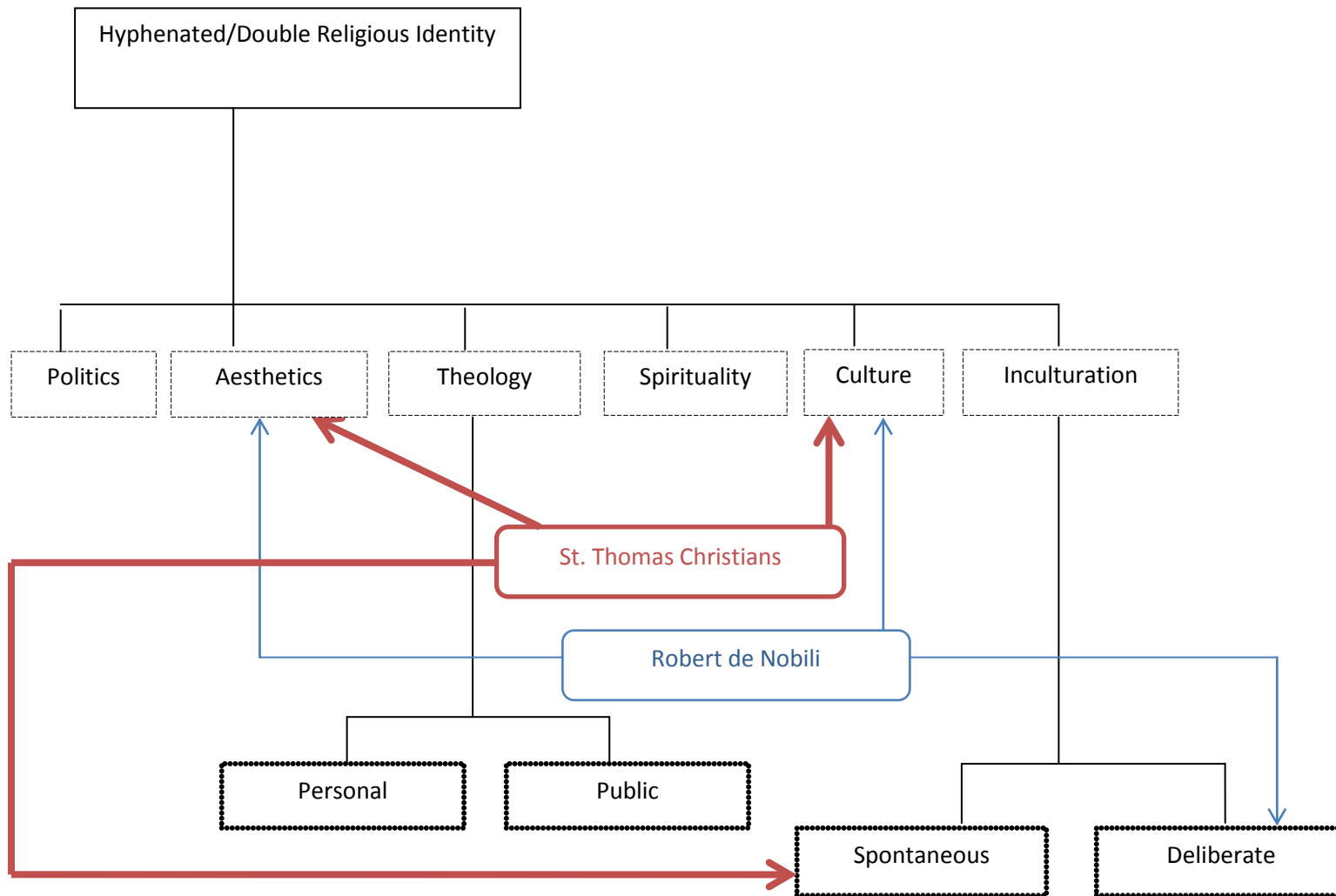
Introduction to Indigenous Case Studies: The re-shaping of (Indian) religious identity during the British colonial period

It is not just Western Christians that this thesis is looking to for examples of double religious identity; indeed there are also those from an Indian background who wanted to combine the spiritual and ethical principles of Christianity with the rich and varied (Hindu) culture of India. This came about largely because of colonial influences, including the Christian missionaries who visited the subcontinent once Queen Victoria became Empress of India. Many (although not all) Christian missionaries were fiercely critical of Hinduism, calling it 'idolatrous' and 'heathen', amongst many other things. Their attitudes triggered a reform, the Hindu Renaissance, whereby Hindu reformers took it upon themselves to reform Hinduism in the light of colonial influence and criticism. Some Indian reformers went about incorporating these colonial influences through establishing societies, like the Brāhmo Samāj. This Hindu reform movement incorporated the Western influences of reason and hence distanced themselves from the 'idolatrous' forms of Hinduism; essentially they were concerned with a return to the purer form of Hinduism found in the Vedas. The Brāhmo Samāj was originally founded in 1828 by the Hindu reformer, Rāmmohun Roy. The first case study in this section, Keshub Chunder Sen, was a member of the Brāhmo Samāj (he joined in 1857) and hence had already rejected certain elements of Hinduism which he saw as idolatrous and superstitious. As for his attitude towards Christianity, it was one that would have missionaries waiting with baited breath for him to announce his conversion, such seemed Sen's conviction. His Church of the New Dispensation, was "…above all, eclectic, proclaiming the unity of all religions although in practice its aim was to unite East and West, Hinduism and Christianity" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 212). It was seen by Sen himself as a universal religion, and unashamedly borrowed from both Hinduism and Christianity in its rituals. *Spiritually*, it is not easy to suggest whether Sen was simply Hindu, or even simply Christian – his religious outlook, and therefore his double religious identity, is wrapped up in the complexities of both Hinduism and Christianity, and later in the New Dispensation which he created.

Another prominent Indian figure, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, sought to remain *culturally* Hindu, and *spiritually* Christian, most noticeably by adopting the life of a Christian sannyāsa. His double religious identity, then, builds upon the issue de Nobili tried to address. Upadhyay is not without controversy, especially for his bold statements such as "We are *Hindu* Catholic" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 25) and because of his involvement in Bengali nationalism. Sen and Upadhyay help to form the backdrop to an indigenized Christianity in India, and contributed to the response for an authentically Indian church via their own historical example. They made steps towards bringing Christianity in India away from its Western trappings and infusing it with Indian culture, steps which were both controversial and bold. In particular, they both

deplored the adoption of Western habits and customs alongside Christian conversion.[142] Sen finally ends up creating his own universal religion (The Church of the New Dispensation) which is a *theological* attempt to bring Christianity to India but also, somewhat paradoxically, to reform Hinduism. Upadhyay, on the other hand, plays further on de Nobili's distinction between religion and culture, which involves theological adaptation (through the use of Thomism and Vedānta) as well as *aesthetic* and *cultural* facets of double religious identity, which become the hallmarks of inculturation in later years. As will be seen, the way in which de Nobili had a double religious identity is very different to how Upadhyay had a double religious identity, and how Sen did also. Nevertheless, these case studies from the colonial period continue to show how double religious identity is not always related to syncretism or cultural norms or spiritual anguish – both men were firmly fixed on emphasising how a Christian could be distinctively Indian, (*culturally*) and did not have to take on the Western trappings of Christianity. Indeed, Sen is at pains to emphasise Jesus' Asianness, as a way to make people remember that Jesus is Eastern and not Western, and therefore 'one' with their own culture, whereas Upadhyay is keen to show in his own life how one can be spiritually Christian and *culturally* Hindu. The way in which he equates Indianness with being 'Hindu' is rather significant; it acts as a precursor to the way in which his later years were spent as a zealous Indian nationalist, and a reminder even now of how being 'Hindu' and being 'Indian' are one and the same thing for some Hindus.

Interestingly, in his 2003 article 'Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church'*,* Phan argues against using Sen and Upadhyay as examples of multiple religious belonging (Phan, 2003, pp. 505-506). Regarding Sen - alongside Radhakrishnan and Swami Akhilananda (Phan, 2003, p. 505) - he comments that they "...had a personal commitment to Christ but without accepting the Church..." (Phan, 2003, p. 505) and disregards them for his study as "...these are not, strictly speaking, instances of multiple religious belonging" (Phan, 2003, p. 506). However, I would argue that just because Sen did not accept the Church, it does not follow that he had a single religious identity; rather, his 'interest' in both Hindu and Christian faith led him to explore both, and his religious identity becomes a synthesis of Hindu and Christian influences in the creation of the New Dispensation. Hence, I consider him an interesting example of double religious belonging. Regarding Upadhyay, Phan states that he will "...not consider the attempts of converts from non-Christian religions to Christianity to retain their former religious identity..." (Phan, 2003, p. 506). He

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[142] See Sen, 1901, p. 34 (from the lecture 'Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia', 5th May, 1866) and Upadhyay, 2002, p. 203 (from his article in *Sophia (monthly)* March 1898, 'The Chief Hindrance to Conversions').

then gives Upadhyay as an example of this (Phan, 2003, p. 506). However, I disagree with his assessment that Upadhyay tried to 'retain his former religious identity' as a Hindu; as will be seen, Upadhyay's 'Hindu-Catholic identity' is generally understood as an attempt to reconcile his Hindu *culture* with his Christian faith, although admittedly this is less concrete towards the end of his life. However, I think that by broadening the terminology of double religious identity into facets, it becomes clear how Upadhyay has a double religious identity in terms of culture and spirituality. Phan's study concentrates on those Christians who "'...go over' to other religions while keeping and even deepening their Christian identity" (Phan, 2003, p. 506). However, this thesis is taking a wider approach to what might constitute double religious identity in the Hindu-Christian sphere, which means that people like Upadhyay and Sen fit the remit here.

Their double religious identities are the result of interactions with various facets with both Hinduism and Christianity, albeit for different purposes. Sen perhaps leans more towards a spiritual syncretism, the usual interpretation of a double religious identity. But they both demonstrate that double religious identity is far more complex than a spiritual issue. Instead, the perception of a spiritually double religious identity can come about because one (or several) of the facets of their religious identity has interacted with Hinduism. However if they have not interacted with it spiritually (like Upadhyay) then it is evident that the terminology of the theology of double religious identity needs expanding, to embrace its scope and to understand it better.

Chapter 6: **Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884)**

Keshub Chunder Sen's religious identity is certainly one of complexity. For a time, he was a leader of the Brāhmo Samāj[143] and was influenced by Western thinking and Jesus. Although never converting to Christianity, he had an "intensely personal and emotional" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 206) relationship with Jesus, which he believed could be better expressed "…through Hindu devotionalism than through the accepted Christian worship" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 206). He later founded The Church[144] of the New Dispensation, which cements the culmination of his efforts to fuse religious thought, ritual and worship. Sen's religious identity was something of a public affair, with Christian missionaries convinced he would convert because of his attachment to Jesus.[145] The way in which his religious identity is perceived by others (e.g. Christian missionaries) and also by himself, as he explores faith and belief through the Brāhmo Samāj and the Church of the New Dispensation, makes Sen a fascinating case study for a thesis focusing on double religious identity.

To give some idea of historical and cultural context, Sen was grateful for British colonialism in India to some extent[146], because they had brought Christianity with them. However, he did not want Jesus or the Church to remain in its colonial apparel; he was a firm believer in the notion of an Indian Church and advocated the return of the 'Asiatic Christ' i.e. the remembrance of Jesus' own cultural background. This emphasis on culture foreshadows some of the later thinking of Upadhyay, and he in turn other pioneers who attempted to establish an authentic Indian Christianity. What distinguishes them is that Sen never formally entered into the Christian faith; by comparison Upadhyay eventually became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Sen is fairly syncretic with his own religiosity, and his emphasis on culture is one that lends itself well to studies which explore Indian Christianity. However, that is not to say that he was a forerunner of (deliberate) inculturation. Deliberate inculturation as studied in this thesis is a *Christian, theological* method; if as aforementioned Sen does not identify himself with any

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[143] In November 1866, a split occurred in the Brahmo Samaj and Sen led one of the groups, which was named the 'Brahmo Samaj of India' (Mueller, 1976, p. viii).

[144] It is important to point out that when Sen refers to an Indian 'Church', sometimes he is referring to the New Dispensation, not the Christian Church.

[145] Borthwick claims that the missionaries, after hearing his lecture 'Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia' (5th May, 1866) (Borthwick, 1977, pp. 66-67) believed Sen to be on the brink of becoming a Christian. (Borthwick, 1977, p. 70)

[146] But he is not wholeheartedly supportive; see Mueller's publication *Keshub Chunder Sen* where, in a lecture entitled 'Asia's Message to Europe' [20 January, 1883] he refers to Europe's presence as a "a curse", if "…in as much as it utterly exterminates our nationality, and seeks to destroy and Europeanize all that is in the East…" (Sen cited in Mueller, 1976, p. 103).

particular Church (or even some of the cornerstones of Christian theology, such as belief in Jesus Christ as God incarnate) then he cannot be seen to be advocating the method of inculturation. That is why I have chosen not to assess Sen's double religious identity through this particular facet. Rather, this chapter will explore the impact of Hinduism and Christianity on Sen's religiosity, seeing his double religious identity in terms of *theology, spirituality* and *culture*.

The Indian Church and an Asian Jesus

Sen once declared "It is to the British Government that we owe our deliverance from oppression and misrule, from darkness and distress, from ignorance and superstition" (Sen, 1979, p. 56). This is an obvious example of Sen's support of colonial rule. However it should not be assumed that Sen views this through rose-coloured spectacles, because he did not feel that the westernised Jesus of the colonisers was appropriate for India. Instead of embracing 'western' Christianity he advocated a return to thinking about the Jesus who was, by birth, Asian; "And was not Jesus Christ an Asiatic?" (Sen, 1979, p. 64). Sen asked. This might seem paradoxical; he is praising British colonialism for bringing Christ to India's attention, yet at the same time lamenting that the Christ they bring is one in European garb! However, Sen is determined to interpret Christ in his own cultural context and that he 'was Asiatic' apparently holds precedence over the British introducing Christ. That Jesus is Asian makes him more relevant to Sen in his own context and, presumably, through his lectures he hopes that this will also resonate with his contemporaries.

By remembering the Asian roots of Jesus and the Church Sen believed that Christianity in India could become truly indigenous[147], and this was of paramount importance to him. Sen was at ease to remark upon the necessity of this to Christians:

> If you like, present the English side of Christ's many-sided character to the English nation. If you wish, present a German Christ to the Germans, and an American Christ to the Americans. But if you wish to regenerate us Hindus, present Christ to us in his Hindu character (Sen, 1979, p. 216).

Here Sen is advocating a Christ who is 'Hindu'. Considering that 'American', 'German' and 'English' are all markers of nationality, perhaps we can assume that Sen is using Hindu as a marker of nationality too. But then in the very next sentence, he talks about 'Christ as an "Asiatic ascetic" (Sen, 1979, p. 216). So is Sen referring to a *religious* Hindu understanding of

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[147] Presumably because if Jesus was not Western, then there was no need for India to accept a Western church, it could be possible to have an eastern church which was more true to Jesus' own roots.

Jesus, as Asiatic seems to be a common marker by which he refers to nationality? I am inclined to think that Sen may have meant both – after all, his double religious identity is a result of incorporating both Christian and Hindu elements, and he constantly stressed the need for incorporating Christ into his own culture. I suppose it depends on the extent to which one can separate religion and culture, which is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. This is where the similarities with the deliberate method of Christian inculturation are apparent; if Sen is using 'Hindu' as a cultural marker then he is asking that Christ be reflected according to cultural context, a key aspect of inculturation. The difference, however, is that Sen does not make these changes himself – he is more of an *adviser* to the Christian missionaries on how best to present Christ to 'Hindus', not the worker. This sets Sen apart from some of the other case studies in this thesis – de Nobili and Upadhyay for example, *are* missionaries, not advisers. I think that this makes Sen a really interesting case study, because he is suggesting ways in which Christian mission could be bettered in India, whilst not demonstrating any desire to convert to the faith in question! For me, this suggests that an emphasis on culture in one's religious identity is important to him, and to others too. This importance is further evident when exploring Sen's attitude towards Indian Christian converts, as Sen disapproved of those who adopted western mannerisms when they converted. In 'Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia' he accuses them of forgetting that:

> ...Christ, their master, was an Asiatic, and that it is not necessary in following him to make themselves alien to their country or race. I sincerely beseech them not to confound the spirit of Christianity with the fashions of Western civilization (Sen, 1979, p. 65).

Sen believed that remembering Jesus as Asiatic would facilitate relationships with Christ for others, because Jesus would be more approachable in his own cultural context and also there would be no need to convert to western culture. Cultural religious identity is clearly important to Sen. However, Sen is not advocating one religious identity (Christian, Hindu) over the other, and this reflects his own religious identity as being somewhat blurred. He has discovered a love for Christ but does not context that personal relationship within Christian doctrine or community, instead incorporating Christ into his own *spirituality*. Part of that includes contextualising Jesus as Asiatic, but it also includes advocating an Indian church. The necessity for such a church is made abundantly clear in a lecture entitled 'The Future Church':

> India has religious traditions and associations, tastes and customs, peculiarly sacred and dear to her, just as every other country has, and it is idle to expect that she will forgo these; may (sic.), she cannot do so, as they are interwoven with her very life (Sen, 1979, p. 119).

That a really Indian church would have to disregard Indian culture for a Western based Church is unfathomable to Sen, as it is to those who support deliberate inculturation contemporarily. But it is not just a private desire for a more Indian, or broadly Asian, church that pushes Sen in his conviction – he is adamant also that the true nature and history of the Church be remembered as having its roots in Asia in the beginning. What is significant there is that Sen is advocating remembrance, rather than adaptation. These views contribute to Sen's *cultural* double religious identity; such is his admiration for Christ and his belief that India needs to know Him that he suggests ways in which Christian missionaries might achieve that i.e. by acknowledging Christ's 'Asianness' and emphasizing that cultural context. According to Sen, being *culturally* Indian (or being 'Hindu') should not be seen as something which gets in the way of Christ in India; in fact it should be the *means* of presenting Him. But Jesus being Asian is also integral to Sen's *spiritual* double religious identity, for he declared that "When I reflect on this, my love for Jesus becomes a hundredfold intensified; I feel him nearer my heart, and deeper in my national sympathies" (Sen, 1979, p. 64). This personal relationship should not be underestimated; without it, it could be argued that Sen would have had very little interest in Christianity or Jesus outside of their ethical and moral values.

Sen's understanding of Jesus and the Church as having their historical origins in Asia offers an insight into Sen's double religious identity, as a combination of his cultural and spiritual approaches towards faith and community. He experiences the former through his personal relationship with Jesus and believes that the latter will bring others to Christ, too. Whilst appreciative of colonial rule for introducing Christ this is not a perfect scenario for Sen, as Christianity has been westernised and hence stripped of its cultural and historical roots. It is in his calls for adaptation and remembrance that Sen's *spiritual* and *cultural* double religious identity can be seen; only through re-embracing an Asiatic Christ and an Asian Church does Sen believe that Christianity will have any weight in colonial India.

Sen's doctrine of Divine Humanity

Whilst Sen had a spiritual relationship with Jesus, nevertheless the divinity of Christ[148] was a doctrine that Sen did not agree with. In fact, he said that to claim that Jesus was also the Father was as 'idolatrous and heretical' as the notion of avatāra[149] in Hinduism (Thomas, 1969, p. 66). Instead, he formulates his own doctrine, 'The Doctrine of Divine Humanity', to express his belief in Jesus as more than human, but at the same time not God incarnate, or the unique Son

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[148] Christian orthodoxy affirms that Jesus is God incarnate.

[149] Bob Robinson (2004, p. 277) says that Sen *did* use the category of avatāra to describe Christ, however.

of God. At the crux of this doctrine lies Sen's conviction that God is *in* Jesus. Significantly this dwelling within is not exclusive to Jesus; the whole of humanity has the potential to have God dwell in them and hence to be 'divinely human' is something all people can partake of.

Because this doctrine contributes greatly to Sen's *theological* double religious identity, it needs to be explored here in depth. Sen claims that Christ serves to demonstrate "…how we can exalt our humanity by making it more Divine, how while retaining our humanity we may still partake more and more of the divine character" (Sen, 1979, p. 230). In that sense then Christ is not simply human, but also not God at the same time. The incarnation "…simply means God manifest in humanity; - not God made man, but God *in* man" (Sen, 1901, p. 61). For God to be made man is unique (in the theology of the incarnation) but for God to dwell in man, is not so; Sen does not believe in Jesus as the unique Son of God and here we see that idea of 'uniqueness' disregarded in his own theology. In rejecting this cornerstone of Christian theology, despite his apparent admiration and love for Jesus, it must be expected that this would have an impact on Sen's double religious identity. In formulating the doctrine of divine humanity, Sen expresses his own theological convictions and in turn, a double religious identity. Rather than actually *being* 'of one substance with the Father', Sen understands Jesus as having reached the full potential of his humanity through his Oneness with the Father. That Jesus is not God is at odds with traditional Christian teachings, and the doctrine of divine humanity is controversial in that sense, for altering theological understandings of Jesus *Christ*. I have emphasised 'Christ' here exactly because Sen shows little favour with the doctrine of the incarnation; for him Jesus is the ultimate moral figure, but that morality is nothing to do with his being divine. Jesus' life is exemplary in that he had such a perfect relationship with God that he could say "I and my Father are One" (John 10: 30) and could be understood as a Son of God, because he fully denied his Self (Sen, 1901, p. 369). Again, Jesus is upheld as an example, one to be emulated through realising divine humanity. In denying his self, Sen claims that this left a 'vacuum' for the Holy Spirit to fill, for "as soon as the soul is emptied of self Divinity fills the void" (Sen, 1901, p. 370).

Jesus points the way to how everyone can reach their full humanity; through Christ achieving such perfection, it was made possible for others also to become sons of God. This issue of 'becoming sons of God' is an interesting one. There is a stereotypical assumption that Hindus often find it difficult to accept the unique divinity of Christ; as Gandhi put it, "If God could have sons, all of us were His sons" (Gandhi, 2007, p. 135). Sen's understanding of Jesus as divinely human has moved away from traditional Christianity, which views the Incarnation as a unique event, and also understands Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. Sen is clearly crossing boundaries of religious identity here; he claims to have a personal relationship with Christ, but not Christ as the Son of God. Perhaps because of Sen's background (recall that

remark about avatāra and incarnation) the incarnation is not something which resonates with him theologically. Nevertheless he has a spiritual and *cultural* interest in Christ (reflected in his having a *spiritual* and *cultural* double religious identity); the doctrine of divine humanity then serves the purpose of making Christ more than human but still not divine. This allows Sen to uphold Christ for both his moral greatness and his divine humanity, but not to align himself with European (colonial) Christianity, and a westernised Jesus.

What is interesting about this doctrine is that Sen claims that it is a *Hindu* one (Thomas, 1969, p. 60) and hence lends more weight to his conviction that the Asian Jesus needs to be recovered in India. Indeed, Sen asserts this himself:

> You will find on reflection that the doctrine of divine humanity is essentially a Hindu doctrine, and the picture of Christ's life and character I have drawn is altogether a picture of ideal human life. Surely, the idea of absorption and immersion in the Deity is one of those ideas of Vedantic Hinduism… (Sen, 1901, p. 386).

Here Sen is trying to locate Jesus as Asiatic according to a particular locus of Asian understanding, in this case the Indian philosophy of Vedānta (presumably Advaita Vedānta, considering his emphasis on Oneness and absorption). In doing so, he appears to be synthesising the Christian and the Hindu, hence his own double religious identity. He certainly does not shy away from the Hindu interpretation he has of Jesus, and through an understanding of 'divine humanity' Sen created a doctrine which suited his purposes of bringing together the various influences of Hinduism and Christianity upon his own spirituality. It is understandable why his religious identity is unclear, appearing to border a Brahmoism (what he would have called 'a reformed' Hinduism) and Christianity. Sen is best understood as a synthesiser, creatively bringing together two religious traditions which held sway over him to try and create the doctrine of divine humanity in order to understand Jesus Christ, by whom he was profoundly impressed. This also facilitates his attempt to found an Indian Christianity, one that was devoid of Western Christian trappings and more amenable to his fellow Indians, with whom he desperately wanted to share Christ.

The doctrine of Divine Humanity demonstrates how Sen's *theological* double religious identity comes into play, accommodating Christ into his own religiosity without having to embrace Christian doctrine. W. Roy Pape claims that "Sen roundly denies that Christ is God in any ontological sense" (Pape, 1976, p. 59) and the fact that Sen rejects the doctrine of Jesus' divinity would, for most people, seem like a rejection of the cornerstone of Church doctrine and therefore faith in Christ. However, Sen's synthesis and his theology permit him to have a personal relationship with Jesus, without belief in Christian doctrine. Whether or not this can be deemed 'Christian' depends on whether the category 'Christian' includes adherence to

orthodoxy. Sen is clearly spiritually influenced by Jesus, and he explores that theologically through his ideas about 'Asianness' and through what it means to be 'divinely human'.

Hindu and Christian rituals in the Church of the New Dispensation

The Church of the New Dispensation was founded by Sen after he had left the Brāhmo Samāj over a debate about wearing "distinguishing caste marks" (Borthwick, 1977, p.59) After breaking away from the Brāhmo Samāj, Sen created the Church of the New Dispensation as an outlet of his ideas. This has been described by some as a new religion, a cult movement, or even an attempt at synthesis (Richards, 1985, p. 38). [150] Such was his syncretism and desire for unity with all religions[151], that he might be perceived as having a multiple religious identity. However he mainly relied on Hinduism and Christianity to do so, and therefore in this thesis he will be described as having a double religious identity, even if eventually he syncretised them into a new religion, the Church of the New Dispensation. In his 'church' we see the full extent of his thinking concerning Hindu and Christian spirituality, theology and culture. I will offer two examples of Sen's synthesis and adaptation here; the first is his 'New Sacramental Ceremony' which uses the Christian Eucharist as its basis, and the second is an adapted form of the Hindu Hom ceremony.

An example of a synthesised rite of the New Dispensation is a Eucharistic like ceremony involving rice and water.[152]. Borthwick describes this ceremony as beginning with the reading of the Last Supper narrative in the Gospel of Luke[153] (Borthwick, 1977, p. 217). To offer some context, in both Catholic and Protestant services reference is made to 'the institution narrative'. For example in the Church of England, the institution is incorporated into the liturgy and culminates in the sharing of bread and wine. However, there are some churches, such as the Salvation Army, which do not practice sacraments. That Sen reads the narrative of the Last Supper as part of a rite in his own 'Church' suggests that he sees this practice of Holy Communion as one of significance. However, that is not to say that he does not make any changes to it! As aforementioned, bread and wine have been substituted for rice and water,

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[150] Borthwick called it "a superficial absorption" (Borthwick, 1977, p. viii). Nevertheless, the synthesis argument is strongly supported by such acts as creating a form of initiation based around the Eucharist, but which involves rice and water, and also his doctrine of divine humanity, through which he accepted the divinity of Christ on his own terms.

[151] M.M.Thomas says that Sen "…was an eclectic convinced of the harmony of religions" (Thomas, 1969, p. 56).

[152] See the section 'New Sacramental Ceremony' from the New Dispensation (Sen, 1979, pp. 334-335).

[153] Chapter 22.

which God is called upon to bless, and are then consumed. (Borthwick, 1977, p. 217). In an excerpt from 'New Dispensation' called 'New Sacramental Ceremony', Sen gives some insight into these substitutions:

> Are the Hindus to be excluded for partaking of the holy eucharist? Wilt thou cut us off because we are rice-eaters and teetotallers? That cannot be…Both unto Europe and Asia thou hast said, -eat my flesh and drink my blood. Therefore the Hindu shall eat thy flesh in rice and drink thy blood in pure water, so that the scripture might be fulfilled in this land (Sen, 1979, p. 334).

Here, Sen has clearly taken the sacrament of Holy Communion and then used it to construct his own rite. It seems simply that water is used because Sen's followers do not drink alcohol and since bread is not a staple of the Indian diet, rice is offered. By doing so, Sen believes that "…you have a national holy communion, at once Hindu and Christian" (Sen, 1979, p. 281). Such an assertion is certainly in line with Sen's conviction that the church must be Indian, because he is here anticipating a '*national* holy communion', one that is thoroughly Indian rather than European. The very power of the Eucharist lies in its roots of Jesus breaking *bread* and sharing *wine* with his disciples – by replacing these elements with rice and water has Sen changed the meaning of the Eucharist, or has he just made cultural adaptations? I would not argue that the use of different elements 'changes' the meaning of the Eucharist. This is because bread and wine are not always used in the Eucharist in churches – to take the Methodist Church as an example they do not drink alcohol as this was something to which their founder (John Wesley) was particularly opposed, so even now non-alcoholic wine or even red juice is used in their Holy Communion. Have they localized Holy Communion to their own, anti-alcohol culture or have they changed the meaning of it by using different elements? Most people (including myself) would be against supporting the second argument, particularly Methodists! However, to continue the comparison, the big difference is that the Methodist Church is a Christian one, whereas the New Dispensation is clearly not a Christian church. For example in his lecture 'India Asks: Who is Christ?' (1879[154]), Sen states quite simply "I am not a Christian, none of the numerous sects into which the Church of Christ is divided would allow my creed to be identified with its own" (Sen, 1979, p. 198). 'None of the numerous sects into which the Church of Christ is divided' is an obvious reference to the abundance of different denominations in Christianity, which Sen has referred to as 'the Church of Christ'. That he calls his own sect 'the Church of *the New Dispensation*' could perhaps suggest that he is separating it from the sects (denominations) of the 'Church *of Christ*' as his teachings (or 'creed') are not something that any of the Christian denominations would recognise, or allow to

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[154] Prior to the New Dispensation

be called, Christian. Therefore for Sen even to refer to his New Dispensation rite as a Eucharist may seem problematic in itself – the Eucharist is a Christian sacrament (for those denominations who subscribe to sacramental theology), and Sen was not a Christian.

As means of contrast, I will offer an example of a Hindu ritual that Sen adapted and synthesised, the Hom[155] ceremony. Borthwick states that Sen purified Hom –remember his Brahmo Samaj background – from what he perceived as their idolatrous tendencies and then incorporated it into the New Dispensation (Borthwick, 1977, p. 216). In Hinduism, the Hom is the fire ritual in which offerings to the gods are made into the fire. According to Johnson, in its most general form the Hom is "...any oblation or sacrifice" (Johnson, 2009, p. 144) but "Specifically, the act of making an offering to the gods...by pouring ghī into the sacrificial fire" (Johnson, 2009, p. 144). Fire itself is also personified as a deity, Agni, who is prevalent in Vedic Hinduism and "...acts as the crucial mediator between the human and divine worlds..." (Johnson, 2009, p. 7). There is then a beautiful sort of paradox: offerings are made to the deities into the fire, but the fire itself is also a deity who is a bridge between the worshipped and the worshipper. Fire is a key element in Hindu worship, and this has been inculturated in some forms of Indian Christianity – for example, Saccidananda ashram has adapted the use of fire in Hindu āratī for Christian worship, as will be explored in the next set of case studies. However, what is different, and controversial, about Sen's adaptation is that he retains the use of the name 'Agni' to address the fire. Borthwick argues that he is referring to, "...not only the physical force but the force which had the power to burn up sin and temptation" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 217). This is, then, a 'redeeming fire'; he enacts this Christian idiom yet still addresses the fire as Agni. In a short excerpt from the periodical *The New Dispensation* Sen wrote that during the Hom ceremony in the Church of the New Dispensation, the priest addresses the fire as follows:

> O thou blazing Agni, great art thou, great among the forces in creation. We shall honor thee and magnify thee because of thy greatness and majesty. Thou art not God; we do not adore thee. But in thee dwelleth the Lord, the Eternal, Inextinguishable Flame... (cited in Sastri, in Sen, 1979, p. 336).

This excerpt is so revealing in terms of what Sen believes he has done with this ceremony. He is at pains to point out that Agni is not being worshipped here; rather it is 'the Lord'. At first glance the use of the term 'Lord' may seem ambiguous (as 'Lord' is also used in Hinduism[156]) but we know that Sen has infused this ceremony with Christian meaning. In the ceremony he makes reference to how "The son of God in an instant vanquished Satan and overcame

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[155] Variant spelling of 'homa'. I will use 'Hom' because this is the spelling that Sen uses.

[156] e.g. Lord Kṛṣṇa, in Sanskrit 'Hare Kṛṣṇa'.

temptation" (Sastri, in Sen, 1979, p. 338) which is clearly a Christian reference. But in the next line he also makes reference to 'the Buddha driving Mara away'[157] (Sastri, in Sen, 1979, p. 338). I think he is just trying to draw a parallel between Jesus overcoming temptation and Buddha overcoming Mara, as it seems more of an aside than intrinsic to his theology. But by removing worship to Agni, he has altered the theological meaning of the Hom ceremony. Although he still addresses the fire by name, this is because 'in thee dwelleth the Lord', not because the fire is to be worshipped in its own right.

It does seem that Sen took inspiration from wherever he found it. However, Borthwick criticizes rather than compliments him for this, arguing that "In his absorption of such disparate rituals and symbols from different traditions, Keshub exhibited an impatience to force a synthesis" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 216). At best, Sen was greatly influenced by Jesus and Christianity, at worst, he borrowed whatever suited his theological intentions at any given time, disregarding any part of it that did not fit. His practising of rites simultaneously and his blending of them in creative ways would have contributed to the confusion regarding his (double) religious identity. One of the aims of The New Dispensation was to reconcile Hinduism and Christianity, (Roy, 1913, p. 2) and perhaps through synthesising ritualized elements of both that was what Sen was trying to achieve. Sen does not shy away from any accusation of synthesis. On the contrary, he proclaims the New Dispensation thus "It shows by marvellous synthesis how the different rainbow colours are in the light of heaven" (Sen, 1901, p. 490); the 'rainbow colours' surely a reference to different religions and their approaches to the divine. Synthesis, for Sen, is something to be celebrated within the New Dispensation, and not to be despised. This resonates with contemporary attitudes concerning syncretism – whilst there is a certain amount of fear concerning tainting of doctrines and misconceptions, there are those like Schmidt-Leukel[158] who see syncretism in a more positive light. Sen takes a similar view; he happily synthesises, albeit haphazardly in places, like with the Hom ceremony or the rice and water 'communion'.

Sen's double religious identity

The Brāhmo Samāj was, for Sen at least, something of a middle ground between Christianity and Hinduism (Borthwick, 1977, p. 22), for "By joining the Brahmo Samaj he was establishing a new identity for himself which was more flexible than either of these" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 22). Ultimately, Sen is a product of both his Hindu and Christian contexts, and this is evident

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[157] For readers unfamiliar with Buddhism, see Damien Kewon's *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* [2000] p. 8 to put this remark into context.

[158] See literature review for further readings.

through his religious identity; he does not break completely with the past yet he also makes strident steps towards a personal relationship with Christ. According to Borthwick, "…Keshub came to realize the validity of both the Hindu and Christian, the Indian and English, parts of his heritage, and spent his life trying to synthesize and integrate the two" (Borthwick, 1977, p. viii). Notice the verbs 'synthesize' and 'integrate'; these are both deliberate attempts to marry Hindu/Christian, Indian/English, rather than a natural coming together. It is possible that for Sen, such actions were necessary in order to reform Hinduism and to incorporate Western, Christian thinking, whilst still maintain a distinct Hinduism. However, it is not quite that straight-forward: The Church of the New Dispensation, arguably, did neither but was instead a synthesis (i.e. where Hinduism and Christianity were less distinct of one another) of Hinduism and Christianity which, although possible, did not happen "…without much tension and conflict as well" (Borthwick, 1977, p. 95). In later years, quite possibly because of his contact with Ramakrishna (Borthwick, 1977, p. 158), Sen became more interested in examining Hinduism. Sen's religious identity seems to be in a state of flux; he is part of the Brāhmo movement yet has a real affinity with Christ and is vocal about the need for an Indian Church, yet he creates the Church of the New Dispensation and returns to examining Hinduism. In terms of double religious identity in this thesis Sen is unique, because his rootedness in a particular tradition *changed* between Hinduism and Christianity depending on his current situation. Normally, double religious identity is understood as someone starting off in one particular religious tradition, and then branching out to include (for whatever reason) another religious identity, but they are always rooted in a particular tradition as their starting point. As a reformer, Sen has the dubious honour of both Christianising Hinduism, and Hinduising Christianity; it might be said that he did so almost beyond the point of recognition through the Church of the New Dispensation.

Closing Remarks

As a member and a leader of the Brāhmo Samāj, Sen felt that Hinduism needed purging of its superstition and further believed that Jesus should be drawn upon to facilitate this. He is clearly inspired by Jesus, but on the other hand is ill at ease with His westernisation, and that of the western Church. This unease lies behind Sen's conviction to present an Asian Christ, and the call for a 'church'[159] that is truly Indian and not foreign. Sen quite unabashedly borrows (predominantly) from both Christianity and Hinduism in order to lay the groundwork for The New Dispensation, a religion that is best described as universal in its theology and syncretic in

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[159] Here is that double meaning of 'church' that was referred to in the introduction to this chapter – Sen is ambiguous because he might have been calling upon the need for Christian churches to be more Indian, but on the other hand, he could be referring to his own universal 'church' – The New Dispensation.

its expression. At times Sen is overtly Christian in his approach and yet at others he is clearly more Hindu in his thinking; there are moments still where he seems to have tried to blend elements of both together, forcibly or otherwise. His religious identity was confusing for Christian missionaries, who could only see Sen's great admiration for Jesus as a moral person in terms of anticipated Christian conviction. Borthwick remarks that:

> Keshub was actually a much more effective agent for the spread of Christianity than the missionaries, because being an Indian he was not alien and met with less resistance. The Brahmo Samaj and New Dispensation under Keshub were channels for the propagation of Christian ideas in India (Borthwick, 1977, p. 224).

I agree with Borthwick that some of these Christian ideas may have been divorced from their traditional setting, in particular the way in which Sen understood Jesus' divinity through his 'doctrine of divine humanity'. Nevertheless he did disseminate ideas about Christ and Christ's relevance to his contemporaries in India. Furthermore, his call for an Indian church demonstrates an early understanding of the complexities involved in presenting Jesus to a non-Western culture.

Unlike other studies of double religious identity in this thesis, Sen changes the tradition he roots himself in; at times it is Hinduism or Brahmoism, at other times it seems to be Christianity or the Church of the New Dispensation. In many ways the rootedness of his religious identity maps the fluctuations of his own theology and spirituality throughout his life. This thesis chose not to place Sen under the banner of inculturation; for him, Jesus and Christianity didn't need to *become* Asiatic, it needed to be *remembered* that they were originally Asiatic. Instead Sen's double religious identity is understood as four-fold, as both Brahmoism and the Church of the New Dispensation played pivotal roles in Sen's religious life and the working out of his own identity. His double religious identity lies first in his *theological* attempts to reconcile Hinduism and Christianity, mainly in order to make Jesus more relevant to his own cultural context. In that sense Sen was ahead of his time, recognising that Christian mission would need to adapt itself to Indian culture if it was going to make inroads there. Secondly, the possibility of having a *cultural* religious identity, then, is also apparent for Sen. As an 'Asiatic' himself he believed that remembering the roots of Jesus' origins would encourage other Indian people to embrace Christ. The Jesus who was heavily clothed in Western symbols and language was an unhelpful one in Sen's mind, whereas emphasising an Asian Jesus (the one more akin to Jesus' own roots as a Nazarene) would be more effectual in bringing Christ to India, Sen's ultimate desire, a desire which might seem odd considering he never converted to Christianity. He was also a strong believer, much like de Nobili, in that Indian believers of Christ should not have to adopt western styles. Thirdly, Sen's

approach to Christianity and 'Hinduism' was one of syncretism and actually his *spiritual* double religious identity is almost paradoxical. This is because he never explicitly embraced Hinduism (he was a Brahmo) or Christianity (despite seeing Jesus as divinely human and the Great Man of all Great Men[160]). Both his reform approach to Hinduism (through the Brāhmo Samāj) and his somewhat radical approach to Christianity, in particular through seeing Jesus as 'divinely human', demonstrate that he was already transgressing the boundaries of both of these religious identities.

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[160] Jesus Christ, according to Sen in his lecture 'Great Men', "…did infinitely more good to the world than the others, and deserves therefore our profoundest reverence…" (Sen, 1901, p. 87).

Chapter 7: **Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907)**

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay became an Indian convert to Christianity in the nineteenth century, yet despite adopting western customs when he first converted he could not bear to be separated from his Indian culture. Eventually returning to his cultural roots, Upadhyay decided that he wanted to bridge the gap between being a practising (i.e. *spiritual*) Christian and a *cultural* Hindu. However, this experience was, at times, fraught with difficulties and controversies, for reasons including his links with Indian nationalism later on in life, and also his attempt to found a Catholic maṭha, as part of his overall quest to develop an Indian Christianity. Scholars like Timothy C Tennent argue that his quest makes him an indigenous pioneer, and that he contributed to founding a theologically positive dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity (Tennent, 2000, p. 379). But there were those who view his conversion to Christianity as irrelevant, because he undertook the prāyaścitta ceremony (Lipner, 1999, p. 378) just months before his death. Prāyaścitta is a type of atonement (Klostermaier, 1998, p. 142) for not performing one's dharma, an example of which might be socialising with non-Hindus, and is a formal process whereby one is received back into the Hindu community. However, such a public declaration led to further speculation over Upadhyay's religious identity. Upadhyay's description of himself and his followers as 'Hindu-Catholic' (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 25), is an identity which largely rests on the perception of 'Hindu' as cultural, and so understanding the relationship between culture and religion in the India of his day is a vital part of understanding his double religious identity.

Julius Lipner rightly calls Upadhyay "a figure of paradox" (Lipner, 1999, p. xv) and a person who "resists neat pigeon-holing" (Lipner, 1999, p. xvi). Other scholars, like Richard Fox Young and Komulainen, concretely refer to his "hyphenated identity" (Fox Young, 2002, p. 23) or "dual religious belonging" (Komulainen, 2011, p. 56); by these accounts he definitely fits the parameters of this study. He can be understood as having a double religious identity in terms of *spirituality*, *theology, culture*, *aesthetics* and *politics*. This complex religious identity is not the outcome of a spiritual crisis but rather a longing for a Church that did not dismiss the intricacies and significance of his Indian culture for him. Upadhyay's relationship with both Hinduism and Christianity will be explored here, in terms of his formation, his theology and his later life. His attempts to expound an indigenous Christianity, which led on from this decision to re-embrace his cultural roots, meant that he had to contend with widespread misconception over his religious identity. Indeed, Upadhyay was devoted in trying to reconcile his new faith with his re-claimed culture; he wanted to prove that he did not have to leave his Hindu culture behind upon becoming a Christian by faith and the expression of a double religious identity does just that.

Formation

The Influence of the Brāhmo Samāj

Upadhyay became a member of the Brāhmo Samāj when it was under Sen's leadership. This means that the Brāhmo Samāj he joined was not so much concerned with Hindu reform, but reform centred on Christian principles (Tennent, 2000, p. 68). This is just one of the areas where Upadhyay would have come into contact with Christianity and Jesus; his uncle was a Christian, and Upadhyay himself associated with Christian missionaries. The influence of the Brāhmo Samāj, and in particular Sen, should be noted here. It is no coincidence that Sen was the first to parallel Saccidānanda ('Being-Bliss-Consciousness', a term for describing Brahman) and the Trinity, although he seems to have done little more than that (Tennent, 2000, p. 73; Aleaz, 1979, p. 75); Upadhyay took the theological analysis a lot further (Tennent, 2000, p. 73) as will be discussed. What is more, Upadhyay felt that Sen did not believe, doctrinally, in the Trinity (Upadhyay cited in Tennent, 2000, p. 72) and it is obvious that Upadhyay did not share his conviction. Although their theologies are markedly different, especially concerning the personhood of Jesus, Lipner argues that under Sen's Brāhmo Samāj "...Upadhyay became a Brahmo and embarked on a career that was to transform his devotion to a purely human Christ into the substance of orthodox Christian commitment" (Lipner, 1999, p. 24). Whilst Sen (under the Brāhmo Samāj) encouraged Upadhyay's thinking up to a point, Upadhyay would take the step that Sen never did – that of baptism and therefore the conversion from 'religious' Hindu to Christian, after accepting the divinity of Christ[161].

"Hindu-Catholic"

In 1891, he was baptised a Christian, becoming involved in a tug of war between Protestant and Catholic missionaries who wanted to claim him as his own – initially he was baptised Anglican, but then re-baptised when he became a Catholic (Baagø, 1969, p. 28). Like many converts of this period his spiritual conversion also led to a cultural conversion, to the ways of western societies (Baagø, 1969, p. 29). The problem that de Nobili had tried to ease, of not being alienated from Indian culture upon conversion, and the association of Christianity with western (often negative) ways, had still not been resolved almost two centuries later. However, this removal from Indian culture was not a permanent one for Upadhyay, for he did eventually choose to re-embrace his Hindu culture in 1894. In this year, Upadhyay "...took off the European dress which he, like most Christians at that time, had accepted almost as part of their new faith, and put on the saffron robes of a sannyasin" (Baagø, 1969, p. 29). Importantly, to

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[161] Whilst Sen did accept the divinity of Christ, it was as previously discussed, from a rather different angle to Upadhyay! (see the sub section of Chapter 6 on Sen, 'The Doctrine of Divine Humanity'.)

avoid confusion "…he wore an ebony cross hung from the neck" (Lipner, 1999, p. 129). This is a pivotal moment; having accepted the trappings of western culture along with his Christian conversion, Upadhyay makes the conscious decision to return to his Indian roots by adopting Sannyāsin. In 1894, he argues that "The central mission should, in short, adopt the policy of the glorious old Fathers of the South"[162] (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 177). Unlike de Nobili however, Upadhyay was Indian and not Western. In a way, this gives him more credence to make the changes that he is advocating. In his article in The Tablet, in 1903, 'Christianity in India', Upadhyay writes that "I have no claims to attention except that I am an Indian, and, as a child of the soil, may be allowed to know things deeper concerning my own country than foreigners" (Upadhyay, 1903, p. 7). Note the nationalistic overtones here, which become increasingly more apparent in his writings in his later life. This decision to return to Indian culture marks Upadhyay out as a pioneer looking to reconcile his own culture with his new faith, and was a radical departure from the conventional mode of 'becoming' Christian that involved adopting Western practices.

Upadhyay is perhaps best known for his blatant assertion in his journal *Sophia (monthly)*, in the article 'Are We Hindus', (July 1898) that:

> In short, we are Hindus so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholic. We are *Hindu* Catholic (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 25).

Such a strong, public statement is testament to his conviction that Hindu culture could be reconciled with Catholic faith; the label "Hindu-Catholic" is naturally a provocative one, appearing to simultaneously combine two religious identities. However, it is Upadhyay's understanding of religion and culture that led him to affirm this double religious identity, not a spiritual crisis or an attempt at synthesis. Painadath argues that Upadhyay expressed this in terms of types of dharma; Hinduism provided him with the *Samaj* dharma, that is, the community and cultural aspect, whereas Catholicism provided him with the *Sadhana* dharma, the soteriological aspect (Painadath, 2008, p. 94. See also Robinson, 2004, p. 19). Therefore there can be no conflict between embracing a Hindu and a Catholic identity because he did not view them as providers or paths that were the same; one is *cultural*, the other *religious* (spiritual). For example, he wrote "A Hindu, so far as sadhana goes, can belong to any religion" (Upadhyay cited in Painadath, 2008, p. 94). Again, Tennent cites Upadhyay as saying that "We

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[162] This is from an article in Sophia (monthly), dated October 1894, 'Conversion of India – An Appeal' (Upadhyay,2002,pp.175-178). The 'glorious old fathers of the south' are a reference to de Nobili and Beschi (Lipner and Gispert-Sauch, 2002, p. 177).

think we are able to prove that a Hindu is a national name. For there is no such thing as a Hindu religion" (Upadhyay, in Tennent, 2000, pp. 302-303). It could not be made clearer here by Upadhyay that he sees 'being Hindu' as cultural, and therefore reconcilable with his religion, his 'Catholicness'. Indeed, Tennent says that "By December 1897, Upadhyay no longer sees any fundamental conflict between being a Christian and being a 'Hindu', because he defines the former theologically and the latter culturally and socially" (Tennent, 2000, p. 302). Such an assertion is of course open to debate, as was discussed in chapter three, but from Upadhyay's point of view his double religious identity (as a 'Hindu-Catholic') is rooted in an understanding of Hindu being a cultural identity, and Christian being a spiritual identity. This label of 'Hindu-Christian' was never meant to imply a spiritual synthesis but rather a joint identity: a Hindu cultural identity for those who were spiritually Christian.

What is interesting about this double religious identity is that he chooses to identify with a particular denomination of Christianity, Catholicism. Any doubts about his belief that Catholicism was the 'true' Christianity are dismissed by one of his own publications, where he answers a question from the reader about which 'sect' of Christianity is the true one. After addressing the man's use of the term sect, Upadhyay concludes that "The Catholic Church alone knows the mind of Christ" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 213). It could be, then, that Upadhyay chooses to identify himself as Hindu-*Catholic* simply because Christianity is a bit too vague. Yet, he also remarks in another article[163] that (Indian) Catholics would *not* refer to themselves as Christians, because "...converts to Catholicism in general cling to their Indian social customs and change only their religion" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 202). This is quite a clever decision; if he had referred to himself as Hindu-Christian, perhaps he felt that this would have confused matters of spirituality. But by referring to himself as Hindu-Catholic, he is placing his trust in the hope that his readers are aware that Catholics allow converts to adhere to their Indian culture.

Within Upadhyay's own example, many of the hallmarks of inculturation can be identified. These include the adaptation to and use of elements within Hindu culture, the use of Hindu terms and doctrine to parallel and describe Christian concepts, emphasis on the inherent goodness in (Indian) culture which, like Greek culture before it, can be used by the Church to make the Church more authentically 'local'. However, this thesis does not consider Upadhyay as a pioneer in deliberate inculturation – as a method, inculturation is applied to the whole church, whereas Upadhyay was simply addressing his own, personal convictions. Also,

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[163] 'The Chief Hindrance to Conversions' (March 1898, in Sophia Monthly). Can be located in Lipner, J. and Gispert-Sauch, G. (eds.) (2002) The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. Volume II. Annotated. Bangalore: The United Theological College, pp. 199-202 (Item 230)

deliberate inculturation is often a missionary strategy – and again, Upadhyay seems to be inculturating out of his own experiences, rather than because it is part of an overall mission practice that is directed by authority.[164] It could be argued that he is *spontaneously* inculturating – this is because, as a direct response to his own cultural setting, he instigates changes in his own Christian life, such as the adoption of kavi, through re-embracing his Indian culture. However, Aleaz makes the interesting point that Upadhyay's theology "beyond the scope of Inculturation or Indigenization" (Aleaz, 1994, p. 63) because his new understandings of Jesus are formed through specifically Hindu religious contributions rather than cultural ones (Aleaz, 1994, p. 63). I will argue that he is best considered a pioneer in Indian Christian theology than inculturation, however tentative such a theology was; this can be seen through his writings, especially the hymn Vande Saccidānandam. Therefore I will argue that there is a *theological* facet to Upadhyay's double religious identity, but not necessarily an inculturative one. However, because I recognise that there are scholars who *do* perceive Upadhyay as inculturative, this will be represented on the diagram. One such scholar is Tennent, but an important point is made by him which backs up my own decision to see Upadhyay as spontaneous: Tennent distinguishes between the inculturation of de Nobili and Upadhyay, saying: "For Upadhyay, contextualization was not a missionary technique, but an on-going, living expression of Christianity in the Indian context" (Tennent, 2000, p. 371). This completely backs up my own distinction; I have categorised de Nobili as 'deliberate' in his inculturation, and if I follow Tennent's line of thought then Upadhyay must be considered as spontaneous (if he is seen as inculturative). They are different in their motivations for inculturating, and this is important to recognise if we are to understand how their double religious identities develop.

Upadhyay's Theology

The basis: Thomism and Vedānta

Although it was not his initial intention, Upadhyay's theology developed into a desire to use Advaita Vedānta to bring Christianity to his Indian peers, and it predominantly rested on the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Upadhyay was particularly reliant on Thomism, to the extent that Lipner accuses him of theology which is "...largely neo-Thomism in Sanskritic disguise..." (Lipner, 1999, p. 387. Also see Lipner, 1999, p. 188). Tennent, on the other hand, views Upadhyay as "...the first[165] to systematically attempt to re-state Christian theology using

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[164] cf Tennent's assertion that "For Upadhyay, contextualization was not a missionary 'technique', but an on-going, living expression of Christianity in the Indian context" (Tennent, 2000, p. 371).

[165] Indian Christian theologian.

indigenous vocabulary and thought forms" (Tennent, 2000, p. 379). Either way, his foraging into this area is a *theological* attempt to express his own Hindu Catholic-ness – in short, a way of expressing, and even working through, his own double religious identity.

One of the basics of Thomism which Upadhyay relied upon was the distinction between natural and supernatural law. [166] He believed in the Thomism theory of there being a 'natural knowledge' about God implanted in the hearts of human beings, independent of scripture or to Christ (Tennent, 2000, p. 153). Upadhyay refers to this as a "primitive theism" (Tennent, 2000, p. 153) and it is this theism that Upadhyay believes can be found, 'fragmentarily', in other religions (Upadhyay cited in Tennent, 2002, p. 161). Tennent explains that:

> It is his acceptance of all non-Christian religions as *natural* revelation which can serve as foundational to the *supernatural* revelation of Christ which gives him an open door to enter into any religion and harvest ideas or insights which he believes strengthen or provide support for Christianity (Tennent, 2000, p. 177).

For Upadhyay, Advaita Vedānta was the natural revelation he was going to use as a foundation stone to reveal the supernatural law, of Christianity, and it was through this that he would bring Christianity to an Indian context, through his theology. Upadhyay strongly believed that Greek philosophy was inadequate for bringing Christ to an Indian context, because it was not relevant to Indians, who were more familiar with Indian philosophical schools: in 'Are We Hindus', he writes "It is extremely difficult for us to learn to think like the Greeks of old or the scholastics of the middle ages. Our brains are moulded in the philosophical cast of our ancient country" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 24). Instead, he believes that "… the Vedanta must be made to do the same service to Catholic faith in India as was done by the Greek philosophy in Europe" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 207). Upadhyay's romantic ideal of Hinduism is evident here, as Vedānta (in particular Advaita) was essentially a path of the intellect (jñāna) and Upadhyay seems to be forgetting that the lower castes and the untouchables were denied access to scripture and education. However, it was not just that Vedānta was more appropriate given the Indian cultural context that made it more suitable for these purposes, Upadhyay believed furthermore that Vedānta may be *superior*. He wrote:

> The light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world (Justin Martyr's *logos spermatikos*) is brightest in the thought of the Vedas perhaps with the possible exception of ancient Greece (Upadhyay cited in Sumithra, 2002, p. 70).

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[166] As a Catholic, Upadhyay believed that his faith "...gave room for natural theology built on human reason on which the supernatural grace or theology of revelation can be built" (Sumithra, 2002, pp .69-70).

He follows on by suggesting that the Vedas he is talking about are the pure, uncorrupted Vedas – he regards the doctrines of reincarnation and transmigration as polluted aspects of the Vedas, and that if one returns to the pure Vedas then the logos is self-evident, hence the Vedas can function as the (natural) basis of an Indian Christian (supernatural) theology. This could be seen as a remnant of the Brāhmo Samāj, which also advocated a return to the pure Vedas. Upadhyay certainly did make Advaita Vedānta 'do service' for Christianity, perhaps with great force in some places. However, Lipner criticises Upadhyay's theology as essentially "…neo-Thomism wrapped up in mainly Advaitic terminology" (Lipner, 1999, p. 267), perhaps suggesting that Upadhyay was a tentative pioneer, rather than a fully formed Indian Christian theologian. Even if his theology was predominantly built around Thomism, a Western approach, nevertheless his use of Vedānta as 'the building block for the Gospel' in Indian culture were steps in a new direction for Christian theology. Indeed, his theology is truly dialogical in that sense, for he drew on both Christian and Hindu philosophy to develop his own theology.

Vande Saccidānandam

Upadhyay' Sanskrit hymn 'Vande Saccidānandam', published in his journal *Sophia* (monthly) in October, 1898 in the article 'A Canticle', is both complex and intriguing, and evidences a very practical, *theological* attempt to reconcile his Christian faith with his Hindu culture. By using various Hindu concepts and Sanskrit terminology to espouse Christian doctrine, he constructs a hymn which has remained popular and is sung in Christian churches to this day, including at Saccidananda ashram in Tamil Nadu, the focus of the next set of case studies. With his use of the Sanskrit term 'Saccidānanda', the reader is reminded of Upadhyay's time in the Brāhmo Samāj under Sen, as both men paralleled the concept of Being-Consciousness-Bliss (sat-cit-ānanda) with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit[167]. The title was ambiguously translated in *Sophia*; in a paragraph given before the actual translation, Upadhyay writes "The canticle sings of the Father-God (*Parabrahman*), the Logos-God (*Sabda-Brahman*[168]) and the Spirit-God (*Svasita-Brahman*), One in Three, Three in One"

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[167] Upadhyay is not the first to use this term in this way; I have already identified Sen's usage, and Nehemiah Goreh, "...follows Sen in seeing saccidānanda as a foreshadowing of the trinity" (Hedges, 2001, p. 151). However, Upadhyay took it further than simply paralleling the two concepts and tried to develop a theology around it, as expressed in this hymn. Indeed, Hedges points out that Upadhyay "...developed, far more than Goreh ever did, the notion of the trinity as a parallel to the Hindu saccidānanda" (Hedges, 2001, p. 152). What it does show is that inculturation was happening before it was embraced as a specific mission concept by churches, and the use of saccidānanda and trinity is just one example of that.

[168] Johnson translates *śabda-brahman* as "'word-brahman', 'word-essence'" (Johnson, 2009, p. 274). He also states that this concept can be found in the Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad (Johnson, 2009, p. 274). From this

(Upadhyay, 2002, p. 126). Such clear references to 'Logos' and 'Three in One' might seem to make it clear that this is a Christian hymn, but on the other hand the use of obviously Hindu terminology such as 'Brahman' might have confused people. Also, the direct translation of 'Vande saccidānandam'[169] is given in the article as:

> I adore:

> The *Sat* (Being), *Cit*, (Intelligence) and *Ananda* (Bliss):

> (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 126).

Sat-cit-ānanda is Hindu terminology, not Christian. The translation, then, presents the hymn as being composed *for* Christian worship, but *written* in Hindu terms.

Gispert-Sauch argues that the hymn is "…not in itself an attempt to find parallel doctrines between Hindu religious thought and the Christian faith" (Gispert-Sauch, 1972, p. 74). Perhaps what Gispert-Sauch means by this is that it is not a deliberate attempt to reconcile doctrines, but more of a desire to situate his own faith using terminology and categories from his own culture. Gispert-Sauch does call it "...a Christian meditation" (Gispert-Sauch, 1972, p. 74) so perhaps the hymn should be understood as Upadhyay's desire to work out the tensions he perceived in his double religious identity, between his faith and his culture. It is certainly not an academic weighing up of the complex issues between the two doctrines, but an expression of faith, as all hymns are. However, by employing Hindu categories to do so, whether that is conscious or not, parallels have still been created, and perhaps more importantly, are likely to be made in the minds of those singing the hymn.

In the second stanza Upadhyay refers to God using the term *govinda*, the Sanskrit term for cow-herder, which, as Gispert-Sauch rightly points out, "…is a word heavily loaded with a particular mythological sense, as it is the usual term for Krishna" (Gispert-Sauch, 1972, p. 72). One of the depictions of Kṛṣṇa is as the cow-herder, (Kṛṣṇa-gopāla) and by employing such terminology, a connection has been made between Kṛṣṇa as protector of cattle and Christ as shepherd, in particular the overtones with Psalm 23 (Gispert-Sauch, 1972, p. 72). Such connotations would not have been missed by Upadhyay's audience and would still not be missed today. However, as Lipner points out, in Upadhyay's own translation of the hymn, he translates govindam as "…'the preserver of the world', an orthodox if anodyne phrase…"

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translation, it can be seen how Upadhyay has made a basic parallel with the translation of Logos as 'the Word'.

[169] This is the first line of the hymn (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 125).

(Lipner, 1999, p. 202), thereby avoiding the loaded connotations that Gispert-Sauch accuses him of making. Upadhyay then has been clever; whilst employing the familiar Sanskrit term *govinda* he is careful not to make the English translation too direct. The same could also be said of his title translation, mentioned above. He is sensitive to Hindu religious culture, for this is not a displacement of Hindu culture, but a clever usage of it to build bridges between Hindu culture and Christian faith. The parallels, it seems, are there for those who understand them or even want them to be there, being subtle but not too subtle so as to be easily missed or made irrelevant.

Besides *govinda*, Upadhyay also makes reference to other Sanskrit terms which are replete with Hindu connotations, such as *caramapada*, literally 'highest goal', and associated with Viṣṇu's dwarf *avatāra*, who claims the earth sky and heavens in three steps, claiming heaven in the final step, the highest goal (Gipsert-Sauch, 1972, pp. 68-69). Lipner argues that the terminology is not separated from Hindu culture as "...Hindu resonances abound (it is just that their undeniable Hindu potential is kept firmly suppressed)" (Lipner, 1999, p. 203). This is of course in line with Lipner's conclusion that the hymn is a piece of fulfilment theology, and as argued before he is not necessarily creating parallels (in order to do that the theology would need to be more concretely expressed) but there are implicit links which would be familiar to those who inhabited Hindu culture, yet had converted to Christianity. This hymn then is not unlike some of de Nobili's efforts to ease the cultural adjustment into a Christian sphere, by employing Hindu categories to express Christian doctrines. However, as an *Indian* Christian rather than a Western one, Upadhyay might be perceived as having the authority to do this, whereas when de Nobili did it for example, it had the potential to be misconstrued. This is even more pressing in the post-colonial context for other case studies like Bede Griffiths and Abhishiktananda, who are accused by some Hindus of being imperialist because they direct the Church to be more Indian in its expression, despite not being of that culture.

Catholic maṭha

Whilst examples such as 'Vande Saccidānandam' clearly demonstrate that Upadhyay was interested in theologically expressing his desire for an Indian Christianity, he was also very practically minded, as his adoption of sannyāsa aesthetics suggests. He wanted to express the need for an Indian church as well as theologically consider it. One of these attempts, to found a Catholic monastery, caused problems for him with the Catholic Church; despite being the first Indian pioneer to attempt this his experiment never came to fruition. His initial proposal was set out in his article 'A Catholic Monastery in India' (Sophia monthly, May 1898) is certainly explicit about this vision; "It should be constructed on strictly Hindu lines. There should not be the least trace of Europeanism in the mode of life and living of the Hindu Catholic monks"

(Upadhyay, 2002, p. 203). This reference to 'Europeanism' is a reminder of his absolute belief in the necessity of 'Hindu-Catholicness', his double religious identity. Because Christianity and Europeanism have been presented as hand in hand, this has led to conversion of culture as well as faith, and led to isolation of those converts from their families and cultures. Indeed, this topic is thoroughly discussed by Upadhyay in his journal article in *Twentieth Century*, called 'Europeanism versus Christianity' (July 1901) and also in *Sophia* (monthly) 'The Chief Hindrance to Conversions' (March 1898). His maṭha, then, was to be the focal point of his belief that Catholics in India could also be Hindu in culture, and did not need to adopt a European Christian way of doing things.

In the January issue (1899) of *Sophia* (monthly), there was a more detailed article, 'The Casthalic Matha', which outlines the aims of the maṭha. Upadhyay remarks that it should be an "indigenizing of the faith" and desires that "...the transcendent Catholic devotions be clothed in Hindu garb" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 208). He also remarks that he is convinced that only sannyāsins are "...capable of presenting to our countrymen the mysteries of the Catholic faith". (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 203) Further reading of some of his other articles claim that this is because poverty is a mark of faith in India, yet the Christian missionaries in India were not poor at all! Hence, Christianity was associated with being rich. Upadhyay argues that the few exceptions were the monks, like de Nobili, and for that reason monasticism (but in the Indian mode, of sannyasin) is the only way of presenting Christianity and Christ to India. Lipner and Gispert-Sauch point out Upadhyay's desire that the monks should be trained in both Vedānta and Scholasticism here (Lipner and Gispert-Sauch, 2002, p. 208). This maṭha is more than just an aesthetical accommodation to an Indian Christian monasticism – if they were to be trained in both Eastern and Western philosophy, then we could perhaps see them as developing the Indian Christian theology which Upadhyay wanted to achieve.

From this perspective at least, this maṭha of his was a concrete expression of his double religious identity; his desire to be both Hindu (culturally) and Christian (spiritually). In this way he is foreshadowing some of the aims of inculturation. However, a significant point that needs to be made here is that Upadhyay did not seek proper permission for his experiment. In a letter to the Bishop of Nagpur (who had *provisionally* accepted to oversee the project) Upadhyay writes that he thinks it wise that "The monastery should exist for some time *permissively* before it can be *formally* launched" (Letter 1 to Bishop Pelvat of Nagpur, 14/2/1899 cited in Lipner, 1999, p. 217) and reveals he has not asked for the express permission of the Delegate Apostolic yet (Letter 1 to Bishop Pelvat of Nagpur, 14/2/1899 cited in Lipner, 1999, p. 217). The maṭha was seriously opposed by the referred to Delegate Apostolic, and Upadhyay it seems also lost heart with the project; after setting up the maṭha with a couple of followers, he left and only returned "a couple of months" later to shut it down

(Lipner, 1999, p. 222). Lipner makes the interesting point that it was not necessarily as inculturative as it might have seemed, as Upadhyay based its Hindu-Catholic theology on Thomism (Lipner, 1999, p. 223). This is in line with Lipner's general argument that, up to this point in his life at least, "At the level of deep structure, I submit, Upadhyay's Hindu-Catholic theology thus far is more Western Catholic than native Hindu" (Lipner, 1999, p. 223). This all boils down to his use of Thomism and natural vs. revealed theology, which reveals an attitude that is, theologically, based on an understanding of Hinduism (in particular, Advaita Vedānta) as a building block for the Gospel.

Whilst a bold attempt at securing a tangible working out of his Indian Christian theology, the maṭha was unsuccessful before it had even got running simply because it lacked the support of the Catholic Church. That is not to say the Church was wholly unjustified in not supporting such a venture; Upadhyay was impatient to kick start his experiment, which meant that he sidelined the Catholic authorities from his decision making, despite the importance of securing their support. After the failure of the āśrama, Upadhyay is obviously disillusioned with the Church and instead he appears to build more heavily on Hinduism, not just Indian culture. It also sees the development of his drive for nationalism and the call for an independent India, both of which culminate in his undertaking of the prāyaścitta, an episode in his life which is fairly confusing in terms of his religious identity.

The other side of Upadhyay

Indian Nationalism

As a youth, Upadhyay was very patriotic and believed strongly in Indian independence; after the failure of the āśrama, he became more and more involved with the striving for Indian independence, with some of the journal articles in *Sandhya* leading him to being charged with sedition by the British government (Tennent, 2000, p. 27); he was arrested on September 3rd, 1907 (Lipner, 1999, p. 380) shortly before his death. This embracing of nationalism also led to Upadhyay relying more heavily on Hindu culture than ever before, wanting to show that he could be patriotic as well as a Christian, although Upadhyay's disillusionment with the Church was apparent because of the failure of the maṭha. His strong reliance on Hinduism led yet again to confusion over his religious identity; during this period Upadhyay seems to have sanctified Sarasvatī pūjā at the school he had established with Animananda. Lipner claims this is because Upadhyay was adamant that the Hindu children there:

> ...were not only entitled to take part, but were to be encouraged to do so...Those who did not have the fullness of Christian revelation should be encouraged to worship the wisdom of God according to their best lights... (Lipner, 1999, p.323).

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On one hand such actions could posit Upadhyay in a positive light, for respecting the rights of the Hindu children to worship. On the other hand, as Animananda saw it, he was allowing idolatry – in fact, Animananda soon left the school after this disagreement (Lipner, 1999, p. 324). Upadhyay was in a difficult place in terms of his political beliefs; he was seen as fighting for Indian right to independence, which was closely linked with Hindu ideals, but at the same time he was a Christian, which was inextricably linked to the colonial powers of the day (Lipner, 1999, p. 250). He was now attempting to be Christian in his faith but Hindu in his politics, and culture. Tennent observes that Upadhyay makes little reference to his faith during this time, perhaps again a nod towards Lipner's argument, but also to that ever increasing tension he felt throughout his life of being both Hindu and Christian (Lipner, 1999, p. 250).

Prāyaścitta – the riddle of Upadhyay's religious identity

Upadhyay was claimed by both Hindus and Christians as one of their own. This is of course in part due to his use of Hinduism to express Christianity, and his adherence to his culture which means that, aesthetically, he may have been perceived as more Hindu than Catholic. This was no more apparent than when he underwent the prāyaścitta ceremony, which occurred only a couple of months before the end of his life. The prāyaścitta ceremony is undertaken by Hindus who wish to reconcile themselves with Hindu society, normally as a consequence of mixing with non-Indians or because they have been working against their dharma. Klaus Klostermaier defines prāyaścitta as 'atonement', adding that "There are long lists of *prayaścitta* that match specific atonements for particular breaches of the law"[170] (Klostermaier, 1998, p. 142). However, there is another definition of prāyaścitta, which Tennent points out, as a "return to the Hindu *religion*" (Tennent, 2000, p. 27). It is easy to see, then, why undertaking this ceremony led to speculation about whether Upadhyay was a Hindu rather than a Catholic.

To partake of prāyaścitta is a personal decision to make, if one feels that they need atonement, rather than a prescribed ritual that everyone has to undergo at some point in their lives as a matter of course. Upadhyay himself wrote an article, 'Social Penance', which was published in his journal *Twentieth Century* in July 31, 1901, and is wholly concerned with prāyaścitta. He begins by defining prāyaścitta as "It is making the unclean clean, the impure pure, by imposing

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[170] Presumably, 'the law' mentioned here is a reference to dharma. *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* [2008] has an excellent entry on prāyaścitta, which explains that there are atonements including death by fasting, (at the extreme end) going on a pilgrimage, excommunication and reciting mantras (Young, 2008, pp. 630-631). Importantly, Katherine K. Young concludes that "Whereas prāyaścitta were once popular, they are today uncommon; only gifts, pilgrimages and recitations remain" (Young, 2008, p. 631). She also notes that prāyaścitta may be dictated by "…deities; the assembly of learned men (pariśad), the king or the self" (Young, 2008, p. 630). Upadhyay seems to have undertaken this of his own accord.

upon guilty persons certain social chastisements" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 130). When referring to 'guilt' later on, he says that the punishment is "...a humiliating act prescribed by the injured society as a public confession of sorrow for the guilty attempt of breaking social integrity" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 132). Upadhyay seems to be focusing on this as a requirement for purging oneself of cultural wrongdoings; the only time he refers to the relationship between prāyaścitta and religion here is when he states that "Social penances do not necessarily involve the question of religious faith" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 132). The key adjective is 'necessarily'; whilst Upadhyay remains ambiguous on the subject of prāyaścitta for reasons of religious penance, this article is so wholly focused on 'social' (cultural) penance – as the title implies – that he is not concerned with arguing why one might choose to take it for religious reasons.

This article can be seen as a reflection on his later ideas about politics, in particular nationalism. It has already been shown how Upadhyay was against Christian converts embracing European ways, and this grows stronger as he become more nationalistic. Indeed, his punishments for those who associate with Europeans, and presumably their ways also, is one of expulsion, for "The most potent safeguard against racial impurity and social vitiation is to place those who interdine and intermarry with non-Hindu races under ban" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 132). Specifically, interdining and intermarrying are considered violations of society which require penance; these are strictly prohibited traditionally between castes in Hinduism because of ideas about purity and pollution. However, bearing in mind that Upadhyay sees caste as culture and not religious[171], presumably such strictures on inter-dining and inter-

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[171] Upadhyay had some interesting views on the relationship between caste and Catholicism which would be fairly unpopular now; much like de Nobili his attitude towards caste was that it should remain part of Christianity because caste was a cultural, not a religious, entity. In his article 'The Chief Hindrance to Conversions' (Sophia monthly, March 1898), he stresses "Religion and caste are quite different and the Catholic Church does not interfere with purely social customs that are not against the law of God" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 202). First, whilst his reference to caste could simply mean culture rather than the caste system itself, the fact that Upadhyay then goes on to talk about social customs suggests that caste (as used here) is indeed the varṇas and jātis. Hence, this suggests that Upadhyay sides with the argument that caste is cultural and not religious, as de Nobili did also. Secondly, his assertion that the Catholic church does not 'interfere with social customs that are against God's law' is now (if not so much then) highly provocative; he seems to be implying that the caste system should be part of Christianity in India because it is cultural, and therefore does not go against religious law. Dalits and śūdras on the receiving end of his statement, I suspect, would beg to differ!

For all of Upadhyay's best efforts in reconciling Hindu culture and Christian faith, at heart he was proud of his Brahmin caste background and he affirmed that caste had a place within Catholicism. However, Tennant makes the interesting point that, unlike their Protestant counterparts, Catholic missionaries

marrying reflect Indian culture more than it does Indian religions. Notice also his tone, he is talking here about 'social vitiation' and 'racial impurity'; this is very clearly the language of one who believes that Europeanism is incompatible with his Hinduness, even his Christian faith. He also leaves the reader in no mistake of his opinion that "...social connections with foreign residents and settlers can now in no way be tolerated" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 131). However, he does concede that anything good in English civilisation should be "divest...of its aggrandising character" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 131). Since his re-adoption of his Hindu culture, Upadhyay had never been the biggest supporter of 'European' Christianity being forced on converts but, at this stage in his life, his nationalism certainly makes that opinion that much stronger. It is clear that Upadhyay sees prāyaścitta as a means to re-affirm, or publicly declare at any rate, himself as culturally Hindu; despite his conversion to Christianity, he had not become European along with it. All of his life's work has been testament to that – the theological attempts, the putting on of kāvi, and the attempt at founding a Catholic maṭha. His rhetoric is clearly political, and perhaps this taking of prāyaścitta is both a political and cultural attempt to align himself with a Hindu identity.

 Interestingly, he also chooses to define Hindu in this article as "To be a Hindu one should only be born a Hindu and observe *varnasrama dharma* (caste distinction)" (Upadhyay, 2002, p. 132). Again, 'born a Hindu' is clearly nationalistic, one is a Hindu by birth, but what is more interesting is his definition of varṇāśramadharma as 'caste distinction'. Once more, his ideals about caste and its compatibility with his own person, as a 'Hindu-Catholic', shine through. This article makes very clear that prāyaścitta is, to Upadhyay at least, a social penance, to do with righting cultural wrongs, not religious misdoings. Lipner believes that in partaking of this ceremony, Upadhyay "…was not abandoning his Christian faith; he was doing the requisite

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"…made a very firm distinction between the Hindu religion and Indian culture" (Tennent, 2000, p. 91), which appears to be a continuation of de Nobili's own preference to do so. It would appear that Upadhyay felt no contradiction between caste adherence and Christian faith; this may have been due in part to his Brahmin roots. Animananda, a companion of Upadhyay and also his biographer, wrote that "A Hindu, as far as Sadhana goes, can belong to any religion, provided he keeps intact his *samaj dharma* by submitting to the social code" (Animananda in Petersen, 2007, p. 91). The social code, or dharma, of Hinduism is linked to caste: each member of the caste system has a traditional role to play in that a particular dharma must be fulfilled, according to each person's varṇa. That Upadhyay separates his samaj (social) and sadhana (religious) dharma, suggests that the caste system, as a social aspect of Hinduism, could be played out alongside his faith, his sadhana dharma.

penance in order to be fully admitted to Hindu society" (Lipner, 1999, p. 377). This certainly seems in line with Upadhyay's own theology – if prāyaścitta is atoning for violation of dharma then Upadhyay could be atoning for his disregard for his social dharma, as by being Christian he had indeed been in regular contact with 'foreign' (Western) society. To re-visit his views on nationalism, it is likely that Upadhyay did not seem to be wanting to side with the British (European) colonial powers; Lipner remarks that "It would be an important symbolic act of solidarity with his compatriots" (Lipner, 1999, p. 377) if he were to make such a penance. The fact that he was also disillusioned with the Church and their lack of commitment to his vision for an Indian church may also have contributed to him partaking in a ceremony that is overtly Hindu in its tone. The problem with undertaking this ceremony is that it is not absolutely clear *which* violation of dharma it is that he is 'atoning' for, and hence why such a public ceremony caused confusion regarding a person who was in the public eye. Indeed, Lipner notes that by doing this ceremony, most people presumed he had "…ceased to be Christian…" (Lipner, 1999, p. 378) regardless of his *Social Penance* article.

This is typical of Upadhyay – the blending of his Hindu culture with his Christian faith was so extensive as to blur the boundaries of his religious identity. This episode and the fact that he was given a Hindu funeral are the main events which caused people to question his religious identity. Lipner, however, takes a simpler view on such matters:

> Perhaps he died as he lived: as a Hindu and a Christian according to his own distinctive lights. That by his life and death he has raised such issues for serious debate can be one of his most rewarding legacies. How narrow must our religious labels be? How open to hyphenated religious identities should we become? (Lipner, 1999, p. 385).

That is precisely what this study is concerned with. Upadhyay had a double religious identity, of that there can be little doubt, and it was mainly centred on a political and cultural understanding of Hinduism, reconciled with a spiritual Christian life, although the distinction of samaj and sadhana dharma does not convince everyone. Blending these approaches resulted in his fragile attempts at an indigenous Indian Christianity. This adds further weight to the argument that Upadhyay is best considered a pioneering Indian theologian rather than a Christian who attempted to inculturate. Furthermore, Lipner is right in that Upadhyay took his own distinctive path, blurring both the Hindu and Christian, and that is not something to be fought over, trying to 'claim' Upadhyay for a certain religion, but should be appreciated for what it is: the tentative steps towards a Hindu- Christian dialogue that encouraged an Indian expression of Christianity. Even if some of those attempts were not very well executed (like the maṭha) or perhaps a bit too close to the bone for people to understand, like the taking of

prāyaścitta, it is perhaps best understood as actions which could only have been explained completely by the one who undertook them.

Closing Remarks

Upadhyay publicly expressed his religious identity as a *spiritual* Christian, and a *cultural* Hindu. His distinction of samaj and sadhana dharma ultimately led to confusion regarding his religious identity, at least for other people. The issue of perception was perhaps difficult for Upadhyay at times, because the perception of his religious identity caused problems with the church authorities, and made it harder for his nationalistic views to be accepted by other Hindus. Indeed, Lipner comments that Upadhyay's desire to be 'all things to all men', a reference to St. Paul (Lipner, 1999, p. 312), meant that he misled both Hindus and Christians (Lipner, 1999, p. 312). This is perhaps a little harsh on Upadhyay; it is doubtful that he intended to mislead people, but rather it was the fact that he was very public with his ideas about what an Indian Christian theology should include which led to confusion on the behalf of his peers. He tried to achieve this through integrating the Hindu and the Christian in his own life, but that meant that he was scrutinized by both sides. His contributions to dialogue, by being the middle man between two religious traditions, are two-fold: first, the realisation that for a true Indian Christianity to come about, he had to reclaim his Indian – what he called his 'Hindu' – cultural identity, and second, the reminder to participants in dialogue that they are making themselves vulnerable to misrepresentation and misunderstanding, should their efforts in dialogue seem less orthodox than some might consider proper.

In the attempt to reconcile his faith and culture, Upadhyay also offers a fascinating insight into the *political* and *theological* implications of having a double religious identity. He is a complex and colourful character who is considered by many as the pioneer of an Indian Christianity, even if he was not fully supported in his attempts to do so. Perhaps the most obvious way in which he did this was through re-claiming the *aesthetics* of his Hindu culture, particularly in his manner of dress, although his attempt to found a Catholic maṭha was markedly less successful. If one main criticism of Upadhyay can be singled out, it is that the Hinduism he draws on to manifest the Indian church is overtly Brahminical, drawing on the Sanskrit language and high caste practices and beliefs as his vehicles of expression.

Sen and Upadhyay serve as examples of indigenous case studies in this thesis, as people with a Hindu and Christian religious identity; unlike de Nobili their claims to a double religious identity arise out of a search to reconcile their own culture with their faith. I would question whether or not to count Upadhyay and Sen as pioneers of inculturation: deliberate inculturation is church based, often strategically, but Upadhyay was very much centred on working out his *own* religious identity…he does call for an Indian church but did not execute it in the same way as, say, de Nobili did. On the other hand, he is clearly responding to the issue of becoming European when converting to Christianity, taking matters into his own hands by re-adopting his Indian cultural background and expressing this in terms of being 'Hindu-Catholic'. Whilst not a missionary with a deliberate objective to initiate inculturation, on the other hand it could be argued that Upadhyay is engaging in a *spontaneous* inculturation of his own making, although it is centred mainly around his own spirituality. For example, he puts on the kāvi, and he tries to set up a catholic maṭha. However, even spontaneous inculturation as explored in this thesis is linked to church practice and Upadhyay was very clearly rejected by the Catholic Church in some of his experiments, such as the maṭha. He is, I think, better understood as an individual in pursuit of his own Indian Christian spirituality, and I will not categorise him as a pioneer in of deliberate inculturation. However, he could perhaps be categorised as 'spontaneous' in his inculturation, because he did eventually re-engage with his own Indian culture post Christian conversion. I will them tentatively suggest that Upadhyay could come under 'spontaneous' inculturation, especially because theologians such as Tennent see him in this light, and this will be outlined in the diagram. However, I am more inclined to see him as a pioneer in Indian Christian theology.

As for Sen, the jury is out as to whether or not someone who is not a Christian can really advocate an Indian Church, and much like Upadhyay, his religious identity seems not so much as a result of deliberate inculturation but of an experimentation with his own spirituality. For me, Sen does not fit 'spontaneous' inculturation either as this is still a type of *Christian* inculturation, and I do not see Sen as a Christian trying to make the Church more Indian. I suppose you could say that his recommendations that the Church become more Indian are profoundly dialogical, but essentially I see Sen as engaging in syncretism rather than inculturation. His creation of the Church of the New Dispensation is also, for me at least, a hallmark of his experimental, syncretic approach to religion and his own religious identity. This is because Sen seems to fit with some existing definitions of 'double religious identity' as a type of *spiritual* syncretism, but his religious identity also interacts with Hindu identity in other ways. *Culturally,* a strong sense of the importance of his Hindu identity as a national identity, which is clearly rooted in the Brāhmo Samāj, is evident despite his being a supporter of British

colonialism. He makes important Hindu-Christian *theological* contributions, particularly in his New Dispensation, which is evidence of the strong influence of Christianity and Hinduism on his own theological stance. He was certainly not afraid to articulate his theology, and his 'doctrine of divine humanity' is both Hindu and Christian simultaneously. The fact that both Christian missionaries and Hindus wanted to claim him as one of their own is testament to his double religious identity, which could at times confuse people, particularly in the later stages of the New Dispensation. The interesting thing for this case study is that Sen does not appear to be permanently rooted in either Brahmoism or Christianity, in fact it could be argued that the tradition he was most rooted in was his own 'New Dispensation', as a way of reconciling the two. He also changes his 'root' tradition, fluctuating between Brahmoism and the New Dispensation, which makes him a unique case study here. He is also important because, whilst he fits with existing theories of double religious identity as 'syncretism' and 'cultural', at the same time he also adds to it, demonstrating how his *theology* plays its part in his double religious identity.

Upadhyay happily asserted his own double religious identity as a 'Hindu-Catholic'; notice how that is a very specific denominational identity in the latter case. The complexities of that, however, are part and parcel of his absolute belief in the possibility of reconciling Hindu culture with Christian faith. The problem de Nobili had identified among his converts, of cultural alienation post conversion, was one that Upadhyay became aware of himself when he converted, and eventually he became determined to prove that he could be both *culturally* Hindu and *spiritually* Christian. This is certainly something which Upadhyay deserves more credit for than he is usually awarded; whilst his expression of this as a 'Hindu-Catholic' might sound unconventional, at the same time Upadhyay is bold in his attempts to both point out and resolve the tension he feels as an Indian convert to Christianity. Re-adopting *aesthetics*, for example by putting on the robes of a sannyāsa, was just a preliminary step for him, which was followed by attempts at an Indian Christian *theology*. Upadhyay's Hindu-Christian identity also serves, at a later stage in his life, as a *political* statement. Unlike Sen, he is anti British colonialism and goes to great lengths to play his part in the resistance movement, which eventually leads to charges of sedition. The prāyaścitta incident confirms that Upadhyay is a difficult man to try and pin a religious identity onto, and Lipner's suggestion that "...he died as he lived: as a Hindu and a Christian according to his own distinctive lights" (Lipner, 1999, p. 385) is an interesting approach. To understand Upadhyay's religious identity it is important to take into account each of the facets of that identity which engaged with Hinduism, else his Hindu Catholic identity might be misconstrued as a spiritual syncretism. By looking at the ways in which he engaged Christianity with Hinduism, it is clear that his double religious identity is rooted in a complex web of what a person's religious identity actually entails.

Regarding Upadhyay, the cultural facet of his religious identity is very different to the cultural facet of, say, de Nobili or the St. Thomas Christians; this is because Upadhyay is not seen as example of inculturation in this thesis whereas de Nobili and the St Thomas Christians are. This raises an important point: the relationship between religion and culture is of such that should inculturation occur, this always necessitates an engagement with the cultural facet too. However, a double religious identity which occurs because of an engagement with the Hindu cultural facet can happen without inculturation. Therefore, there is a one way link between inculturation and culture; if inculturation occurs, by its very definition the cultural facet is changed also. This will be represented on this diagram with a one directional arrow from inculturation to culture. This could also apply to aesthetics for example; inculturation usually includes some adaptation to Hindu aesthetics, but adopting Hindu aesthetics (for example, in the taking on of kāvi by Upadhyay) does not always imply inculturation – for Upadhyay, this was a return to his Hindu cultural roots.

Halfway through the selected case studies for this thesis it has been demonstrated that, when the theology of double religious identity is moved into Hindu-Christian dialogue, it is necessary to have a wider understanding of religious identity as encompassing various facets. Otherwise, the ability to designate a double religious identity would be limited to a spiritual (syncretism) or cultural engagement, whereas in reality issues such as politics, inculturation, aesthetics and theology have also played significant roles. It is likely, then, that double religious identity is best approached as an over-arching term, by widening that term to include various facets of religious identity, with which an engagement can take place, can only better help understand how and why such identities might occur.

Hyphenated/Double Religious Identity

Politics · Aesthetics · Theology · Spirituality · Culture · Inculturation

LATER LIFE ONLY

Personal · Public

Spontaneous · Deliberate

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

Keshub Chunder Sen

(According to some perceptions of Upadhyay as inculturative)

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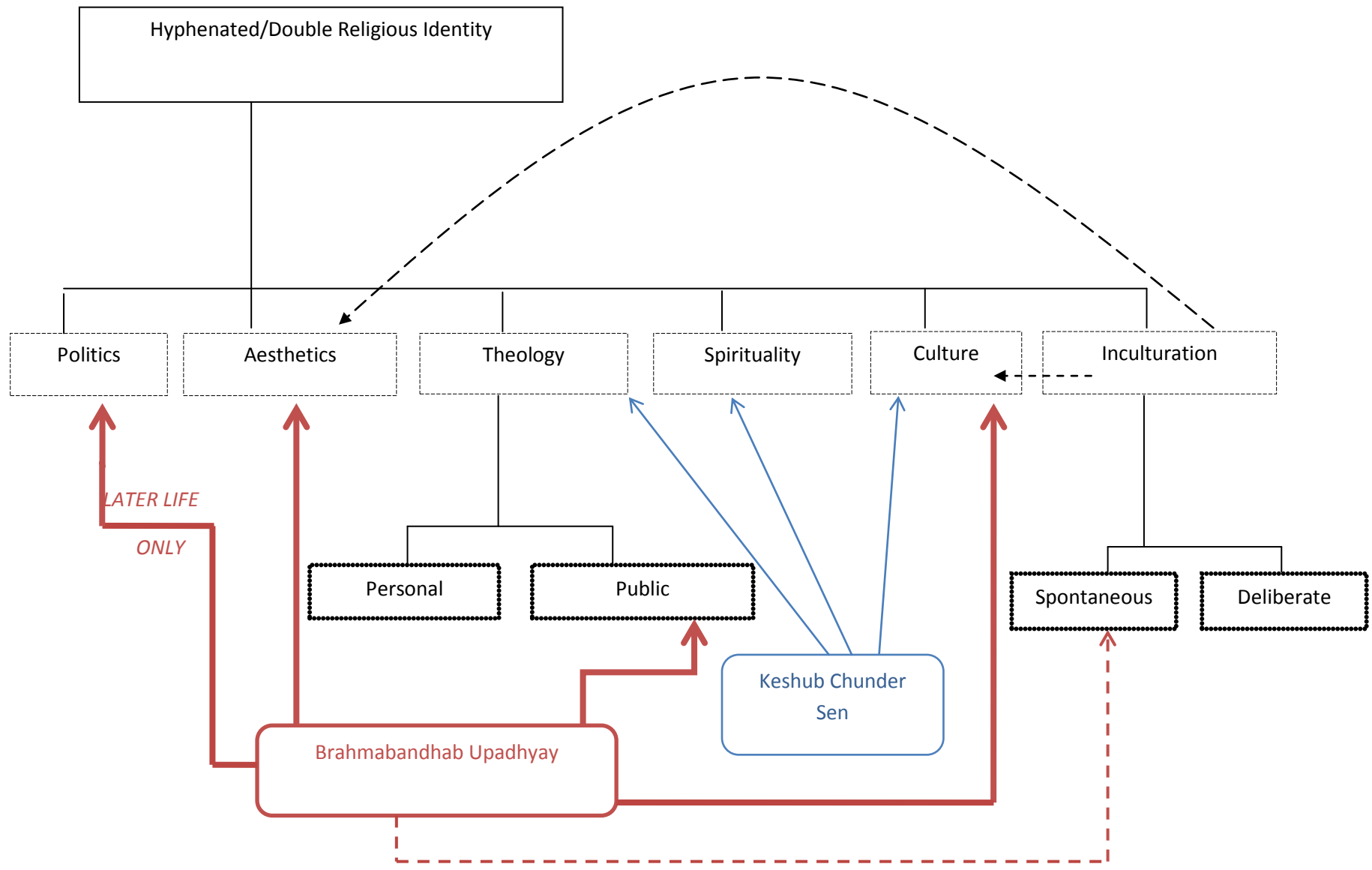
Introduction to Post-colonial rule Case Studies: Post-independence India and a new approach to Hinduism by Christian missionaries, through the Christian āśrama movement

> *The Christian Ashram Movement is a welcome blessing to the Church in India... If a Church is not indigenous in its identity, theology and expressions of worship, it cannot be deeply rooted in the culture. It may exist as something foreign* (Pattathu, 2002, p. 57).

> *This activity* [*which*] *is imperial and not spiritual...you impugn Hinduism, slur sannyaysa, rout reason, ruin meaning, mutilate categories...* Letter to Bede Griffiths from Swami Devananda, July 21st 1987 in Goel, 1996, chapter 19, paragraph 7).

Two very different opinions regarding inculturation of the Church in India are vehemently expressed above, both with particular reference to one place and its founders: Jules Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths and the Catholic Ashram of Saccidananda at Shantivanam[172] in Tamil Nadu. The story of this place and its impact is an interesting one, and a solid choice of case study for a number of reasons. Primarily, the āśrama can be viewed as having a double religious identity of its own, in terms of *aesthetics*. The āśrama, being Christian, is based on the Rule of St. Benedict but incorporates Hindu *cultural* elements; just two examples are the use of āratī at Mass and the wearing of kāvi[173] by the monks and Priests. Secondly, the founders all had various ways of expressing their religious identity, being inextricably drawn to Hinduism in some way or another, and to both dialogue and *inculturation*. Abhishiktananda had a double religious identity, which exemplifies the possible *spiritual* anguish that might involve, whereas Monchanin was much more concerned with *theology* and *inculturation*, for example. Thirdly, some of the controversies which would come to be associated with their āśrama are of great significance, exemplifying one of the biggest problems with double religious identity in dialogue and inculturation; that is, how well (or badly, as the case may be) it is received by others. This particular case study then is primarily focused on the problematic nature of double religious identity, especially when perceived this way by other people.

All three founders recognized a calling by God to go to India and therefore believed that they were there by Divine Will, affirming Phan's (contemporary) observation that double religious identities are vocational; "...not for the faint-hearted or the dilettante" (Phan, 2004, p. 81).

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[172] Shantivanam literally means 'forest of peace'; the āśrama is situated on the banks of the Kaveri river amidst a forest.

[173] Kāvi is the ochre/saffron coloured robes which mark out a Hindu Sannyāsin.

Monchanin recognized the need for the Church to become acquainted with the cultural and spiritual heritage of India if it was ever going to make a real impact. He believed that the key for the Church's acceptance in India lay in encouraging the Church in Indian culture, whilst still retaining the doctrinal essentials of Christianity. When Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda's Western name) wrote to Mendoñça to be of use to the Church in India, Monchanin knew that he had found an ideal companion in his work. Together they founded Saccidananda ashram, insisting upon the inclusion of Hindu cultural elements and began adapting themselves to the Indian way of life. Bede Griffiths would eventually take over the running of Saccidananda in 1968, upon Abhishiktananda's departure and after Monchanin had died.

What is now called 'inculturation' is a method which the founders would employ alongside dialogue as a way of expressing the Church and Christianity in India. However, the confusion that this sometimes fostered, surrounding their own religious identities, as well as that of the āśrama itself, would lead to a lot of misunderstanding and vilification by some Christians and Hindus. The Christians who opposed them claimed that they did not have proper authorisation from Rome for their methods (Goel, 1994, Preface, paragraph 1), whereas some claim that many Hindus "…had been hoodwinked by this form of mission strategy"[174]. These are similar to the charges brought against de Nobili, recalling the lack of support from his contemporaries in the Catholic Church who forced him to prove the authenticity of his missionary methods, especially at The Goa Conference (Cronin, 1959, p. 210f), and an initial reaction to him as a *muni*, a sage[175] (Cronin, 1959, p. 126). The founders of Saccidananda regularly wrote articles and presented papers or letters, much like de Nobili, to justify the existence of the āśrama that they had brought into being. They also wrote personal letters to family and friends, as well as to each other, and Abhishiktananda even kept diaries which have since been published. The methods used by the āśrama are understood as tools in dialogue and in the later development of inculturation. As the quotations at the top of the page illustrate, the methods used to engage in dialogue have been seen in less than flattering light by some Hindus, but on the other hand it has been hailed as 'a blessing' upon the Church in India. As for the religious identity of the founders, their identities certainly contributed to the formation of the āśrama in different ways, but the task of establishing the āśrama also greatly affected them as individuals. Abhishiktananda is a strong example of someone who had a double religious identity in the *spiritual* sense, struggling to find his own path between Advaita and Christianity. This case study focuses on three main areas: The āśrama itself, the founders and their joint reception.

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[174] That is, Christian āśramas.

[175] Although this was eventually abandoned in favour of calling him 'Tatuva Bodhakar', the 'Teacher of Reality' (Cronin, 1959, p. 127).

The ashram of Saccidananda can be considered as having a double religious identity in its own right, which plays both to its advantage as a model of inculturation and to its disadvantage, as a representation of the perceived extent to which the Church will go in order to convert people. Therefore the *aesthetics* and liturgies of the āśrama will be discussed at some length, not just because it is important in understanding the efforts of the three founders but also because it is a tangible symbol of double religious identity; that a place is being examined as a case study is unique in this thesis. The founders' religious identities will also be examined in a similar manner, discussing the ways in which their religious identities were changed as a result of the dialogue that they entered into, and the problems that they faced in doing so, from personal, collective and community-based perspectives. Each founder might be seen as having a double religious identity, especially in *aesthetics*; however Monchanin moves away from this – eventually he admits that he is aware of just how 'Greek' his Christian faith is. He and Abhishiktananda clash over the extent to which Hinduism should be incorporated, with Abhishiktananda eventually developing a *spiritual* double religious identity. Bede Griffiths' arrival takes Saccidananda ashram in a slightly different direction, with his *theology* embracing a more Universalist and dialogical atmosphere. Also, the āśrama becomes popular with western pilgrims and tourists, and therefore the extent to which it can be seen as 'inculturation' if it does not appeal to Indian Christians is questioned. The three founders, and even the āśrama itself, then offer different ways which demonstrate how having a double religious identity is not a uniform experience. On this basis, this thesis continues to assert that the theology of double religious identity needs to be expanded if it is to do justice to such religious identities.

Chapter 8: **Saccidananda ashram (founded 1950)**

Saccidananda ashram was founded on the banks of the Kauveri River on the 21st March 1950, by Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux, who took on the Indian names 'Parma Arupi Anananda' and 'Abhishikteśvarānanda' (shortened to Abhishiktananda) respectively. The very conception of Saccidananda ashram was that it should be a centre for the contemplative life, "based alike on the traditions of Christian monasticism and of Hindu Sannyasa" (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 3). Both founders were keen to emphasize that "A specific type of Christian spirituality has to evolve out of the particular genius of the people of each country" (Monchanin and Le Saux, 1964, p. 13) and this attitude is what sums up their vision. Saccidananda ashram, from its original conception as a hermitage to an āśrama (dedicated not only to the contemplative life but also to dialogue) has evolved in its architecture, liturgy and styles of worship. Its identity, then, has also evolved, yet right from its conception the issue of religious identity overhung the two founders – indeed, it is out of such a recognition that their manifesto was published, as a means of communicating to their friends and colleagues exactly what they were doing (Abhishiktananda, in Monchanin and Le Saux, 1964, p. 1). Its incorporation of Hindu culture into the liturgy, worship and immediate surroundings means that whilst Saccidananda ashram is a bold example of Indian Christianity, it has led to conflict over its religious identity, with some accusing the founders of dressing the āśrama up in Hindu signs and symbols to deliberately confuse Hindus. However, the two founders strongly reject this charge, arguing that:

> ...it is neither out of a deceitful purpose...nor even out of a desire to make her apostolate more fecund, that the Indian Church looks to-day towards being more and more Indian even in her appearance and externals (Monchanin and Le Saux, 1964, p. 33).

The founders' retaliation clearly expresses that whilst the *externals* of their āśrama are rooted in Hindu culture as a process of Indianization, it is not out of deceit or to convert. Rather, they saw it as an experiment in grounding the Gospel and the Church in India through the contemplative life. This experiment, by its very nature, would have to be dialogical in order to fully understand Hinduism and so as to make parallels between Hindu and Christian symbols and religious concepts. Whilst the founders addressed such criticisms, Saccidananda ashram still came in for heavy criticism, including that it 'lacked realism', was 'syncretic'(Stuart, 1995, p. 43) and that the founders had 'become Hindus' (Letter to Mr Alfred Le Saux/Mme L. Montagnon-Le Saux, 24/9/1950 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p.43).

What is a Christian āśrama?

In order to understand the problems, as well as the success, that Saccidananda has faced, it is necessary to consider the principles on which the conception of a *Christian* āśrama lay. An āśrama is traditionally a centre of contemplation, a place to retreat or even to live in the pursuit of the divine. The community of an āśrama might be built up around a guru, which is perhaps the first departure of a Christian āśrama from a traditional Hindu āśrama – a Christian community would not build up around a guru, it is a place centred to the pursuit of God rather than a place built up around a human being. On the other hand, Maria Jeyaraj argues that "The most essential aspect of the ashram is the guru. In a Christian ashram Jesus is the Sadguru" (Jeyaraj, 2001, p. 27). This distinction between *guru* and *Sadguru* is extremely important; whilst a guru is a teacher the Sadguru is the spiritual leader of the āśrama, the true guru who leads towards self-realization. Jesu Rajan refers to Bede Griffiths as the guru of Saccidananda ashram (Rajan, 1989, p. 178); coupled with Jeyaraj's suggestion that Jesus is the *Sadguru* of a Christian āśrama it allows the format of a traditional āśrama to be followed without compromising Christian faith[176]. Tellingly, Abhishiktananda also referred to Jesus as sadguru in his diaries (Abhishiktananda 3/4/1952; 23/3/1970) and therefore he presumably shared a similar understanding with present day theologians like Jeyaraj and Rajan.

Jeyaraj also outlines several other features of a Christian āśrama, including contemplation, sannyāsa, community, poverty, chastity and obedience, and silence (Jayaraj, 2001, pp. 5-18). Sebastian Painadath SJ adds that a compassionate attitude towards all is also essential in āśrama life (Painadath, 2002, p. 7). All of these features can be seen as hallmarks of both Hindu and Christian āśramas; indeed Abhishiktananda knew that if their āśrama was to be authentic then they had to first have proper experience of Hindu āśramas (Stuart, 1995, p. 28) which is why they visited Ramana Maharshi's āśrama, for example. At Saccidananda ashram, the guests are requested to adhere to a contemplative lifestyle, which includes refraining from abusing the body, be that through alcohol or smoking (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 11), much the same as in Hindu āśramas. Saccidananda still adopts the life of sannyāsa, as did its founders, which is marked out by the *kāvi*, and they adhere to all its principles, including a strict vegetarian diet. In terms of their 'compassionate attitude', Saccidananda ashram is involved in various social projects such as schools, day care centres for children and the elderly and typewriting and tailoring courses in the nearby village. Interestingly, Abhishiktananda was not

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[176] See also Vandana in Rajan: "Though Christ always remains the *sadguru* in a Christian *āśram* he deigns to use a human being as *kārak guru* or instrumental guru to lead people to the *Paramguru*, the Father" (Vandana cited in Rajan, 1989, p. 181). Bede Griffiths, then, could be understood as God's instrument in leading people to him in a Christian ashram.

keen on distinguishing between Hindu āśramas and Christian āśramas, because "An *ashram* is an *ashram*. It would be rather like saying a 'Hindu potato' or a 'Christian potato'" (Abhishiktananda, cited in Visvanathan, 1998, p. 85). However, perhaps it makes sense to make such a distinction, especially as the founders were sometimes accused of being missionaries disguising themselves in Hindu garb to deliberately confuse people. Perhaps this is one of the reasons which leads them to being perceived as Hindu and Christian.

Possibly because a Christian āśrama is so alike to its Hindu counterpart in its *aesthetical* religious identity, it can be seen as confusing, misguiding, even based on principles which are not its own. It all comes down again to just how far one can go in attempts at inculturation. This problem concerning the lengths to which one can go without overstepping boundaries of respectful adaptation and synthesis is particularly directed towards Christian āśramas. There are over fifty Catholic āśramas in India and further afield (Ayyanikkatt, 2002, p. 1), and Saccidananda was the first successful Catholic āśrama. As previously mentioned in chapter two, one of the criticisms of Saccidananda ashram is that it appears to be lacking somewhat in inculturation because it does not attract that many Indian Christians, in fact it attracts more westerners! Bede Griffiths was acutely aware of this and recognised that often the westerners that came to Saccidananda were 'seekers', many of whom had become disenchanted with the Catholic Church but who were drawn to Saccidananda by its easy and relaxed approach, for "They do not go to Mass anymore and yet they are searching for God, and they came to Shantivanam to learn how to come closer to God" (Griffiths, 1992, p. 35). This is all very well, but if Saccidananda is meant to be a place which has adopted Indian culture as a means of inculturation, surely Indian people, rather than Western 'seekers' should be reaping the benefits of such a step? Perhaps the fact that Saccidananda was founded by Western rather than Indian Christians speaks volumes; Bede Griffiths became a popular figure in the West and this is quite possibly why he attracted so many people to his āśrama. Perhaps it could be suggested that if Christian āśramas are to flourish and attract Indian Christians as well as westerners, then such initiatives as Christian āśramas should now come from the local Church rather than being led by Western Christians. Tovey comments that both the Church of South India and North India:

> ...now have authorized experiments in inculturated liturgy. However such official experiments are still controversial, as are the experiments in the Roman Catholic Church (Tovey, 2004, p. 139).

The important thing to glean here is that whilst inculturative experiments are still controversial, it is the Church in India that is initiating these movements in adapting the liturgy etc. The founders of Shantivanam played a key role in demonstrating how the Church could adapt itself to Indian culture, but perhaps now the onus of that needs to be taken up at a grass roots level by

the Indian Church itself. Also, whilst Bede Griffiths *et al.* did adapt themselves to a culture that would readily become their own, Christians in India will always have been immersed in that culture and therefore surely it makes more sense for the people whom the inculturation of the Church is for to go about that process themselves? By doing so, there is a possibility that at least one of the charges levelled against Christian āśramas (that they are founded by imperialist missionaries) would be no longer appropriate, as these āśramas would be run by Indian Christians themselves.

The architecture of Saccidananda ashram

Before exploring the architecture of Saccidananda ashram, I want to pause and reflect on inculturated architecture generally. Perhaps one of the best known examples is Bishop Azariah's Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Dornakal. Although some churches in India were exact replicas of European churches (for example, St. Andrew's Chennai is the replica of St. Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square)[177] Azariah's "…mixed architectural elements and symbolism from Hindu, Muslim, and Christian traditions into a wholly unique synthesis" (Billington Harper, 2000, p. 262). This included lotus flowers, domes and twelve pillars which represented the twelve apostles (Billington Harper, 2000, p. 262). In short, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany is overtly Indian in its architectural style and a brilliant example of inculturation in architecture. Paul Collins describes the inculturation of church buildings as 'intentional' (Collins, 2007b, p. 123), or to use my own terminology, deliberate. This is because such a move is a conscious step towards making the Church more Indian in external appearances. The new chapel at Saccidananda ashram is certainly more Indian Christian than its old counterpart, as will be seen, and it could be suggested that this is also an intentional step forward on their part. Anand Amaladass and Gudrun Löwner in their excellent tome *Christian Themes in Indian Art* [2012] say that the new chapel at Saccidananda is being built as the old structure "was falling apart" (Amaladass and Löwner, 2012, p. 365) and that now "only the altarroom survives" (Amaladass and Löwner, 2012, p. 365), as will be shown later. But certainly this new chapel is not simply a rebuilding of the old; it is much more inculturated and reflects an Indian Christianity. Collins gives an example of another inculturated church, this time in Chenganoor, Kerala; he notes that 'both have goparums' (Collins, 2007b, p. 116) and this is something that Saccidananda ashram also has (see below). There are, then, a sharing of architectural styles between churches and temples in some cases. Paul Hedges comments that "… [missionary] architecture reflects [missionary] theology, but we must be clear what that theology is reflecting" (Hedges, 2000, p. 187). This is of course entirely true, and I will argue here that the architecture of the new chapel at Saccidananda ashram reflects the contemporary

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[177] See Collins, 2007b, p. 99.

community of Indian Christians there who are appear to embrace an Indian Christianity and an Indian Christian theology. However when such theology is not reflected, or reflected but not properly understood, this can give rise to a perception of Hindu-Christian syncretism (negatively construed). Hence it must not only be clear 'what that theology is reflecting' but how that reflection is perceived by other people, else inculturated places like Saccidananda ashram may be seen as syncretic rather than inculturative. Generally, Hedges says that "…we see today the free adoption of the form of the Hindu temple for new Christian chapels in a widespread way" (Hedges, 2000, p. 185) and this is certainly the case with the new ashram chapel, which is pink and white in colour and rounded in shape, with a big lotus flower in the middle of the ceiling and figures in meditating positions around the outside. At the end of the day it is really down to individual perception whether one thinks that inculturated architecture has adapted Hindu prototypes well and without causing offence, but in my opinion I think that the chapel at Saccidananda ashram is a stunning example of Indian Christianity and that it is clearly a Christian chapel, not a Hindu temple. Maybe this is because I approached the ashram chapel knowing it was Christian, but I believe that the abundance of Christian symbols are obvious enough, especially if one takes the time to reflect upon them.

When Saccidananda ashram was first founded in 1950, perhaps the most obvious allusion to Hinduism was the name of the āśrama itself: the use of the Sanskrit term (found in Advaita Vedānta to describe Brahman) for Being, Bliss, Consciousness (sat-cit-ānanda) which they used to allude to the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The gopuram (entrance gate) to the āśrama has above it the classic symbolic representation of the trimūrti, under the sign of a cross with the Oṃ in the middle (see figure 1).

Above Left: **Fig.1** Detail from the goparum to Saccidananda ashram and *Above Right*: **Fig. 2** serves as an example of Hindu trimūrti from a roadside shrine in Tamil Nadu. **Images: author's own. (2010)**

Aesthetically, there are both Hindu and Christian symbols depicted on the goparum. The trimūrti of Hinduism is here adapted to represent the Trinity; whilst the trimūrti usually represents Brahma, Śiva and Viṣṇu, here it is used to represent Father, Son and Holy Spirit of Christian doctrine. (Notice how the Holy Spirit is represented here as female[178] – the Spirit of God, or the Wisdom of God, is sometimes identified in Christian scripture as female.) This is an Indian pictorial representation, and not something which one would normally find in Western Christian art. Saccidananda ashram, openly stating that the Trinity is represented in the form of a trimūrti[179] suggests that "The figure is shown emerging from a cross to show hat (sic.) the mystery of the Trinity is revealed to us through the cross of Christ" (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 9). However, it could also be argued that the cross is obvious enough on this image so as to promote the understanding that the āśrama one is entering is indeed a Christian one, and not a Hindu āśrama. On the other hand, by adopting such a well-known image, it could be claimed that it is misleading, especially with the Oṃ symbol at the centre of the cross and the adoption of an artistic image usually associated with Hindu representations of the trimūrti. This might have led to the āśrama being perceived as Hindu, or Hindu and Christian simultaneously. But the use of the trimūrti is exactly in line with the remit of the founders of the āśrama; they wanted to use Hindu symbols in such a way that they can be appropriated for Christian purposes, and the comparison of the trimūrti and Saccidananda to the Trinity in both written and aesthetical form has been achieved here. However, it can be at least understood why this image has been accused of being misleading when such artistic representations abound in both Hindu and Christian symbolism.

The Christian āśrama that they founded was very simple; they wanted to be at one with those who were poor and so tried to furnish the āśrama very simply – they had mats on the floor instead of western beds, no mosquito nets and the huts they lived in were built with banana-leaved roofs. They initially celebrated Mass on the veranda of one of the huts, hoping to one day have a chapel which would be "...built and furnished in a simple but decent way and according to the best Indian artistic traditions" (Monchanin and Le Saux, 1964, p. 66). In the first few years of the āśrama's foundation many hours were spent writing *An Indian Benedictine Ashram*, a tract which set out their purposes and aims, to be distributed to friends abroad and to those local to the āśrama, as well as the many contacts they had formed travelling in India. They sat cross legged on the floor, removed their shoes before entering the chapel (du Boulay, 2005, p. 86) the same way as Hindus did before entering a temple, and wore rosaries, "...which exactly resembles those worn by Shivaite ascetics" (Letter from Abhishiktananda to

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[178] cf Amaladass and Lowner, 2012, p. 392

[179] Compare with above right.

Mr Alfred Le Saux/Mme L. Montagnon-Le Saux, 21/8/1950). They also used Tamil and Sanskrit in their singing, and read Tamil and Sanskrit texts, too (du Boulay, 2005, pp. 85-86). Saccidananda, then, was truly an Indian, rather than Western, monastic foundation, which reflected India's rich cultural and religious heritage.

The chapel would eventually draw its inspiration from a Cōḻa temple in Pondicherry (Stuart, 1995, p. 47). Bede Griffiths asked Jyoti Sahi to design the images of the saints – see figure 3 for an example - and Jesus and Mary, which adorn the Chapel in line with the Indian artistic way of representing divinity and holiness. The dome was built above the sanctuary, so that "...you are positioned right at the base of death and resurrection..." (Griffiths, 1997, p. 76), for that is where the altar is (Griffiths, 1997, pp. 75-76).

Above: **Fig. 3** A photograph of part of the new Chapel, depicting the mūrti (image) of Saint Peter atop the Chapel at Saccidananda ashram (December 2010). **Image: author's own. (2010)**

Above: Fig. 4 This image is intended to give the reader a fuller representation of one's first impression of Saccidananda ashram on approach for the first time. **Image: author's own. (2010)**

The Chapel built by Abhishiktananda drew its inspiration from Hindu architecture and art; however the Chapel was incorporated into a larger building in 2010 and the chapel he built now forms the Holy of Holies as part of a much larger, more obviously Indian style Church. Griffiths lists the four images as Saint Peter, Saint Benedict, Saint Paul and the Virgin Mary (Griffiths, 1997, p. 75). Now, two remain fully visible, Saints Peter and Benedict. In Figure 3, it is obvious that St. Peter is modelled using Indian artistic techniques – he is accompanied by an animal to his right, much the same as the Hindu gods and their vehicles which adorn Hindu Temples. However, Griffiths says that they are "...the four living creatures of the Apocalypse" (Griffiths, 1997, pp. 75-76). So there has been an obvious translation from the use of animals in Hinduism when accompanying deities, to depicting Christ in an Indian form. There is prominent use of bold colours (although spruced up, they were always bold in colour). However, on closer inspection St. Peter is easily recognizable by the key he holds (symbolizing the Cross Keys of St. Peter) and his name written underneath. Above him, Jesus is seated in a posture of divinity. Notice how both are not dressed in Western garb, but in Indian apparel.

The new chapel, dedicated in December 2010, is even more overt in its Indian style. It is pink, a typical colour of Indian religious buildings, and the inside (not visible) has a lotus flower at the centre. It has the domes on the top, depicting Mary, the saints and Jesus, just as Hindu gods and goddesses are depicted on Hindu temples. Overleaf, figures 5 and 6 display the front and the back of the Chapel at Saccidananda ashram. The square building (as seen from the back) is part of the original chapel built by Abhishiktananda. Notice also the Cross with the Oṃ symbol outside the front of the Church.

Figure 5 The square part of the building, with the Cross on it, incorporates Abhishiktananda's chapel. **Image: author's own (2010)**
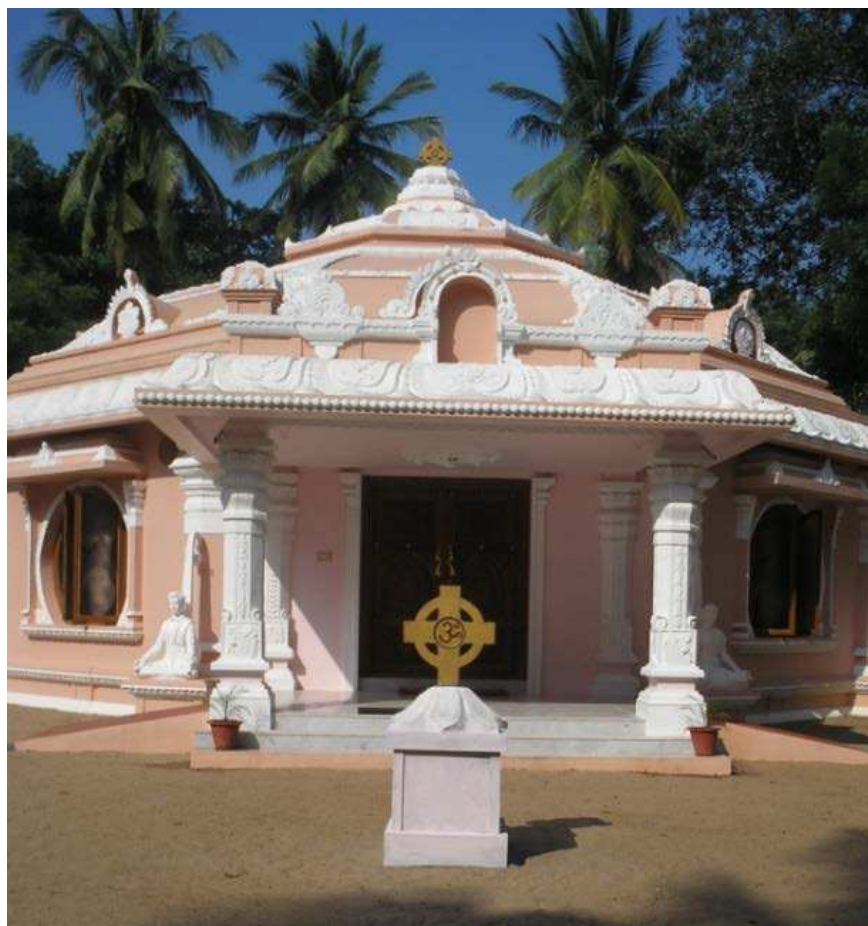
Figure 6 Image: author's own (2010)

Even the grilled shutters have an inculturated image on: Figure 7 is of Jesus, his hands in typically Indian gestures. He seems to be kneeling besides or on a bird which has a halo, suggesting this represents the Holy Spirit, and it has the world at the centre. The heavens being projected behind Jesus' head, whilst reminiscent of a halo used to depict him in Western Christian ideals, are also encapsulated by fire, and are not a 'traditional' Christian depiction of Jesus. Indeed, it is perhaps more reminiscent of the flames which encircle Śiva in his naṭarāja pose, as figure 8 illustrates.

*Above Left***: Figure 7 Image author's own. (2010)** *Above Right* **Figure 8 Image: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.** Unknown, 12th Century. *Siva Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, India (Tamil Nadu), 1100-1200. Museum no. IM.71-1935. Lord Ampthill bequest.* Image available at: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O25011/shiva-nataraja-lord-of-the-sculpture-unknown/ (Accessed: 11 October 2012).

Liturgy and Worship at Saccidananda ashram, with a particular focus on āratī

What about the style of worship and the liturgy used at Saccidananda ashram? Whilst both Abhishiktananda and Monchanin were residing at Saccidananda, the Morning, Midday and Evening prayers were "...enriched with Sanskrit and Tamil texts and songs, and followed an Indian style with regard to postures, greetings, etc" (Stuart, 1995, pp. 39-40). This is something that has been carried over to the present day, but it is important to remember that when they started this practice of adopting postures and gestures (which were a norm in Indian religious culture but not Western) it was pre-Vatican II. Stuart goes on to claim that "These experiments prepared the way for later developments in Indianizing the Church's worship which became possible after Vatican II" (Stuart, 1995, p. 40).

At present, the Chapel at Saccidananda ashram "make[s] use of various symbols drawn from Hindu tradition, in order to adapt our Christian prayer and worship to Indian traditions and customs according to the mind of the church today" (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 6). Symbols, as pictorial representations which point to something beyond, are used from their Hindu context to adapt Christian patterns of worship and prayer accordingly. In addition to the changes outlined above, the āśrama in its present form also uses the use the sound/symbol of Oṃ, sandalwood paste, āratī and offerings of the four elements in its Mass and prayers (Saccidananda ashram, no date, pp. 6-7). The āratī was introduced by Bede Griffiths, inspired by a visit to a Hindu temple in Trichy where Viṣṇu was venerated (Griffiths,1997, pp. 76-77). The welcome leaflet of Saccidananda ashram discusses how they use āratī, and why:

> ...wave lights before the Blessed Sacrament to manifest, as it were, the hidden Christ and we then take the light of Christ to our eyes by placing the hand over the flame which is passed round to all the congregation (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 7).

In Hindu worship, the āratī is used in a similar manner by taking the light of the camphor flame (which is waved before the mūrti and then passed around during pūjā) to one's eyes and receiving darśan. Āratī is used then as a means of taking light symbolically to one's eyes, in both Indian Christian and Hindu worship, but at the same time what the light represents is fundamentally different. Whilst aesthetically the process of using āratī may look fairly similar, the reason for doing so is not the same: In Hinduism it is used primarily as a purveyor of darśan, whereas in the Indian Christian liturgy it is used by drawing on Christian interpretations of light as 'Christ's light', but also to 'manifest…the hidden Christ' (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 7). The latter certainly evokes parallel images of Anglo-Catholic Mass (at least in my experience) where the moment of consecration is signalled through the use of incense, bells, and occasionally, light. The blessing of Christ then is taken in the same way that darśan is received, by taking the hands over the flame and then placing the hands over the eyes. The

āśrama, then, seemingly blurs Hindu and Christian worship, but it is the underlying meaning of the worship that is key to understanding that actually the religious identity of the āśrama *is* spiritually Christian. Yet it is Hindu *culturally* because it has adapted the use of fire in worship from Hindu religious and cultural ceremonies[180] by taking on the use of light and paralleling it with the light of Christ (cf John 8:12: "I am the Light of the World"). The worship then is still spiritually Christian, but *is perceived* to border both Hindu and Christian, giving the appearance of a confluence of Hinduism and Christianity. Rather than a synthesis, the worship is best understood as the outcome of a dialogue between the Christian founders and the Hinduism they participated in, as it is only through such dialogue that sufficient understanding of āratī (for example) could come, recognizing and appreciating the importance of āratī in Hindu culture and proceeding to make the necessary adaptations to use it in Christian worship in India.

Saccidananda ashram is very clear that it is conducting itself in the best spirit of the Catholic Church, stating its aim as being "...to bring into our Christian life the riches of Indian spirituality" (Saccidananda ashram, no date, p. 2). This is the language of inculturation, the linguistic precursor of what Monchanin and Le Saux called the Indianization of the Church/ the Christianization of India. The ways in which this is manifested in symbol are the problematic factors which lead to some critics accusing the āśrama of synthesizing Hindu and Christian worship. However, because Hindu and Indian culture often flow into each other (like for example, the use of āratī to welcome visitors but also its use during pūjā) it proves difficult to use Hindu culture in Christian worship without seeming to border on Hindu and Christian worship simultaneously. As raised in Part I, this is something that dialogue and inculturation will continue to develop and address, but for now it can be argued that despite the problematic aspect of using Hindu symbols in a Christian āśrama environment, such uses are bold adaptations of the Church to a non-Western environment. Aesthetically the āśrama may give the appearance of having a double religious identity, but spiritually, the aims of Saccidananda are still being met in providing *Christian* worship within an Indian cultural (and therefore from their perspective a *Hindu*) environment.

What if inculturation was reversed?

A possible criticism concerning the methods of inculturation is whether or not Christians would be happy to accept inculturation in reverse i.e. inculturation of another religion *through their own.* This is an extremely interesting point, similar to criticisms about the theory of 'anonymous Christians' – i.e. how happy would Christians be with being labelled anonymous

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[180] Āratī is used not only in Temples or pūjā but also as a way of welcoming visitors to homes etc. It is then both religiously and culturally significant in India.

Vedāntins?[181] If it is the case that Christians would be unhappy about their faith being the focus of inculturation, does this then mean that there is something dubious about the whole process, if they cannot rest on the laurels of their own Golden rule? (Do unto others as they would do to you). I suspect that Christians who would be at the receiving end of inculturation would find it hard to accept, and even find it an uncomfortable experience. To give an example, Goel asks his reader to imagine a Muslim missionary who "…puts on the clerical collar and black robes of a Catholic Priest and holds Sunday services which look just like Mass, except that prayers are to Allah and Mohammed instead of Jesus" (Goel,1994, Chapter 8, paragraph 39). As a Christian, I know that I would find this deeply unsettling; to partake in a service which looked like a Mass, but actually where it turns out that the focus of prayer is Allah, not Christ. Indeed, there would probably be all sorts of criticisms about using the Mass inappropriately, questions about whether it is even possible to hold a Mass-like service which does not espouse Christ – as surely the very theology of the Eucharist is rooted in the concept of salvation through Christ? It could be possible to draw parallels with Sen here, who has been criticised for simply re-enacting the Eucharist minus the Christology in his Church of the New Dispensation. Essentially, the point Goel is making is that however uncomfortable Christians might find his hypothetical Muslim inculturation, this is the situation that Hindus are finding themselves in now (Goel, 1994, Chapter 8, Paragraph 41). Whilst I think that Goel's criticism has raised a valid point about how Christians would feel if the shoe was on the other foot in inculturation, nevertheless I also think that he has chosen a deliberately polemical example and that the example of the Mass is a far-fetched one. Also, the issue of the hypothetical Muslim missionary 'putting on the robes of a Priest' is too simplistic: in Goel's example there is no allusion to partaking in the theology of priesthood, just simply dressing up in the attire. So Goel's example is a weak one, which rests on the assumption of inculturation as a form of deception rather than adaptation.

Indeed, Goel's example seems to imply that inculturation as a deliberately deceptive act; however it is not the aim of Christian inculturation to deceive people. Nevertheless, this criticism has to be addressed: the fact that inculturation can be perceived in this manner raises serious questions about how appropriate it is for the Church to engage in this kind of missionary practice. And it would be foolish to think that criticism of inculturation come just from Hindus in this thesis; for example Swami Devananda claims that the Catholic Laity Congress of Bombay "circulates pamphlets denouncing Bede Griffiths for his syncretism and calls for disciplinary action by the Church" (Letter to Indian Express/Bede Griffiths, early June 1987 in Goel,1994, Chapter 13, paragraph 27). The crux of the problem seems to rest on this

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[181] This was discussed in chapter three.

issue of 'distinction' – that if inculturation does happen, it needs to be aware that openness and honesty are needed to avoid charges of deception. Does it then follow that, if Christian āśramas were more easily identifiable as being centres of Christian contemplation, the critics of these places would be satisfied? I think it would certainly help, as there could then be little or no ground for accusations of deceit. For example, Monchanin favoured distinguishing between Hindu and Christian sannyāsins by a small wooden cross, and this is an obvious, aesthetical symbol which tells people that a place has a Christian foundation. But I think what will really help counteract this criticism of deception will be inculturation 'from below'; i.e. not from foreign missionaries but from Indian Christians themselves as the criticism of deceit seems to be driven by the notion that Christianity is a colonial hangover. Do away with the association of Christianity and imperialism, and inculturation *might* just lose that image of 'deceitful conversion tactic'. However, there is no denying that such an association will be hard to erase completely, and so the criticism of deception is something that needs to (and hopefully does) initiate dialogue between Hindus and Christians, and encourage transparency between Christian missionaries and Hindus.

Saccidananda ashram has run into various problems arguably in part due to the religious identity of the āśrama and its founders. Although this has not necessarily hindered their work, the problems posed do raise important questions about engagement in Hindu-Christian dialogue and inculturation through the workings of a Christian āśrama. In terms of breaking the 'Western mould' of Christianity, Nalunnakkal argues that whilst "It may well take experimentation and time...it does not mean that it is unattainable" (Nalunnakkal, cited in Tovey, 2004, p. 2) and this open mindedness to the success of inculturative methods like Christian āśramas is important in the early years of such formations. It may well be that more obvious distinctions between Christian and Hindu āśramas may become part of a developing attitude towards successful inculturation, which could also be instigated more at a grass roots level rather than simply being an idea imported by foreign missionaries[182].

Closing Remarks

The āśrama serves to illustrate an important observation of *aesthetical* double religious identity, which is not as obvious in other studies of double religious identity. Saccidananda has a double religious identity because of its aesthetics. Adopting the kāvi, as an aesthetical religious identity, does not always mean that this is also replicated on a spiritual level. Saccidananda ashram itself demonstrates this; by retaining the liturgy and worship as Christian but adapting it

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[182] However, it is not only the identity of the āśrama itself that can draw criticism, but also the identity of the founders of these places, as Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths were acutely aware. Bede Griffiths' problems are explored in the next chapter.

to Hindu culture, the āśrama illustrates how a place as well as a person can have a double religious identity. The confusion over its religious identity surfaces because Hinduism is culturally infused with India, hence the cultural and religious aspects sometimes appear to overlap. Therefore inculturation may appear to some to be creating a hybrid of Christianity and Hinduism. However, as such examples as the use of āratī show, the meanings which underlay the purpose of that worship are essentially different from one another and therefore are not in danger of syncretism. Perhaps it could be argued that inculturation is excessive when it becomes syncretic, as this would be a blending of religions, and therefore inculturation is not performing its purpose i.e. rather than emphasising Christianity through a different cultural context it is mixing religions together instead. Indeed, it could be argued that excessive inculturation could be misguided, colonial even because of the way it haphazardly uses the religious other for its own ends. However, if practice of inculturation does not really embody the concept (of inculturation) wholeheartedly, then it could be in danger not of being excessive, but of not being inculturative enough! The actual execution of a Christian āśrama like Saccidananda demonstrates to people that inculturation is not the same as hybridization – it is not about putting a Śiva mūrti on the altar! However, what it does instead is to take note of how images are respected in Hindu temples, translating that respect by borrowing Hindu ideas such as garlanding the images with beautiful flowers, much more part of Indian culture than lighting a candle next to an icon, as can be the custom in Western Churches[183]. As Teasdale comments, Griffiths attempted to demonstrate how "...the content of Christian faith is itself not bound exclusively to any one culture or linguistic framework" (Teasdale, 2003, p. 130) and this is extremely important in considering how religious identity can also be appropriated to remain relevant in those cultures.

Saccidananda ashram is just one example of Christian inculturation in India, through a particular medium, the use of āśramas. Accusations that the use of religious identity in inculturation is underhand should act as a reminder to the Church to be extra sensitive about the way it portrays itself and the way it uses other cultures, even if that use is motivated by a desire to make the Church more universal rather than dominated by Western culture. Whilst the Church is right to be prioritizing inter-faith dialogue and inculturation, because religious identity is a sensitive issue this is something to bear in mind particularly with regards to the latter. One way in which greater sensitivity might be achieved is by following Monchanin's advice that 'for the sake of fairness', Christian sannyāsins should be distinguishing themselves through the wearing of a cross. Saccidananda ashram already does this; although it makes use of Hindu symbols it is also careful to prominently place Christian symbols such as the Cross in

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[183] This might arise through spontaneous or deliberate inculturation.

such a way that the āśrama is more overtly Christian. More emphasis on grass-roots involvement in inculturation is also another step in the right direction, encouraging Indian Christians to find their own ways of bringing in Indian culture into the Church and their faith, rather than making inculturation just another well-intentioned Western proposal. Despite the aesthetical double religious identity of the āśrama, which explains the perception of the āśrama as 'Hindu' or 'deceitful', the spirituality is indeed Christian, albeit an Indian Christian spirituality which might feel alien to its western Christian visitors.

***Chapter 9:* The founders of Saccidananda ashram – Jules Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths**

The ways in which their religious identities were perceived often meant that the founders of Saccidananda ashram encountered problems vis-a-vis their religious identity. This included conflicting with Hindus who accused them of being missionaries in disguise, Christians who charged them of syncretism and colleagues who had become uncomfortable with the extent to which they were incorporating Hinduism into their lives. Religious identity can be problematic in dialogue, as if one is seen to go too far in incorporating different beliefs in their own faith they can be accused of deception. However, the extent to which the founders were willing to go in pursuit of dialogue, which would also manifest itself in *inculturation*, is testament to their commitment to upholding the validity of inclusivist and pluralist *theologies* during their personal adventures in inter-faith dialogue. Whilst the time period covered by this case study is pre-Vatican II, the founders of Saccidananda ashram are certainly found to be ahead of their time. They initiated inculturative methods to bring about the adaptation of the Church in India in quite a spectacular way, by taking on the Hindu concepts of āśrama and sannyāsa. This had only been attempted in small doses and to varying degrees of success before the founding of Saccidananda ashram. For example, there were a few attempts at Protestant āśramas from the 1920s onwards[184] (Coff, 2002, p. 46) and, as explored earlier, Upadhyay had tried but failed to initiate his ideas on inculturation through establishing a Catholic maṭha. Saccidananda then can be viewed as the first successful Catholic āśrama, drawing people to it not just from India but from all over the world.

Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths are particularly explored in this thesis as examples of people with double religious identities, and they each embrace many of the facets outlined in the introduction. To give just one example, Abhishiktananda demonstrates the *spiritual* facet of double religious identity, through trying to bridge Advaita and his Christian faith, and Bede Griffiths demonstrates this facet only later in life after his 'Surrender to the Mother' experience. As for Jules Monchanin, he will not be explored from the perspective of double religious identity *per se*[185] but he does offer an interesting contrast. This is because Monchanin saw the impact of Hinduism on Abhishiktananda's spirituality, but did not want that experience for himself. Instead, Monchanin discovers the limits to which his own religious identity can go

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[184] The first Protestant āśrama, indeed the first Christian āśrama, was Christukula Ashram, in Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu (Pattathu, 1997, pp. 202-203).

[185] Monchanin is integral to the founding of the ashram and will be included in the first section of this chapter, which explores the contributions of each founder. He will also be referred to in various places as means of contrast, and to ensure a holistic picture of the founding of the ashram.

during the founding of the ashram, and in his relationship with Abhishiktananda. What is significant is his reaction to Abhishiktananda's spiritual double religious identity, and how this affects Monchanin's own theology and spirituality. If Monchanin can be said to have a double religious identity at all, it is purely in the *aesthetics* and *inculturation* facets which all three of the founders share in.

The stories of the founders and the formation of Saccidananda ashram

Jules Monchanin

Monchanin was not deployed to India with the remit to set up an āśrama (although this is how his vocation would eventually bear out) but rather to become a part of the Church in India. Rajan notes that Monchanin wanted to reveal "...the contemplative dimension of the Church by creating a community which would devote itself to the contemplation of the Trinity and live the values of Indian *sannyāsa*" (Rajan, 1989, p. 88). It is out of this conviction that Saccidananda ashram would be conceived, and the adoption of kāvi would be their starting point for the adoption of Sannyāsa principles. However it is important to point out, as Michael Barnes does, that Monchanin "…was not interested in making converts, nor was he concerned with what we have become accustomed to call 'dialogue'" (Barnes, 2001, pp. 63-64). Dialogue for him involved taking an interest, learning about Hinduism in order to achieve his goal. He was not interested in dialogue to the extent that Le Saux and Griffiths were; his chief aim was the Indianization of the Church. In that sense Monchanin and de Nobili share certain characteristics in their religious identities: both were concerned with learning from Hinduism as a means to an end, the former with the Indianization of the Church and the latter with the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. However, it can be argued that what Monchanin did *was* dialogical. Robinson for example, argues that one of the reasons for entering into dialogue is quite simply, "to understand why others believe and act in the ways they do…" (Robinson, 2004, p. 94). In order to start the process of the Indianization of the Church, the culture and religious make-up of India had to be understood – Monchanin learnt about these things through conversing with (albeit very few) local people, and visiting Hindu temples and āśramas. If dialogue is to be understood at the basic level of even just *learning about*, then Monchanin did engage in dialogue, it is just that by comparison Griffiths and Abhishiktananda went much deeper in their own approaches to dialogue.

Henri Le Saux/Abhishiktananda

Le Saux arrived in India from France on 15th August 1948 at the invitation of the Bishop of Trichy. Together in 1950 on March 21st (St. Benedict's Day) after much preparation, Le Saux and Monchanin founded Saccidananda Ashram on the banks of the River Kaveri, and the two

of them took on their Indian names. They had already adopted kāvi previous to this, and Le Saux's letters recite amusing anecdotes about the initial reactions of the Christians in the community to their manner of dressing![186]

Le Saux was no stranger to monastic life, having entered the Benedictine order at the young age of nineteen. Of the three founders, Abhishiktananda has the most obvious example of a double religious identity; the diaries that he left behind certainly reveal how he struggled between Hinduism and Christianity until he reconciled himself. He was influenced by two Hindus a great deal, Ramana Maharshi and Sri Gnanananda, the latter of which he was a disciple of, frequenting their āśramas and also spending solitary months on the holy mountain of Arunachala, as had Ramana Maharshi. Visvanathan points out however that Monchanin was uneasy about Le Saux's experimenting with Hinduism (Visvanathan, 1998, p. 37), and this issue would drive a wedge between the two founders, with Le Saux coming to the realisation that the monastic institution he had helped to found was "too heavy a responsibility" (Visvanathan, 1998, p. 72). He found it hard after the solitude he had been accustomed to and left the āśrama eleven years after Monchanin's death (1957) to found a secluded hermitage in the North, near the Ganges, leaving the āśrama under the care of Fr. Francis Mahieu.

Abhishiktananda's diaries provide good sources for examining his struggles with his religious identity, and as aforementioned it is an obviously double religious identity, in both *spirituality* and *aesthetics*. Whilst Bede Griffiths and Monchanin engaged in comparative *theology* which may at times have appeared to be evident of double religious identity, as Rajan points out Bede would never have dared to identify Hindu and Christian concepts as the same, but merely related them (Rajan, 1989, p. 146). In comparison, Abhishiktananda identified, as just one example, Saccidānanda and the Holy Trinity as the same[187]. It could be argued that this makes Abhishiktananda's *theology* the most radical of all the three founders. On the other hand, some of Bede's later theology (particularly concerning Advaita and his surrender to the mother) could be conceived as radical as well, although the importance of his historical context is not to be overlooked[188].

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[186] For example, one afternoon he went to buy Mass wafers from a nearby convent, dressed in *kāvi* "...they [the sisters] could not have been more appalled by seeing the Devil himself walking in!" (Letter to Mr Alfred Le Saux/Mme L. Montagnon-Le Saux, 21/8/50 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 42).

[187] Upadhyay and Sen also did this.

[188] I mean this in relation to the outcomes of Vatican II; this is explored in the 'Surrender to the Mother' section of this chapter.

Bede Griffiths

Bede Griffiths had helped Francis Mahieu to establish Kurisumala ashram in Kerala[189], and when Abhishiktananda placed Saccidananda ashram under Mahieu's care, Bede Griffiths was sent, along with two others, to reside there and take care of the āśrama. He had a long experience of monasticism and a vision similar, in parts, to Monchanin and Le Saux. After his studies[190], with two friends (Hugh Waterman and Martin Skinner) Bede chose to live in a small village in the Cotswolds in a self-founded hermitage, in 1939 (Griffiths, 1997, p. 39). Although this lasted for less than a year, it was integral to Bede's formation and affirmed his vocation to become a Priest (which led him to read theology) and eventually entered the monastic life, at the age of 25, and spending some of this time at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire, as well as becoming Prior of Farnborough. Griffiths came to India in 1955 (Griffiths, 1982, p. 3) at the request of an Indian Benedictine monk, Fr. Benedict Alapatt, who had written to every monastery in Europe hoping to find support from like-minded monks who would help to establish a Benedictine foundation in India (Rance, 1997, p. 25). The hermitage they built in Kengeri, they believed to be "...very simple, but it was still Western" (Griffiths, 1997, p. 71). Eventually, he and Fr Alapatt parted ways, and Bede Griffiths met Francis Mahieu. In 1958, along with Fr. Francis Mahieu, he helped to found Kurisamala ashram. Part of the lifestyle they adopted involved the decision "...to adopt the *kavi* (saffron-coloured) habit of the Indian sannyasi and to follow as far as possible the customs of a Hindu ashram" (Griffiths, 1984, p. 42). In doing so, they were readily adapting themselves to the cultural and religious heritage surrounding them. He was well equipped, then, to take over the management of Saccidananda ashram in 1968, after Monchanin's death and Le Saux's departure. However, this was not an easy task and Bede recalled how "We started from scratch, with practically nothing – just a few little huts, a little chapel, a tiny library, and just the three of us" (Griffiths, 1997, p. 75). Despite these difficulties, Saccidananda ashram flourished under his care and evolved into not only a centre of Benedictine monasticism in India but also a centre of inter-faith dialogue.

Bede Griffiths wrote, travelled and spoke publicly about Saccidananda ashram and inter-faith dialogue. He was particularly interested in the bridge between East and West, something he shared with Le Saux, and also between rationality (and what he saw as the Western emphasis on reason) and intuition (what he viewed as a more Eastern emphasis), which he also identified

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[189] To read more about this Indian Catholic ashram, see Bede Griffiths' essay 'Kurisumala Ashram' in his own *Christ in India: Essays Toward a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* [1984, 2nd edn], pp.. 41-47.

[190] He had studied English Literature at Oxford under C.S. Lewis; the few of their letters that are available show their shared passion for discussing theology, although they would sometimes be in sharp disagreement (Hooper, 2005, pp. 670-673).

as the dominance of the male mind over the female mind[191]. He was also acutely aware of the growing numbers of people who were becoming dissatisfied with the Church in the West, recognizing that people came to Saccidananda ashram from the West because of the way the Church presented Christianity (Swindells, 1993). Bede Griffiths did write some autobiographical works, and like the other two was a prolific letter writer (Rance, 2006, p. 17), as well as a theologian. Of course, this study restricts itself to the works and letters which talk about dialogue and religious identity, in particular his time at Shantivanam. His easy, open attitude towards other faiths (especially in Hinduism) means that he is sometimes viewed as being a Christian Hindu, or perhaps an inclusivist or maybe a universalist or pluralist: certainly his spiritual journey and academic interests make his religious identity worth commenting on in this study. His motives in going to India were two-fold; not only to bring the contemplative Christian life to India but also to find out what India could give to him. He recalls in *The Marriage of East and West* how he wrote to a friend that "I want to discover the other half of my soul..." (Griffiths, 1982, p. 3). It could be argued therefore that this journey to India was also a very personal, spiritual adventure for Bede Griffiths. Indeed, before journeying to India he wrote how "I wanted to experience in my life the marriage of these two dimensions of human existence, the rational and intuitive, the conscious and unconscious, the masculine and feminine" (Griffiths, 1982, p. 4). A later section of this chapter, 'Surrender to the Mother', will show how towards the end of his life he believed that the masculine and the feminine had been balanced in him and how through this surrender (which occurred shortly after he had experienced a stroke) Griffiths may have discovered the other half of his soul. However, it appears that his religious identity seems to have caused him less angst than Abhishiktananda's did. This 'experience'[192] will be viewed in this thesis from the perspective of Bede Griffiths partaking of a *spiritual* double religious identity towards the end of his life.

By the time of Bede's death in 1993, the small, experimental Christian ashram built by two French monks on the banks of the Kaveri had become a monastic foundation affiliated to the Camaldolese Benedictine Order, which whilst centred on the contemplative life also welcomed guests from all over the world to visit and participate in their work. It was also a renowned centre for dialogue, and a vision of the inculturation that Vatican II had advocated. Contemporarily, it remains true to its vision, integrating aspects of Indian religious culture into the Western foundation of Christian monastic life, by the adoption of sannyāsa and the

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[191] For example, see Griffiths, 2004, p. 90. Also, recall Ursula King's comment on Bede Griffiths' east/west distinction as "simplistic, if not to say myopic" (King in Robinson, 2004, p. 30).

[192] Shirley du Boulay writes that "Though it was undoubtedly an extremely serious physical illness, those who heard him talk about it were convinced that it was essentially a mystical experience" (du Boulay, 2003, pp. 227 – 228).

adaptation of liturgy and worship in line with Indian culture, although this has not been without its problems.

Abhishiktananda – Spiritual turmoil of a Hindu-Christian monk (1910-1973; arrived in India 1948)

Despite Monchanin and Abhishiktananda sharing an almost identical passion for bringing Christianity to India minus its Western culture, they were actually quite different and their religious identities would also bear out very differently. Abhishiktananda's relationship with both Hinduism and Christianity meant that he "...was to be led into places where he found himself torn apart" (Nicholl, in Stuart, 1995, p. vii).

The influence of Advaita

Unlike Monchanin, Abhishiktananda remained a firm believer in the meeting point of Hinduism and Christianity, and the influence of Advaita[193] upon him is not to be taken lightly, which he first came into real, experiential contact with on the mountain of Arunachala and through his first meeting with Raman Maharshi. The town of Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu has built up around this mountain, and Ramana Maharshi's āśrama is located at the bottom of it. Maharshi himself spent many solitary years upon the mountain as a Sadhu, and Abhishiktananda would follow his example. It is amusing that in first meeting Ramana Maharshi, Abhishiktananda was not overly impressed![194] However, the second time around (which would also be his final meeting with him) he said:

> ...it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, tore it apart and opened a mighty abyss (Abhishiktananda, 1979, p. 9).

This feeling would lead him to spending long months alone on Arunachala, as he immersed himself more and more fully in Indian culture and (Hindu) Advaita experience. It is during these retreats in solitude on the mountain, as well as other solitary retreats, that his diary records real pains of the confrontation of Hinduism and Christianity meeting within him,

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[193] Advaita means non-dual and is a strand of philosophy from one of the six schools of Indian philosophy, the school of Vedānta. It is the idea that reality and Brahman are non-dual, as only Brahman is real, everything else is therefore illusory. (*māyā*) Advaita Vedānta is most famously attributed to Śaṅkara, the eighth century philosopher (See Koller, 2002, p. 81f).

[194] See *The Secret of Arunachala* by Abhishiktananda. "...the halo? In vain I strained my eyes trying to see it; all my efforts were useless" (Abhishiktananda, 1979, p. 7).

beginning to face up to their incompatibility from 1953 onwards (Panikkar in Abhishiktananda, 1998, p. 57). The crux of the problem for Abhishiktananda was posed by the issue of committing oneself to a different faith, the spiritual anguish of the possibility of conversion. This is because the exclusivist Truth-claims of Christianity leave no room for committing oneself to another faith; full and uncompromised loyalty is expected if Christ is understood as unique Saviour. Indeed, in one diary entry he writes "In committing myself totally to *advaita*, if Christianity is true, I risk committing myself to a false path for eternity" (Abhishiktananda, 25/9/1953).

Very early on, it is obvious how Abhishiktananda struggles to see how he can remain true to Christianity without compromising (what he sees as) his Christian beliefs with the Truth he has also found so acutely in advaita. There is a lot of doubt expressed in that particular journal entry – '*if* Christianity is true', 'I *risk...*' – which is understandable considering the pull he is feeling: one in the direction of embracing a more Hindu identity, the other being constantly pulled back to his Christian one. However, he is also aware that he cannot renounce either advaita or Christianity, writing a few days later that "I have tasted too much of *advaita* to be able to recover the 'Gregorian' peace of a Christian monk" (Abhishiktananda, 27/9/53). This is the double religious identity of Abhishiktananda – he does not renounce Christianity or Hinduism, instead recognising the validity of both paths he is now confronted with. From the beginning of his experiences he has identified a tension between his two religious identities, and eventually this comes to the fore. His journals record a growing anguish, as by December 1954 he is writing rather abstractedly about his tormented position "A deeper fall into the abyss. Walking on a knife-edge. Unable to decide for one side or the other. What a torment" (Abhishiktananda, December 1954). By 1955 Abhishiktananda was tormented by his position in between Christianity and Hinduism and was searching for his own identity rather than a synthesis between the two (Panikkar in Abhishiktananda, 1998, p. 100).

Bearing the Hindu-Christian tension

Over the next couple of years, Abhishiktananda does not abandon one of his religious identities for the other, but continues to try and reconcile the two, a dialogue within himself which is still a painful experience. Towards the end of 1956, he seems to admit in his diary that he knows that the surrender to Advaita would bring him peace. However he remains aware that:

> All my agony lies in the fact that I still want to remain Christian. If once the step were taken, once and for all, of frankly accepting *advaita* with all its possible consequences, including the "letting go" of Christianity, everything leads me to believe that then peace would shine out. But that – whatever I have said or written or thought – that I have never done (Abhishiktananda, 30/11/1956).

This passage clearly demonstrates the *spiritual* problems one can encounter if they have a double religious identity; it is as if he intuits that surrendering everything to Advaita will bring him peace, but he does not desire this, because he 'still wants to remain Christian'. This feeling is testament not only to his inclusivist theology but also to his vocation, of wanting to bring Christ to India, because he still believes that his faith in Christ is essential, a part of his very being. Interestingly, Clooney makes similar remarks about 'letting go' in regards to his own faith journey, in particular the use of Vaiṣṇava mantras *as* prayer. 'Letting go', and praying these Hindu prayers, Clooney says is "...an ideally awkward position for the Christian to be in, since finally real inter-religious learning is at stake" (Clooney, 2009, p. 94). Whilst Clooney 'let's go' and prays the mantras, Abhishiktananda does not. Context should not be underestimated; Clooney is a post Vatican II Catholic, Abhishiktananda is writing before the Council at this point. Because of this context, Clooney, perhaps, has the greater freedom to let go and 'put his theology where his mouth is' – Clooney is taking his own beliefs about interreligious dialogue and *acting* upon them. He is living his theological convictions. But Abhishiktananda sees 'frankly accepting Advaita' as incompatible with his desire 'to remain Christian', and cannot, spiritually or emotionally, embrace this 'ideally awkward' situation. As Drew points out, "It is one thing to answer the question of how it is that a plurality of religions can be equally true, but it is a further question as to whether it is possible for that plurality to be reflected in the thought and practice of an individual" (Drew, 2011, p. 9). I think that in Abhishiktananda we can see how his understanding of Hinduism as spiritually significant for him is 'reflected in his thought and practice', but certainly that is not always easy. So there is a jump, as Drew's comment suggests, between expressing theological convictions and reflecting that through lived experience.

A year later, it seems that Abhishiktananda has reached the climax of his double religious identity, alluding to death as a release for him because "I cannot be at the same time both Hindu and Christian and no more can I be either simply Hindu or simply Christian" (Abhishiktananda, 12/4/1957). This resonates with what Phan calls "a demanding vocation", which is "not unlike martyrdom" (Phan, 2004, p. 81), of having more than one religious identity simultaneously – therefore suggesting it is not an easy path to have to follow. Far from it; if the diaries of Abhishiktananda are anything to go by then double religious identity is not something to be desired in inter-faith dialogue. For example, Cornille writes that if, as Panikkar suggests, dialogue is "to enter emphatically into the experience of the other, or to understand the other from within" (Cornille, 2003, p. 45) then surely "...double religious belonging may be regarded as an ideal for dialogue, if not actually a presupposition" (Cornille, 2003, p. 45). However, the diaries which so acutely map the agonies of the tension that Abhishiktananda

discovers within himself due to this internal dialogue are certainly beyond 'ideal', and this is the conclusion that Cornille reaches herself:

> It is true that many of us have benefited from the experiences[195] and struggles of pioneers or "luminal figures" who have experimented with double religious belonging. But that does not necessarily mean that it should or could be advocated as an ideal (Cornille, 2003, p. 49).

Whilst the agonies of this double religious identity did not last forever, with Abhishiktananda retaining his Christian identity throughout his spiritual crisis, the pain it caused him is not to be overlooked; whilst eventually formative it was also deeply disturbing and therefore not to be seen as some sort of ideal to encapsulate in dialogue. The *praxis* of that dialogue however, which was internal as well as external through his meetings with Hindus and engaging with Hindu worship, is an important aspect of inter-faith dialogue. Abhishiktananda recognises this himself when he wrote that "Dialogue about doctrines will be more fruitful when it is rooted in a real spiritual experience at depth and when one understands that diversity does not mean disunity…" (Abhishiktananda cited in Oldmeadow, 2004, pp. 13-14). For that reason Abhishiktananda can be viewed as a good example of someone who engaged in dialogue to the full capacity of his being, such was his conviction that Advaita and Christianity might eventually be reconciled in him, despite the personal difficulties he had to face in doing so.

Abhishiktananda's and Jules Monchanin's different approaches

As a missionary, Jules Monchanin did not approve of simply planting the Western Church into Indian culture; he argued against those who thought it "sufficient to reproduce in other countries the Western Churches' way of doing things, along with their style of architecture, their customs, their hymns, their paintings" (Matagrin, 2001, p. 17). Instead, he drew his inspiration from the Hellenization of the Church, recognizing that "It took four centuries for Christianity to integrate the culture that came from Greece; it will take at least that long to do the same for India" (Monchanin in Trianni, 2010, p. 1). This then was his starting point in India and the founding of Saccidānanda ashram was meant to embody that vision. Certainly in *aesthetics* this was achieved, through his adoption of kavi and the founding of a Christian ashram rather than a Western monastery as a centre of contemplation. However, he eventually

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[195] Compare this to du Boulay: she refers to Abhishiktananda in a conference paper to mark the centenary of his birth: "So many of us are torn between different faiths, or are Christians attracted to another faith. If it is easier for us now, it is largely because of the courage of this man and others like him" (du Boulay, 2010, p. 11).

came to realize that he could not successfully synthesise Hindu and Christian philosophy, and instead offered:

> ...a theological proposal that was in harmony with Indian sensibilities, and yet radically different, since it was so totally Christian. He [Monchanin] no longer looked for a true synthesis, for he believed that was impossible (Trianni, 2010, p. 2).

This is perhaps where it could be argued that Monchanin managed to retain his Christian identity with more ease than Abhishiktananda, because Monchanin had resigned himself to the impossibility of synthesis (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 8) and instead focused himself on a process of inculturation. This is evident in some of his writings, for example he wrote in a letter to his friend Duperray in 1955 (Only five years since the foundation of Saccidānanda) that:

> Never have I felt – intellectually- more Christian, and, I must say it, more GREEK. I feel a growing horror for confused thought or all this beyond thought... (Letter to E. Duperray, 17/12/1955, in Prévotat, 2001, p.64).

This 'horror' is therefore completely at odds with his initial hope of synthesis. It can be suggested that perhaps this feeling of being 'intellectually Greek' was in part accelerated by his growing concern over Abhishiktananda's experimenting with Hinduism, writing to Duperray only three days earlier than the letter cited above that "the change is too abrupt" (Letter to E. Duperray, 14/12/1955 in Prévotat, 2001, p.64). In Abhishiktananda it is possible that Monchanin saw what could happen if one tried to entertain Hindu and Christian religious identities simultaneously, and was alarmed by the possibility of what his own ventures into synthesising Hinduism and Christianity could produce or leave people open to. It is known that Monchanin's and Abhishiktananda's relationship soured under the strain of the latter's immersion in Hinduism, being at odds about the extent to which Indianizing the Church should go as well as Abhishiktananda's fascination with Hinduism to the detriment of Shantivanam. In short, Monchanin became theologically uncomfortable with inculturation, realising that his own Christian religious identity was steeped in his cultural background, and indeed the Greek foundation of the Church.

All of the above is not to suggest that Monchanin was against Hinduism being incorporated into Christianity on some level. For example he was open to appreciating the validity of certain Hindu Truth-claims, and even expressed that "India has received from the Almighty an uncommon gift, an unquenchable thirst for whatever is spiritual" (Monchanin in Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 8). However, at the same time he did not get drawn into an inner, spiritual dialogue with Hinduism like Abhishiktananda, which Oldmeadow suggests is because "...throughout his life he felt bound to the conventional Christian belief in the ultimate superiority of his own

faith" (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 8). That is not to say that he was exclusivist; Rodhe records a radical interpretation of conversion, with Monchanin asking "Why change? are not all religions roads to God? All of us worship the same Lord..." (Monchanin, in Rodhe,1993,p.27), which exclusivists would not hold. Whilst his Christian identity is certainly much more open than one would expect in that time period, nevertheless Monchanin was still conditioned by his attachment to the Church. Oldmeadow remarks that "Monchanin's life would have been much easier had the Vatican II renovation of Catholic attitudes to other religions taken place half a century earlier" (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 9). Maybe Oldmeadow is right, as Monchanin might have felt more at ease with what he was involving himself in with the explicit backing of the Church – both he and Abhishiktananda were open to accusations from not just Hindus but Christians as well, colleagues who did not understand what it was they were trying to achieve by mimicking the dress of Hindu holy men and settling in an ashram.

Aesthetically, Monchanin was willing to engage with two religious identities – for example, through his adoption of kavi – yet spiritually he was not, forever being drawn back to the Western Church. This is perhaps most strongly evidenced by the remark in *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* that for the sake of fairness, Christian Sannyāsin should wear a wooden cross (the cross of St. Benedict) to distinguish themselves from Hindu Sannyāsin[196] (Monchanin and Le Saux, 1964, p. 70). But nevertheless Monchanin did not want his religious identity to be compromised, and the wearing of a cross is one obvious (*aesthetical*) way of marking oneself out as Christian, even if in another *aesthetical* way one seems to be aligned to the renouncer tradition (of sannyāsa) within Hinduism, as the kavi robes the founders wore would have suggested. Tellingly, in 1952 Abhishiktananda carved the Om symbol in the centre of his cross (Letter to Sr Marie-Thérèse Le Saux, 22/8/52 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 58); his relationship with Hinduism was very different to Monchanin's and this is evidenced by the evolving nature of his religious identity, particularly in terms of *spiritual* double religious identity.

Whilst at first Monchanin was looking for a way of syncretising Hindu philosophy with Christian monasticism, he admits in his own writings that all this actually does is emphasise his own Greco-Christian heritage, and to become wary of 'syncretism'. *Theologically* he starts down this path of Hindu Christianity, but is stopped in his tracks by Abhishiktananda's own explorations, which he saw as a warning to be heeded rather than an adventure to bear fruit from. He is then the most obviously Christian in his religious identity, barely Hindu in fact except in the *aesthetics* they used as a means of mission based *inculturation* (albeit as a pioneering attempt). Monchanin's encounters with Hinduism only served to heighten his own

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[196] This draws an obvious parallel with de Nobili attaching the cross to the sacred threads of his converts.

inclusivist Christian theology, and remained a testament to him that whilst the Church could not simply be planted in a different culture without adapting to it, there had to be limitations.

Abhishiktananda's theology of religions

How then did Abhishiktananda move on from the point of being torn between these two religious paths, and therefore two religious identities? Oldmeadow notes that despite his struggles:

> Abhishiktananda never denied or repudiated the doctrines or practices of either Christianity or Hinduism, nor did he cease to observe the Christian forms of worship and to celebrate the sacraments; rather, he came to understand their limitations as religious forms, a form necessarily being limited by definition (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 12-13).

This then is what he came to find in Advaita, that everything is One and therefore he came to the conviction that religions cannot possess the Truth completely; indeed in his diary as early as 1953 he questions whether God could "...be shut up in what is created" (Abhishiktananda, 8/3/1953), such as dogmatic formulas, rites, even the Church (Abhishiktananda, 8/3/1953). This remark is also testament to his inclusivist stance; whilst Christianity is superior in its possession of the Truth it does not mean that seeds of that Truth have not also been planted elsewhere. The influence of Advaita on his *theological* double religious identity is significant then, in developing an 'understanding of the limitations of religious forms'. However, especially through his friendship with Panikkar, he would begin to move towards fulfilment theology – his first visit to the Himalayas in 1959 prompted him to write that "All this worship, all these offerings, all this devotion, must find its fulfilment in the Mass, in the definitive offering of Jesus" (Letter to Sr Marie-Thérèse Le Saux, 16/7/59 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 120). Whilst his admiration of fulfilment theory would not last forever, Stuart suggests that "...the problem of holding together Advaita experience and Christian faith had become less acute for him through the adoption of a 'theology of fulfilment'" (Stuart, 1995, p. 146). Therefore the role that fulfilment theory played was, at one time, integral to the retention of his Christian identity.

He eventually moves away from fulfilment/inclusivist theology. du Boulay writes that "The call is always to go beyond – beyond faith, beyond human formulations, however beautiful, seeking the Absolute, the one, the nondual, and, inevitably, the alone" (du Boulay, 2005, p. 145). This 'going beyond' is extremely significant for understanding Abhishiktananda. What he came to find in Advaita was that everything is One, and through that understanding he came to the conviction that religions cannot possess the Truth completely. Fulfilment theology initially helps him to do this, but he sought to go beyond 'faith and human formulations' in his search

for the Absolute. Whilst retaining a Christian identity, he had been strongly influenced by Hinduism (*theologically* and *spiritually*) to the point of crisis. But by refusing to refute one for the other, he managed to hold in tension two religious identities, and gradually balanced them. Although he retains a Christian identity, he did not refute the impact that Hinduism had had on this, acknowledging that "...I had to go by way of the Hindu Scriptures in order to accept the Gospel paradoxes in their full truth" (Letter to Sr Marie-Thérèse Le Saux, 29/1/72 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 262). So Abhishiktananda, a Christian monk, eventually developed his own faith through an intense and angst filled encounter with Hindu Advaita, which can be seen as contributing to his *theological* double religious identity, as well as his spiritual one. In his later years, Abhishiktananda seems to have recovered his Christian identity, without refuting the impact that Hinduism had had on this.

Paul Knitter, as a more contemporary example of someone who has a double religious identity, claims that "Buddhism has enabled me to make sense of my Christian faith" (Knitter, 2009, p. xii). He refers to this experience where his Christian faith has become enriched through taking on Buddhist concepts and methods as 'Passing back', for example in thinking about Nirvana as a way of trying to understand what happens after death (Knitter, 2009, p. 81). Perhaps it can be argued that this is similar to how Abhishiktananda eventually reconciled his Christian beliefs with Advaita, after such a long struggle. Through his internal contact and dialogue with Hinduism and Christianity, "the tools"[197] of Hinduism helped him to explore his own Christian faith, climaxing in a tension that was spiritually and emotionally unbearable for him. However, eventually he moved beyond using such tools when he realized that Advaita speaks of the Oneness of Reality and the need to go beyond all forms, including religious ones. To build upon Knitter's analogy, he dropped the tools and used his hands, his own *Being*, to work out his double religious identity and the crisis of faith he ensued, through an intense dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity that he lived out as much as he wrote about.

Once he had removed to his hermitage in Gyansu in 1968, he again began to stress the importance of Advaita for the Church (Stuart, 1995, p. 205); again this shows the importance that Hindu *theology* (Advaita, in this case) had on Abhishiktananda's double religious identity. The outcome of Vatican II as taking the presence of the plurality of religions seriously was extremely significant for Abhishiktananda, helping him to recognize that "God has spoken and continues to speak to every human being in terms of his own religious background or culture" (Stuart, 1995, p. 234). This must also have helped him to reconcile the other duality he felt within himself, of being both Indian and European – if Abhishiktananda believed that God

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[197] Knitter uses the metaphor of "Buddhist tools for a Christian project" (Knitter, 2009, p. 155) in relation to his own faith and spirituality.

speaks to those in their cultural situation is it any wonder that he was torn between two ways of knowing God, when he felt himself belonging to two cultures, and also two religious backgrounds?

Bede Griffiths – Hindu-Christian dialogue and religious identity (1906-1993; arrived in India 1955)

A position that Bede Griffiths shared with the founders of Shantivanam was that "Christianity remains for the people of the East a foreign religion, moulded by the West" (Griffiths, 1982, p. 201) and therefore the Church needed to be rooted in Indian culture if it was to make an impact in India. This was his hope for Kurisumala ashram and also his hope for Shantivanam – whilst being a centre of dialogue Griffiths adapted Shantivanam much more dramatically to Indian and Hindu culture than its founders did, developing an Indian liturgy, and "...gradually transformed the church itself, making it into a real temple..." (Griffiths, 1997, p. 75). They also chanted the Gāyatrī mantra, along with singing bhajans, taking readings from different religious scriptures (including Hinduism, Buddhism and Tamil mystics) during times of prayer and partaking of āratī (Griffiths, 1997, p. 76).

Bede Griffiths, Hinduism and his religious identity

Whilst it could be argued that Griffiths identified with both Hinduism and Christianity, it is not in the same way that Abhishiktananda did – Griffiths was much more comfortable about his Christian faith and his dialogue with Hinduism (and dialogue in general) and this did not push him to the edge of his faith. If Griffiths does have a double religious identity, it was chiefly in *aesthetics* and *theology* (and not in terms of spirituality) which is perhaps more of a consequence of his differing theological positions (inclusivism, fulfilment universalism and pluralism) and not because he was spiritually caught in between traditions. Indeed, he saw Hinduism as particularly fruitful as a means of cultivating his Christian faith, through a deep interaction with it. Inter-faith dialogue was important to the formation of his religious identity, but only in so far as that the openness of his Christian identity towards other faiths enabled him to learn from and cultivate respect towards other religions, especially Hinduism. This dialogue also encouraged his conviction that the Church needed to be rooted in Indian culture, with it being suggested that Monchanin's ideas found fulfilment in Bede Griffith's efforts (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 7). Something that is testament to the importance of his Christian faith is that he once wrote to his friend Micheline that he "was a little embarrassed at being mistaken for a Hindu Sadhu..." (Letter to Micheline, 22/4/1962 in Griffiths, 2006, p. 392), but was content with being understood as a holy man (Letter to Micheline, 22/4/1962 in Griffiths, 2006, p. 392). This suggests that whilst he was happy to adapt himself to Hindu Sannyāsin in aesthetics and principles, he did not however want to be confused with actually *being* a Hindu.

What can be said about Bede Griffiths' religious identity is that whilst he does not appear to have had any major crisis over it himself, the response to his *aesthetical* double religious identity, and the way this was manifested at Shantivanam through an Indian liturgy and general environment, was certainly problematic for other people. However Bede Griffiths' personal *theology* ensured that his religious identity remained rooted in the Christian faith, whilst still believing that all religions have that commonality at their centre (Griffiths, 1992, p. 98).

Wayne Teasdale describes Griffiths as "...retaining his Christian identity" (Teasdale, 2003, p. 40) and the most important part of his relevance to developing Hindu-Christian dialogue today is Griffiths' conviction that inter-faith dialogue should be about "understanding the other religion from *within*" (Teasdale, 2003, p. 185). This idea of 'understanding from within' is similar to Abhishiktananda's attitude. In the foreword to Griffiths' autobiographical work *The Marriage of East and West*, the Dalai Lama expressed his conviction that "By entering so deeply into Indian culture and religion his own Christian faith, far from being weakened, was in fact strengthened and universalized" (in Griffiths, 1982, p. vii). Whilst the end result of both his and Abhishiktananda's engagement with Hinduism was the same i.e. it strengthened their Christian faith, it seems that Griffiths did not have to undergo the same trials as Abhishiktananda to get there. In fact, this is confirmed by Griffiths in his own words when he stresses that "I have not felt called to reject anything that I have learned of God or of Christ or of the Church" (Griffiths, 1982, p. 35).

Bede Griffiths' theology of religions

Griffiths began as an inclusivist Catholic, in particular the fulfilment theory that Hinduism would be completed in Christ (Rance, 2006, p. 27). In 1952, before he had left for India, he wrote in one letter that:

> Hinduism would be only too glad to absorb Christianity into itself, and there would have to be a real conversion, before it could become subject to Christ and brought into that vital union with him. It is not unlike Greek religion and philosophy in the early church (Letter to Mary Allen May, 10/5/1953 in Griffiths, 2006, p. 28).

The above remark is an obvious reference to fulfilment theology. However, his personal theology would evolve to the point where he certainly seems to take on a more pluralistic attitude where the different religions are compatible and also are only partially exposed to the Truth. Griffiths often liked to use the analogy of a hand, which can be understood as an analogy for the pluralist approach that Race suggests[198] Griffiths sometimes held:

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[198] Referenced already in Chapter 2 of this thesis; see Race, 1983, p. 62.

The fingers represent Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Buddhism is miles from Christianity, and each has its own position. If you try to mix them, taking a bit of Hinduism or Buddhism and adding it to Christianity, that is syncretism. But if you go deeply into any one tradition you converge on a centre, and there you see how we all come forth from a common root (Griffiths, 1992, p. 98).

Bede Griffiths, then, believed in the 'common root' of all religious traditions, whilst at the same time warning against syncretism. However, this belief in a 'common root' does not mean that Griffiths believed that the differences in religions should be overlooked; rather he recognised "...there are radical differences which have to be conquered, but then there can be a real meeting and marriage of east and west" (Letter to Micheline, 23/7/1961 in Griffiths, 2006, p. 370). He also stressed the crucial need for respect in terms of other people's beliefs and practices, especially when there were gaping differences. Griffiths sums up his own position further in *The New Creation in Christ:*

As long as we are in the way of ritual and doctrine, we are all fighting one another. But when we get beyond ritual and doctrine, which are signs (and necessary in their own way) to the mystery itself, then we touch the point of human unity where religions can be reconciled (Griffiths, 1992, p. 69).

This then is his theological position, that ritual and doctrine are necessary (presumably to understand Truth and to access it and make sense of it) because beyond them there is the essential unity of human experience of the Divine. Perhaps Griffiths is a universalist[199] rather than a pluralist; the analogies he uses and his attitude of 'going beyond' religion certainly suggest it. However, this does not mean that he denied his Christian faith by engaging with other religious identities, although he felt that Hinduism did have a lot to teach him about Christianity. For example, he wrote:

It has been our experience in the ashram that the more we open ourselves to other religions, to Hinduism in particular, the deeper our Christian faith grows. Our aim is the deepening of our own faith which then becomes more open to others (Griffiths, 1992, p. 97).

This is what matters then; not which typology Bede Griffiths fits under but instead only an awareness that his theology is influenced by 'opening himself to other religions' which leads to 'a deepening of his own faith'. Indeed, the inadequacies of typologies were explored in chapter

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[199] By 'universalist', I mean the viewpoint that all religions are equally valid in that they all lead to a higher end. This is not to be confused with 'Christian universalism', which Hedges defines as "…someone who believes, or hopes, that all people will be saved" (Hedges, 2008, p. 32).

2 of this thesis, and it seems pertinent here to reference Hedges admonition that "It was never the point of the typology to make everyone fit within it; the categories are fluid approaches…" (Hedges, 2008, p. 21). Bearing that in mind, it is suggested that whilst the typologies are useful here to help trace the changes of Bede Griffiths' theology, 'which' typology he falls under should not be fixated upon.

'Surrender to the Mother'

Although Bede Griffiths did not undergo the same emotional distress concerning his relationship with Hinduism that Abhishiktananda did, there is an important event in his life which changed his spirituality completely and drastically. This 'event' was in fact a stroke, followed by a call to "Surrender to the Mother" (Griffiths, 1997, p. 89); Griffiths later interpreted this as the emergence of the feminine alongside the masculine within him. This event will be explored here to try and grasp the significance of the concept of 'the Mother'[200] and 'the feminine' in formulating a *spiritual* double religious identity for Griffiths.

On January 25th 1990, Griffiths had his first stroke (he was to have two further ones). Whilst initially trying to recover, Griffiths recounts how:

> The inspiration came suddenly to surrender to the Mother. It was quite unexpected: "Surrender to the Mother". And so somehow I made a surrender to the Mother. Then I had an experience of overwhelming love. Waves of love sort of flowed into me. Judy Walter, my great friend, was watching...I called out to her, "I'm being overwhelmed by love" (Griffiths, 1997, p. 89).

'Being overwhelmed by love' was a deeply spiritual experience for Griffiths, and its significance should not be underestimated. He said that "It's quite extraordinary, because, I think, in the last two years I have grown more than in the previous eighty-four years" (Griffiths, 1997, p. 102). More than anything, this experience shows how Griffiths' double religious identity was evolving all the way through his life, and supports the argument for religious identity being seen as flexible, capable of growth. That 'the inspiration came suddenly' is not to suggest that Griffiths had never considered the Divine as feminine; he was in fact very vocal about the need for wholeness, the unity of the masculine and the feminine[201]. Teasdale writes that in Hinduism, the divine is experienced as both Father *and* Mother, and indeed "Bede was convinced that Christianity is impoverished by its lack of a similar understanding" (Teasdale,

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[200] For a good general introduction to the Goddess tradition in Hinduism, see Flood, 1996, p. 174f

[201] Recall what he said in *The Marriage of East and West* about wanting "...to experience in my life the marriage of these two dimensions of human existence, the rational and intuitive, the conscious and unconscious, the masculine and feminine" (Griffiths, 1982, p. 4).

2003, p. 104). Of course, Teasdale is acutely aware of the presence of the feminine, for example Wisdom as Sophia, the Holy Spirit as feminine (Teasdale, 2003, p. 105). Also, in the Christian mystic tradition Julian of Norwich is well known for her experiences of Christ as 'Mother'[202]. In some ways then, the ground was already prepared for him to experience this unity, not just in his own theology but in some aspects of the Christian tradition. However, Andrew Harvey said that Bede "...believed his stroke to be an initiation by the Mother (specifically in her Kali[203] or Black Madonna aspect as Saving Destroyer and Killer of Illusion)" (in du Boulay, 2003, p. 232). Bede Griffiths also perceived the Mother as "the Hindu concept of Shakti, the feminine aspect of divine energy..." (du Boulay, 2003, p. 228) stating that "I feel that it was this power which struck me. She is cruel and destructive, but also deeply loving, nourishing and protecting" (Griffiths cited in du Boulay, 2003, p. 228). So it could be reasonably argued that the 'surrender' to the Mother also came from the influence of the Goddess (particularly Kālī) in the Hindu tradition, where the feminine is both all-loving and to be feared. Interestingly, Bede Griffiths also wrote of how this experience:

> ...on the spiritual level [it] certainly left an impression of advaita – a transcendence of all limitations & an awakening to the non dual reality. This has left an indelible impression on me. I am seeing everything in a new light (Griffiths, cited in du Boulay, 2003, p. 231).

From this excerpt, it is clear that Bede Griffiths also interpreted his 'stroke experience' in terms of Advaitan philosophy; that it 'left an indelible impression' upon him makes clear that he went through some type of spiritual change at this stage. But importantly he does not reject his Christian spirituality, rather he sees this change as an evolvement; Judson B Trapnell writes that "A few years before his death, Griffiths discerned three stages in his lifelong surrender..." (Trapnell, 2001, p. 5), the final stage being Advaita (Trapnell, 2001, p. 5). What also supports this argument is that Griffiths was 'led to a new appreciation of Mary' through his experience (du Boulay, 2003, p. 231); this is similar to experiences of contemporary comparative theologians like Knitter[204] who argue that their approaches to Hinduism and Buddhism respectively have actually enriched their Christian faith. With Bede Griffiths the implication is that the masculine and feminine were resolved, were balanced in him, rather than becoming purely feminine. He states this quite clearly when he said "…it is not the Mother alone. It is the Mother and the Father, the male and the female, sort of gradually having their marriage"

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[202] See Grace Jantzen's *Julian of Norwich* [2000; 2nd edn] for a good introduction.

[203] Kālī is a ferocious form of the Goddess in the Hindu tradition.

[204] See the aforementioned *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian.*

(Griffiths, 1997, p. 98). This spiritual experience, then, should be seen as complementing his theology rather than a taking over of a sense of the Divine as feminine. What is most important to remember is that Bede's spirituality underwent a drastic change as a result of his stroke experience; in light of his comments about advaita, 'the Mother' and the union of masculine and feminine within, this thesis suggests that Bede had a *spiritual* double religious identity towards the end of his life.

It might be interesting to compare Abhishiktananda's spiritual double religious identity to Bede Griffiths' here. Both men had come from European, Catholic monastic backgrounds because of a sense of vocation surrounding monasticism in India, and an Indian Church. They had both been involved in founding similar experiments of monasticism in India, setting up ashrams and adopting kavi. What is different however is their timing. Bede Griffiths lived for a few decades after the time of the Second Vatican Council, dying in 1993, whereas Abhishiktananda died shortly after the Council, in 1973. Bede Griffiths, then, simply because he lived later, was able to benefit more from the theological implications of Vatican II. This is significant because we know that the theology of religions is very different post Vatican II; in essence *Nostra Aetate* and other such documents acknowledged that the Holy Spirit could be present in other religious traditions. Abhishiktananda's spiritual turmoil was, amongst other factors, a product of his concern over conversion and the exclusivist truth claims of Christianity. Bede Griffiths, on the other hand, had a certain amount of freedom in being a Catholic monk whose Church acknowledged the possibility of the Holy Spirit in other religions. That is not to say that Bede Griffiths' problems were solved concerning his experiences post stroke. He said:

> Sometimes, I get in a state of bewilderment and confusion, and then I meditate…I don't try to sort it out, but I enter into silence, into emptiness, and allow all this confusion, these things, to settle (Griffiths, 1997, p. 98).

The important phrase here is 'I don't try to sort it out'. Abhishiktananda spent a lot of time trying to work his experiences out; his 'bewilderment and confusion' is evident form some of his journal entries, as we have seen. Of course everyone is different, and I am not suggesting that because their contexts and experiences were similar that it should be surprising that their spiritual experiences and the way they handled them were so varied. But what I am suggesting is that it is possibly because Bede Griffiths knew the benefits of a post-Vatican II context for the theology of religions that he was more able to accept such experiences as the divine feminine without fear of condemnation. Abhishiktananda, on the other hand, had to wrestle theologically and spiritually with these issues predominantly by himself. However, that is not to say that he did not feel at least some of its effects. The outcome of Vatican II as taking the presence of the plurality of religions seriously was extremely significant for Abhishiktananda,

helping him to recognize that "God has spoken and continues to speak to every human being in terms of his own religious background or culture" (Stuart, 1995, p. 234). But the majority of his spiritual angst was handled on his own terms, having little guidelines from the Church on how to interpret his experiences in a positive light.

This spiritual experience was valued highly be Bede Griffiths, and contributes significantly to any exploration of his double religious identity, demonstrating how Griffiths had a *spiritual* double religious identity towards the end of his life. Furthermore, the importance of this experience needs to be assessed in the light of historical context, as doing so perhaps sheds light on to why Bede Griffiths incorporated a *spiritual* double religious identity with less angst than Abhishiktananda. Whilst both Griffiths and Abhishiktananda were dedicated theologians who contended with the theological implications of their own religious identities, Bede Griffiths was perhaps facilitated in this by a post Vatican II context. Previously Upadhyay's case study showed how he took on a political double religious identity in his later life; together these case studies support the argument that the development and growth of a person's (double) religious identity is an on-going encounter.

The perception of their religious identities – *Sannyasins or Swindlers*?

The adoption of *kāvi* and the life of *sannyāsa* seemed to be one of the biggest stumbling blocks for the way in which the three men's religious identities were perceived. It caused confusion initially, as Abhishiktananda narrates of some village Christians in India who donated some money to have some new cassocks made for him! (Letter to Mr Alfred Le Saux/Mme L. Montagnon-Le Saux, 9/11/49 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 24). Abhishiktananda mused "I do not know if I look too poverty-stricken when I go about with bare feet, wearing a large kind of Indian shawl in place of a monastic habit..."! (Letter to Mr Alfred Le Saux/Mme L. Montagnon-Le Saux, 9/11/49 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 24). Even with the publication of their tract, explaining why and how they had chosen to follow the life of sannyāsa and live in an āśrama as Christians, it seems that not everyone understood or appreciated why they had taken this step, even their colleagues and local Indian Christians.

However, there was also a much bigger problem, which was aimed mainly at Bede Griffiths, from a Hindu perspective. This is the accusation that his adoption of kāvi, and the adoption of Hindu culture in general to make Christianity more culturally acclimatised, was actually a missionary tactic to conceal his true religious identity, and to confuse Hindus into becoming Christians. Not only that, but the people who accused him of this also recognized that "The widespread support for these Catholic ashrams by the official Church is one part of the vast fall-out from the Second Vatican Council…" (Goel, 1994, Chapter 8, paragraph 28) and therefore sanctioned by the Church. Despite Griffith's and Abhishiktananda's constant

assertions that they were not out to convert people, these remain serious charges and were most notably made by Hindu individuals who were anti-Christian mission and also anti-imperialism. The most prominent among these Hindus were Sita Ram Goel and Ram Swarup, both of whom had meet Abhishiktananda in their youth[205]. Later on, Goel and Swarup set up a publication company called *Voice of India*, which published books and reports which denounced Christian mission in India, amongst other things, often making reference to the deception of Christian āśramas, noting Saccidananda ashram and Bede Griffiths as prominent examples of this deception. They claimed that their reason for doing so was to forewarn Hindus about the extent to which the Church was going to try and infiltrate Hindu culture and make it Christian, noting that many people had already "been hoodwinked by this form of mission strategy" (Goel,1994, Preface, Paragraph 1). Whilst supporters of inculturation, like Monchanin, argue that their methods are sanctioned by the assimilation of Greek culture into Christianity, Goel argues that this very fact is "a grim reminder" (Goel,1994, chapter 2, paragraph 14) of the fate of cultures whose existence was subsumed by Christianity.

Bede Griffiths and Sannyāsa: A Critical Approach

Amongst *Voice of India* publications, the most polemical in its attitudes towards Christian āśramas is one of Goel's own publications, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* In this he not only gives his own reasons for denouncing inculturation, but he also publishes correspondence between Griffiths and Swami Devananda. Although some of these letters were published in response to an article in *The Indian Express*, some of their private correspondence was also published. Because this publication repeatedly refers to Shantivanam and Bede Griffiths, with regards to their 'unethical conversion tactics', it is worth looking at in detail.

In one letter, Devananda questions Griffiths authority to wear the *kāvi* (Letter to Bede Griffiths from Swami Devananda, Indian Express, Early June, 1987 [unpublished] in Goel,1994, Chapter 13, Paragraph 29); elsewhere he argues that certain theological concepts e.g. sannyāsa, are rooted in Hinduism (Goel,1994, chapter 8, paragraph 42) and therefore doubts that they can be legitimately adopted by Christianity (Goel,1994, chapter 8, paragraph 42). For example, sannyāsa rests on Hindu concepts like saṃsāra and mokṣa, because one renounces the world to pursue mokṣa, release from saṃsāra. Mokṣa is completely different to ideas of Christian salvation, which believes in linear time rather than cyclic, and as such the life of sannyāsa is

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[205] Abhishiktananda mentions their meeting in a letter dated Summer 1959. Also, Goel claimed to be seemingly unaware that he was a Christian missionary, and he was Treasurer to the Abhishiktananda Society! (Goel,1994, Preface, paragraph 9)

leading towards mokṣa, i.e. a Hindu belief, not a Christian one[206] (Goel,1994, chapter 8, paragraph 42). Griffiths' argued that sannyāsa is surely about 'transcending religious limitations' (Bede Griffiths to Indian Express,17/6/87 [unpublished] in Goel,1994,chapter 13) and therefore is not Hindu or Christian or affiliated with any other religion. But once again Devananda retorts with the very good point that "The Church does not recognize a priest outside of the apostolic succession of Peter[207], and we do not recognise a sannyasin outside of the Hindu *paramparas*"[208] (Letter from Swami Devananda to Bede Griffiths, 21/7/87, in Goel, 1994, chapter 13). This whole debate hinges around how a person is *perceived* in their religious identity. Devananda's position is that through wearing the kāvi and adopting Hindu culture, Griffiths is portraying himself as a Hindu when actually he is a Christian, and that his reason for doing this is an unscrupulous one. Griffiths, on the other hand, feels that by adopting the kāvi he is adopting Hindu culture, and not Hindu religion itself. Inculturation, because it interprets the relationship between religion and culture in a very clear-cut way, is criticised by those who do *not* see such a separation between religion and culture. Nevertheless, from Goel's perspective Bede Griffiths had a double religious identity: He is "an anomaly – a Hindu on the outside, a Catholic on the inside" (Goel, 1994, Chapter 8, paragraph 12). Griffiths does not argue with him, in fact that is precisely how he views himself! But this is not trickery, as Goel and Devananda suggest, but from Griffiths' perspective, it is a legitimate means of Indianizing the Church.

This issue of how his religious identity was perceived was something that Bede Griffiths addressed:

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[206] Goel points out that Griffiths "has not adopted any Hindu beliefs which would be considered heretical by the Catholic Church" (Goel, 1994, Chapter 8, paragraph 10).

[207] Remember that Goel is explicitly referring to the Catholic Church here, which believes that the laying on of hands at ordination passes on the Holy Spirit through the succession of St. Peter, the first Bishop of Rome and also the man Jesus referred to when he said "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church..." (Matthew 16: 18).

[208] Klostermaier defines paraṁparā as "The lineage of teacher and disciple, tradition...A teaching not traced back to an acknowledged line of teachers is considered unsound and not conducive to LIBERATION" (Klostermaier, 1998, p. 134). Therefore, what Devananda is saying is that for Bede Griffiths to adopt the kāvi, is not to automatically become part of the historical lineage and tradition of guru and disciple in the sannyāsa tradition, he has just simply changed his attire! It is much someone dressing up in a priest's robes, it doesn't mean they are now ordained, in the lineage of the Apostolic tradition, rather they are just mimicking their dress and habits.

Inculturation is largely external in dress, in architecture and in the way of life. Christian mentality in the past was simply for converting. I think it is very deceptive...But we have always seen it as a conversion of heart. It is really to enter into the traditions of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* and to live out our Christian life in the context of the Hindu experience. Then only it is authentic. So I would feel that the Hindu is justified if we put on the external appearance and in the heart we are just European Christians, trying to convert them. Then I think it is very harmful (Griffiths, cited in Rajan, 1989, pp. 242-243).

Bede Griffiths does not seem to deny that if he were just doing this to be deceptive and gain Christian converts, then it would be a very harmful activity. However, his 'conversion of heart' is to live the Christian life within Hindu culture, and he sees nothing wrong with doing that. As he claims that he is not trying to convert people through trickery, he feels that what he is doing is authentic. The problem with this argument is that it cannot have a definite end; people like Goel will always claim that what Bede *et. al* are doing is deceptive and harmful, whereas the latter will always defend their actions by claiming that they are not and what's more, that they have been authorised by the Church to do so. Again, this is largely due to the ways in which different people interpret the relationship between religion and culture in different ways. Rajan is clear in his own opinion that "Indo-Christian sannyāsa is not a fraudulent device used by Christians to convert the Hindus...It facilitates and fosters the creation of a Christianity suitable to the soil of India" (Rajan, 1989, p. 223). However, Goel is adamant that this is an unethical approach, and was determined to make this known to other Hindus, so that they did not fall into the trap of inculturation-conversion.

Closing remarks

The religious identities of the founders and the āśrama itself are certainly 'double' in an *aesthetical* sense – the worship and architectural style of the āśrama, and the founders' adoption of kāvi and Indian customs are testament to that. Whilst their *inculturative* methods were not always understood or trusted, admittedly their adaptations to liturgy, style and manner were innovative ways of making the Church seem more authentic in a non-Western culture. They achieved this by building on Indian culture rather than the Greek culture that the Western Church is rooted in, and it was an important part of each of their vocations to help situate the Church in India in a manner that reflected the present culture. As Mattam remarks "The Church becomes authentic in a place through inculturation" (Mattam, 2002, p. 145) and Saccidananda ashram has achieved that authenticity to some extent, although as this case study noted, this authenticity is marred by accusations of their true intentions.

As for the founders' *spiritual* religious identities, Monchanin and Bede Griffiths were much more concerned with the Indianization of the Church through the contemplative life, than with having to reconcile any spiritual crisis about the validity of both Hinduism and Christianity. However, he does have a spiritual reconciliation of the feminine and the masculine within him; he becomes more aware of advaita and also the 'Mother', the latter leading to a renewed appreciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Whilst Monchanin remained very inclusivist, Griffiths would cultivate an attitude towards religions that saw them as complementary to each other but also as pointing towards the same eternal Truth. If Monchanin's religious identity is often perceived as being blurred, this is more of a consequence of his *theological* outlooks and his *inculturative* vocation to Indianize the Church, rather than because he was trying to reconcile two different faith positions.

Abhishiktananda, on the other hand, clearly had "...suffered the anguish of 'double-belonging'...his calling, his demanding, almost impossible calling, was to belong wholly to both sides" (du Boulay, 2010, p. 14). In this Abhishiktananda can be seen to be dialoguing not only externally with the Hindus he met in India, but also within himself, as he tried to reconcile Advaita and Christian faith; this desire for reconciliation contributed towards a *theological* double religious identity, as expressed in some of his published works. But we also find a very personal theology espoused in his diaries, as he tried to articulate the theological conundrums of his experiences with Hinduism. His religious identity did not stay within the realms of a *spiritual* double religious identity forever, eventually concluding that his Christian faith had been renewed through his deep contact with Hinduism.. Abhishiktananda was a Christian who engaged himself absolutely with Hindu culture and spirituality, in particular the principle of sannyāsa, even if it meant that he sometimes felt as if he was "Walking on a knife-edge" (Abhishiktananda, December 1954) such was his will to be a tentative bridge between Hinduism and Christianity[209]. Shapiro argues that "Dialogue is prepared to risk all – even conversion to the other's stance..." (Shapiro, cited in Race, 2001, p. 86); whilst this is not always true it could be argued that Abhishiktananda 'risked' conversion to Hinduism despite his rooting in the Christian faith and despite the problems that ensued from this. Trianni suggests that "The contribution that Le Saux makes to the contemporary Hindu-Christian theological debate is...to ask crucial questions, to open a debate that has not yet come to a conclusion" (Trianni, 2010, p. 6). The same could be said of Monchanin and Bede Griffiths, who were bold pioneers in a mission-based initiative (inculturation) which was only just beginning to unfold in their lifetimes. However, something important that Trianni misses about

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[209] See Abhishiktananda in du Boulay, 2005, p. 201. Abhishiktananda saw himself as that bridge (Visvanathan, 1998, p. 108).

Abhishiktananda's contribution (and this *is* truer of him than the other two) is that Abhishiktananda's uncompromising dialogue with Hinduism can also be seen as a warning about the spiritual turmoil that double religious identities in dialogue can lead to. If this case study shows anything, it is that the implications of being caught between religious boundaries can be painful ones. Abhishiktananda, by putting his own religious identity (the very essence of his being) on the line as he entered into dialogue in such a practical (Coff, 1996, p. 156) and interior manner, found a path fraught with personal difficulties. As Cornille argued, double religious identity is not to be advocated in dialogue, as it could lead to spiritual turmoil (Cornille, 2003, p. 49). However, it should also be conceded that those who have had such identities do offer examples of ways in which inter-faith dialogue can also take place on a personal, interior level and not just externally, which is their distinct contribution to Hindu-Christian dialogue.

It goes without saying that these men would have to have had quite an open attitude towards other faiths to be involved in Hindu-Christian dialogue in this manner, especially pre-Vatican II when Catholicism was more conservative in its attitudes towards other faiths than it is contemporarily. However, this does not necessarily imply that they were pluralists or had double religious identities from the beginning of their faith journeys: more than anything, they wanted to make Christianity more Indian, particularly through monasticism and this is why they adopted sannyāsa and founded a Christian ashram. For Abhishiktananda, his double religious identity evolves out of this journey. Their double religious identities are actualised in very different ways, which adds strength to the argument that the terminology of double religious identity should be expanded if such identities are to be properly understood. As previously alluded to, Abhishiktananda's double religious identity would evolve throughout his contact with Hinduism and that would lead him into [temporary] *spiritual* turmoil, as a consequence of evolving a very definite double religious identity during this period. Bede Griffiths, on the other hand, always maintained that he himself was very much a Christian, albeit a fairly liberal Christian for his time, as he was open to the possibility of Truth in other religions beside his own, which is reflected in his *theology*. However, that does not mean that the experiences of 'surrendering to the Mother' should be disregarded as non-spiritual; here we have a clear example of Bede embracing a *spiritual* double religious identity shortly before he died As for Monchanin, his encounters with inculturating the Church in India made him realise just how important the Western Church and Christianity was in influencing his own religious identity.

Summary of Post-colonial rule Case Studies

The founding of Saccidananda ashram occurred just under three years after Indian independence from British colonial rule, and hence is an example of double religious identity at a point in history when the ties between 'Christianity' and 'colonialism' still abounded. (If not more so, for the political links had been severed between a European colonial power and India.) Christianity had been viewed as a colonial import, despite the St Thomas Christian traditions, and that identification of Christianity with colonialism was still a problem for converts, as Robert de Nobili had discovered. As demonstrated in this thesis, Sen and Upadhyay had highlighted a need for an Indian church, and post-colonialism this was still an urgent need. Therefore the original founders of Saccidananda ashram, Jules Monchanin and Abhishiktananda, were acutely aware of the need for Christianity to be more culturally aligned in India. They believed that this could be achieved through an Indian approach to monasticism, drawing particularly on the Hindu concepts of *āśrama* and *sannyāsa.* The āśrama they founded on the banks of the Kauveri River was one of the first Christian āśramas, and there are still many Christian āśramas in India today. By focusing on the founders, their successor Bede Griffiths and the āśrama itself, these post-colonial rule examples were used to represent just a small part of Hindu-Christian identity during this period, and hence could be focused on in greater detail.

Saccidananda ashram itself was the first case study, and was unique for this thesis in that it is a place, not a person, with a double religious identity. Its double religious identity is rooted in its being an attempt at inculturation; by its use of Hindu symbols, architecture and elements from Hindu worship such as āratī the āśrama has the potential to be perceived as Hindu. However, a deeper analysis of these Hindu *aesthetics* of the āśrama illustrated how the spiritual and theological religious identity of the āśrama was Christian. This was because of the *inculturation* which had taken place; the meaning of the symbols had been translated and/or adapted to Christian usage, although it is easy to appreciate why the āśrama might have been perceived as Hindu, for example in its use of the imagery of the trimūrti to represent the Trinity. In short, its adaptation of Hindu aesthetics greatly impacted on the ways in which the āśrama was perceived. The accusations levelled at the āśrama by people like Sita Ram Goel suggest a need to consider the appropriateness of a deliberate inculturation which can be perceived as a deceptive approach to conversion. However in the āśrama's defence, if it is not judged on first appearances but given time to be explored and assessed theologically, then the Indian Christian spirituality can be perceived and appreciated for what it is: an attempt at an Indian Christian monasticism.

Whilst each founder adopted the *aesthetics* and mode of living of a sannyāsa and were pioneers of *inculturation*, nevertheless their individual religious identity's are different. It is also important to point out that they each had their approaches to theology which were part of the expression of a double religious identity for them. Abhishiktananda expressed a desire to be, by God's will, "…a genuine Christian sannyāsīn, a Hindu-Christian monk…" (Abhishiktananda, 29/3/1952) and his double religious identity is not only a result of his engaging Hinduism and Christianity *spiritually*, but also in trying to stop a complete synthesis in him which would dissolve both his Catholic monastic identity and (paradoxically!) his Advaitan one. He never reaches a complete synthesis, but instead seems to pre-empt the musings of contemporary comparative theologians: that it was by treading the verge of the religious other, especially through their scriptures and practices, that his own faith as a Christian was deepened. His religious identity is also Hindu-Christian in the *theological* sense, in his attempts to appropriate Jesus as sad-guru, for example. His theology was also published, and he made no secret of his desire for an India church based on the principles of Advaita. Abhishiktananda has both a personal theology and an Indian theology which he expresses in published works. He is also the founder who was perhaps most *culturally* Hindu or Indian, for he legally became an Indian citizen.

Bede Griffiths is much like Monchanin in his double religious identity; he was a Christian spiritually but he recognised the need for an Indian Christian monasticism and also the need for Hindu-Christian dialogue; under his leadership the āśrama is more dialogically than inculturation centred. His *personal theology*, in particular of Christian sannyāsa and his universalist theology, are what led to fracas with people like Swami Devananda, who saw such appropriations as misguiding and theologically flawed. Under his leadership the āśrama changes direction, becoming affiliated with the Camaldolese Order and bringing his experiences of Kurisumala ashram and its Syrian Christian liturgy to the life of this āśrama. He both echoed the theological sentiments of Monchanin, but also the practical, Indian theological wishes of Abhishiktananda (i.e. in an Indian Church such as an Indian Christian Eucharist), whilst not going too far as to synthesize Hinduism and Christianity. That said, in his later life it could be suggested that Bede Griffiths takes on a *spiritual* double religious identity, because of his experience of God as 'Mother'; he attributes this to the emergence of the feminine, complementing the masculine within him. However, Bede Griffiths appears to experience this spiritual double religious identity with less angst than Abhishiktananda experiences his own, which could be attributed simply to the former's historical context as post-Vatican II.

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Hyphenated/Double  │
                    └─────────────────────┘

                              The ashram

  Political   Aesthetical   Theological   Spiritual   Cultural   Inculturative


        All three founders

                              Personal        Public


                                    Abhishiktananda

                    Bede Griffiths


                          LATER LIFE                    Spontaneous   Deliberate

                            ONLY
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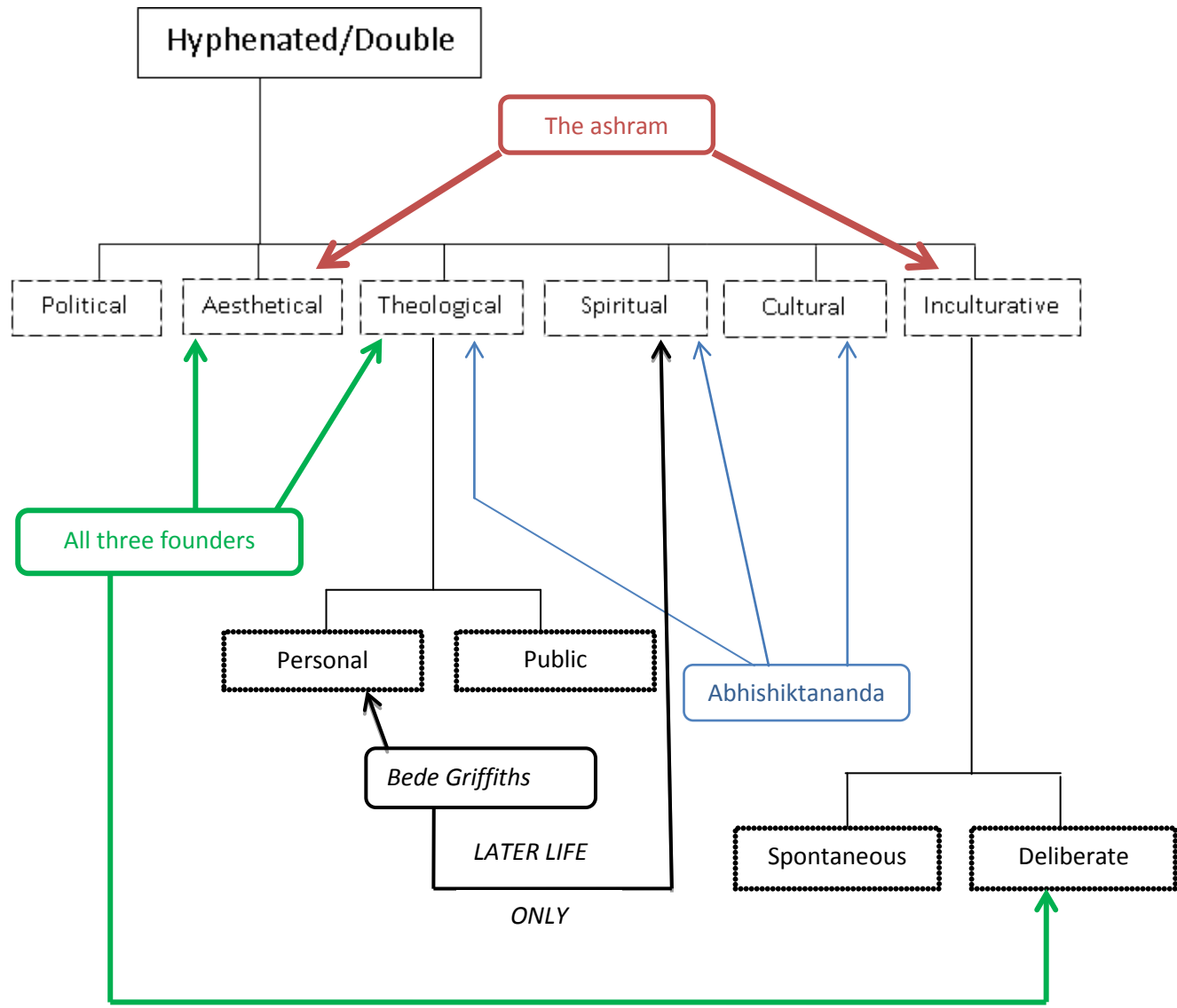
Introduction to Contemporary Case Studies

The contemporary case studies fall into two chapters, with the first chapter exploring the issues surrounding dalit Christian and their legal status in contemporary India. Christian dalit religious identity is centred around, ironically, their identity _as_ dalits; this plays a large role in the lives of many (if not all) dalit Christians in India. The crux of this issue is that by law, the Indian Government does not recognise dalit Christians as being dalit, and therefore they do not have Scheduled Caste status. Without Scheduled Caste status they cannot access reservations in areas such as education and government jobs, as set out in the Indian Constitution, and are unprotected by certain laws which act to safeguard dalits from caste-based violence. It is important to note that some commissions, like the Mandal Commission, have "…recommended to the central and state governments to extend SC reservation privileges to dalit Christians" (Louis, 2007b, p. 1413). However at present, no individual state or the Indian government as a whole have included dalit Christians under the Scheduled Caste banner, which has huge implications on dalit Christian identity and their rights.

Dalit Christians may respond to this situation in different ways. For example, Ashok Kumar M. and Rowena Robinson have highlighted a group of dalit Lutheran Christians in Andhra Pradesh who feign a Hindu identity for political gain, as a result of their "…dismal economic conditions" (Kumar and Robinson, 2010, p. 150). Nevertheless they "…continue to practice Christianity in their day-to-day lives" (Kumar and Robinson, 2010, p. 150). This then is a sure case of double religious identity, as a result of political pressures, whereby a second religious identity is deliberately embraced to ease socio-economic hardship. However, in the same publication that Kumar and Robinson's chapter appears[210], John C. Webster highlights the case of a church community in the Etah district of India, who are not only very aware of their dalit Christian identity but 'would not trade scheduled caste benefits for their faith' (Webster, 2010, p. 111). What these two examples serve to point out is the conundrum that dalit Christians could[211] find themselves in _politically_, regarding their religious identity – by law they do not exist, which means that they are not protected or aided by laws which provide for other dalit groups; except for Muslim dalits, who are in a similar situation (Louis, 2007a, p. 2). Must they then take the lead of the Lutheran dalit group, and hold a Hindu identity, for political purposes only, in order to improve their daily lives? Or like the Etah dalit Christians do they embrace a

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[210] Text referred to is: Robinson, R. and Kujur, J.M. (eds.) (2010) _Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India_. New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt Ltd.

[211] That is not to make the swathing assumption that _all_ dalit Christians view this as a conundrum.

Christian identity both spiritually and politically, regardless of the consequences regarding reservation?

This chapter will explore and analyse these issues, examining the place of dalit Christians in Indian law, and the options available to them, one of which manifests itself in this feigning of Hindu identity for political gain whilst remaining spiritually Christian. They are, then, a concrete example of a *political* double religious identity. It is important to stress that the point of this chapter is not to make a value judgement of said situation – instead it is concerned with highlighting the complex (and sometimes, non-singular) religious identity of dalit Christians in India, regarding the current political situation whereby their dalithood is not recognised by law and the implications that holds. The *political* double religious identity comes about because of certain external pressures i.e. the need for dalit Christians to access reservations.

The second chapter examines a more *spiritual* or *cultural* approach to double religious identity, demonstrating that double religious identity does operate in similar ways in which it has been explored in Buddhist-Christian studies (which is the loci of most of the theological explorations of double religious identity). It will fall into two parts. The first section looks at two examples. It will examine dalits who are *culturally* dalit, and spiritually Christian, and will also look at Selva Raj's exploration of Santal Catholics who adapt Adivasi practices and practice them alongside Catholic ones. The Santal Catholics are also an example of *spontaneous inculturation*.

The second part of the final case study will analyse some examples of *spontaneous inculturation*. One example focuses on Kerala which sees Christians and Hindus participating in each other's' religious traditions. It can even see that interaction manifest in symbolic relationships between their gods/goddesses and saints; Corinne Dempsey's work amongst Keralan Christians will be appraised here. Her work explores the crossover between Christian saints and Hindu gods and goddesses, and even how they are understood to interact. These might be understood as *spontaneous inculturation*, particularly as Kerala has a Christian community which claims to date back to St. Thomas. Another example of *spontaneous inculturation* will look at Mukkavar Christians, in particular their syncretic approach and also the way that their double religious identity is informed by a *theological* reappropriation of Mary which sees her worshipped in her own right, which arguably alters their *spiritual* double religious identity.

Chapter 10: **Hindu or Christian? Dalit identity in the political arena**

Pope John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Asia* asserts that "The Church always needs to have an exact understanding of the political situation in the different countries where she seeks to fulfil her mission" (Pope John Paul II, 1999, Chapter I, Section 8). This is certainly the case in India, a subcontinent which has had a turbulent relationship with Christian mission through colonialism. However, there is also the contemporary political situation of dalit Christians in India which the Church is involved with trying to change; indeed the reception of Christian mission in some parts of India can be attributed to political issues concerning conversion. At present, the Scheduled Castes Order of 1950 (Ammended 1956 and 1990) only recognises Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist dalits as Scheduled Caste:

> Notwithstanding anything contained in paragraph 2, no person who
>
> professes a religion different from the Hindu 5[, the Sikh or the
>
> Buddhist] religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled
>
> Caste] (Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, 1950).

Whilst the amendments cater for both Sikhs and Buddhists, this means that Dalit Christians[212] and Dalit Muslims still do not come under that umbrella. If they are not registered as Scheduled Caste, then they cannot benefit from the positive discrimination put in place by the Indian Government, called 'reservations', which benefits dalits in the work place and in education and in government. It also means that they are not covered by the Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989). Before analysing these laws in any great depth however, it is important to briefly highlight the place of the Church in India and how Christianity has been projected as well as perceived.

The implications of these laws have led to one of the set of dalit Christians examined here to feign a Hindu identity, but in contrast the other set deliberately chose not to embrace a double religious identity. The change in the political facet of their religious identity is what leads to the first set of dalit Christians affirming a double religious identity; it is not their spiritual identity

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[212] For readings on Dalit Christians, see James Massey's *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians* [2009]; John C. B. Webster's *The Dalit Christians: A History* [1994], especially chapter 4 'Compensatory Discrimination', pp. 130-198 and Prakash Louis' article 'Dalit Christians: Betrayed by State and Church' [2007b]. For readings on the policy of reservation and dalit Christians, see chapter 6 in Felix Wilfred's *Dalit Empowerment* [2007], entitled 'Reservation – A Policy for Empowerment', pp. 113-128; Daniel Jeyaraj's article 'The Struggle of dalit Christians in South India for Their Identity and Recognition' [1997] and the special edition of the journal *Social Action* entitled 'The Policy of Reservation' (Volume 48, Number 2) [1998]. Of particular note is Edward Mathias' article 'Dalit Christians and Reservation Policy', pp. 160-185.

which is altered. By adopting a Hindu identity in the eyes of the law these dalit Christians have assumed a double religious identity. The other set of case studies, who do not adopt a Hindu identity, offer some counter-balance and contrast, and significantly will demonstrate the diversity of response to their political situation.

Context: Indian Law and dalit Christians

As far as the Indian Government is concerned, Christianity preaches a message of equality; this was the message of many colonial missionaries. But it has also been viewed negatively, seen as a 'tool' used to convert low castes and dalits over to Christianity, with the promise of social equality. Granted, such an attitude takes a dim view of conversion, but conversion is one of the most contentious topics in the Indian subcontinent at the moment. Conversion amongst lower castes might be seen simply as a way of making themselves more upwardly mobile, the so-called 'rice Christians'[213] (e.g. Küster, 2001, p. 166). If the message has been promoted that Christianity is a religion of equality, as is supported by Christian scripture – for example, St. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians that there is neither slave nor free, Jew or Greek etc. in Jesus Christ[214] (Galatians 3: 28) – then there can exist no inequality within the Church. If, as is claimed, caste Hindus discriminate against dalits, this has to some extent been politically recognised by the two laws mentioned above, then that is an inequality. Ipso facto, caste discrimination cannot exist in an institution that is, by its own definition, a body of equality and therefore no such thing as a dalit Christian can exist (See Rajpramukh, 2008, p. 82).

The above is the reasoning behind the exclusion of dalit Christians from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Order. As is well known, casteism has and does occur within the Church in India; regardless of whether or not one agrees with the view of the Indian government one cannot but admit that what they have said is technically true: one of the basic premises of Christianity is the equality of all human beings in the eyes of God. What has happened then is that the Church finds itself in a catch twenty-two situation: to agree with the Indian Government's analysis of Christian values, which are not wrong, they have to deny that casteism exists within the Church, thereby alienating seventy per cent of the Indian church – which is predominantly dalit and therefore made up of those who experience caste discrimination first hand. However, were

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[213] This may indeed seem like a cynical view, and to some extent it is, but the point of this chapter is not to directly contribute to the debate on conversion but to grasp the view of the Indian government on why dalit Christians are not legally dalit. See also Wilfred's reference to the similar phrase, "conversions of convenience" (Wilfred, 2007, p. 148).

[214] "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus".

they to admit that casteism does exist in the church, they have just admitted that Christianity (by allowing casteism to continue within the church) does not practise its own teachings regarding equality. The situation then is a tricky one, and at present it seems that no explicit side has been taken. Rather, the Indian Church seems to carefully balance itself between these two poles – by doing so they can still lobby the government to recognise dalit Christians as existing according to national and state law, but they also admit that the Church has been infiltrated by the discriminations of the caste system for years, whilst simultaneously advocating change.

However, some scholars and political activists have suggested that the reason for Christians not being given Scheduled caste status has less to do with the perception of Christianity and more to do with the fear that if it is given, then low caste and dalit Hindus will start converting in their droves to Christianity[215] (Louis, 2007b, pp. 1410-11). Louis argues that such a consequence is not likely, as Christianity has remained a marginal community despite evangelization and those dalits who have made the transition from Hindu to Christian "…have not improved their lot dramatically" (Louis, 2007b, p. 1411). The view of conversion of some Hindus, that it is purely a matter of social mobility and nothing to do with spiritual experience (see Kim, 2003, p. 124), completely undermines the basis of the notion of (in this case, Christian) personal faith [216]. It also only serves to add fuel to the Hindutva fire that Christian missionaries convert those who are vulnerable in society through the promise of social mobility and charity (Kim, 2003, p. 130) which they consider as deceptive: it is on such a basis that Hindutva ideologists will perform re-conversion ceremonies, called *shuddhi*, for those who have been 'tricked' or led into conversion, to be received back into Hinduism (Kim, 2003, p. 140). Hindu-Christian dialogue has an important role to play here; it has to address the perception of 'all' dalit converts as converting purely on the basis of social mobility as a skewed one, part of the on-going debate over religious conversion in India, an issue for both Christians and Hindus. It is also continually addressing the issue of Scheduled caste status, another on-going struggle. Whilst political action is important, it must be seen to be at least

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[215] See for example Louis' working paper where he states this more explicitly. He gives two reasons why this is not the case: Christianity remains "…a marginal religious community…" (Louis, 2007a, p.10) and secondly dalit converts "…have been kept in a depressed and peripheral location" (Louis, 2007a, p. 10).

[216] Bauman points out that "…conversion also involves an *assent* to an alternative social ideal"; (Bauman, 2010, p. 284) and later argues that such an ideal would of course include "…'material concerns'…" (Bauman, 2010, p .284). He adds balance to Kim's view, without taking away from a more holistic picture of what conversion might actually entail i.e. spiritual conversion might also include a conversion to this 'social ideal', but that does not make it any less of a conversion.

attempting to combat caste discrimination within its own walls as well as addressing the outside world. Both of these issues are pressing matters for Hindu-Christian dialogue and the church in India, and the church is seemingly attempting to combat casteism within its own churches, as well as addressing the issue of Scheduled Caste status.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989)

The very obvious advantage of Christians being included on the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Act is that it would allow dalit Christians to access reserved seats. However, there is also another advantage to being recognised as Scheduled Caste, as it means that one is protected by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. (1989) This Act, as the name might suggest, serves to bring perpetrators of caste based violence to justice. However, in order to invoke that law one has to be recognised as belonging to a Scheduled Caste – the implication being that dalit Christians, currently not registered as holding Scheduled Caste status, are therefore not protected by this law (Massey, 2009, p. 142; Louis, 2007a, p. 7). This law, then, exists should someone wish to prosecute – as long as that someone is legally recognised as a Scheduled Caste. So it is not just about political gain and social mobility – there is a very real threat here to dalit Christians in not being recognised as Scheduled Caste.

Dalit Christians are denied legal rights permitted to most other dalits, on the basis that inequality (and therefore, caste discrimination) cannot exist within the church because the Church is a body of equality. However, it is well publicized (by both the Church itself and the body of dalit Christians that make up seventy per cent of its religious communities in India) that casteism has and *does* exist within the Church. Especially in some states like Tamil Nadu, the church is particularly active in its mission to eradicate casteism, and is also involved with asserting and lobbying for the rights of Dalit Christians to be equal in law as those of other dalits (Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist) are. However, there is a great deal still to be done; Jayachitra suggests that more collaboration with secular[217] Dalit movements groups is needed "…in order to enhance their common goal of transformative political changes for the cause of dalit liberation" (Jayachitra, 2010, p. 132). Whilst at least the protest for Scheduled Caste status goes on, this still leaves dalit Christians without a legally recognised status despite often experiencing the full force of being perceived as dalit by those in their own, and other,

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[217] Paul Weller provides eight possible meanings (as outlined by P. Ade Dopamu) of what a 'secular state' consititutes (Weller, 2008, p. 106). For example, "A state where religion is suppressed" or "...where the government is neutral in matters of religion", or where "...there is freedom of worship" (Dopamu, cited in Weller 2008, p. 106). Here, 'secular Dalit movements' is likely to apply to Dopamu's eighth definition, whereby "...there is a separation of religious from political, legal, economic or other institutions" (Dopamu, cited in Weller, 2008, p. 106).

communities. What follows this section are two very different reactions by dalit Christians to this political situation: one involves the deliberate blurring of religious identity to gain access to political rights, and the other is the conscious move to do the very opposite, affirming a dalit Christian identity despite continuing to be denied those political rights. Ultimately, what it boils down to is the perception of Christianity and Christian identity in India. Dialogue can help alleviate the negative perceptions through discussion with Hindus and Christians in India about the nature of conversion, in particular responsible mission, as well as the meaning of what it means to be a 'dalit' regardless of religious identity.

Different approaches to expressing a (political) religious identity

What are the options available for dalit Christians in India regarding their religious identity in the political arena? One is that a dalit Christian might feign a Hindu identity in order to not only benefit from but be protected by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. I will outline some scholarly examples of this below, and explore why these examples choose to express a Hindu political identity instead of a Christian one. It is in these examples that we find a double religious identity on political lines. As means of contrast, I will then offer some examples of Indian Christians keeping a Christian identity politically.

Feigning a Hindu identity

Kumar and Robinson's case study is an interesting one, and worth exploring here in detail. The important thing to point out first of all is that the authors are very insistent that dalit discrimination within the church is absolutely minimal in this area of Andhra Pradesh, so it is not a case of oppression that means that the dalit Christians there are feigning a Hindu identity[218]. Rather, it is feigned in order to access state reservations. In their study, Kumar and Robinson's report that this particular Lutheran Church does not keep records of conversion and baptism; it is not suggested whether this is, at present, an administrative problem or a conscious omission:

> …the Lutheran church does not keep any records of converts and those baptized into the church. Such records have not been maintained for several decades and it is impossible even to get records for earlier periods, which it appears may have been destroyed. Thus, generation after generation Lutherans assume the practise of bearing an official Hindu identity and a personal and social Christian one (Kumar and Robinson, 2010, p. 158).

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[218] The state of Andhra Pradesh, is dominated by caste, as will be explained later on.

Regardless, the fact remains that such a situation means that these dalit Lutheran Christians can, if they so wish, claim to be Hindu even if they are practising Christians, because there is no 'official' evidence to suggest otherwise. The authors conclude by pointing out that:

> For Dalit Christians, their declared Hindu identity is not a performed religious identity in any sense. It is assumed in order to adjust to state-framed rules regarding the Scheduled Castes (Kumar and Robinson, 2010, p. 158).

It could not be made clearer that the reason for claiming a Hindu identity, despite remaining spiritually Christian, is a *politically* motivated choice for this particular group of Dalit Christians. It is a very clear case of double religious identity, but this is not some sort of spiritual crisis, confusion or even syncretism: it is about claiming their political rights as dalits. They feel entitled to such rights, because as dalits they experience that in all its fullness, even if the law does not recognise that. The only way to gain access to these rights, from the perspective of that particular community, is to adopt an 'official' Hindu identity and carry on being practising Christians; that is, fully participating in worship and the Christian community and believing the doctrinal claims of Christianity.

There are of course questions to be asked about such an approach, i.e. the ethical aspect of feigning a religious identity for political gain, but the fairness of making a value judgement about this situation should be called into question. M.E. Prabhakar suggests that in similar cases "Economic and social adversity seems to override theological ambiguity of this situation" (Prabhakar, 1995, p. 96) and for this thesis at least, Prabhakar's line of reasoning is conclusive. Many Western Christians never have to live in fear of persecution or face such a situation whereby their religious identity means that they cannot benefit from the state. It is easy to make absolute statements, like 'what these dalit Lutheran Christians are doing is dishonest', but who could say what one would do in such a situation, were one to ever be faced with it? These dalit Christians have to choose between their own emancipation at the cost of labelling themselves Hindu, or being labelled Christian and not able to help themselves or their families to better their socio-economic situations, which for many means poverty and an early grave. Such a value judgement of a situation is, here at least, unnecessary. This thesis is not concerned with 'judging' such approaches, but explaining why such blurred boundaries occur and how Hindu-Christian dialogue can help, or does help, in changing that.

According to Kumar and Robinson, the Lutheran Christians also have another political reason for claiming a Hindu identity, which comes about because of "…the powerlessness of the Dalits against domination and violence from the upper castes. Caste is a grim reality of rural Andhra Pradesh; it is not absent even from the urban areas" (Kumar and Robinson, 2010, pp. 159-60). The feigning of Hindu identity is not just about political gain in terms of reservation, it

is also about protection. As mentioned above, there are certain laws that protect Scheduled Castes from caste atrocities, i.e. from caste-based violence. This is yet another reason for deciding not to pass judgement on the situation in hand: Yes, material gain is one side of the coin (in the best of senses, in terms of being able to access education, for example) but the flip side is that as dalit Christians, the law does not protect them from caste based discrimination. As the authors point out, society in Andhra Pradesh encounters caste on a regular, daily basis, (even if the particular church they are talking about does not) and therefore their double religious identity is as much about protection from caste violence as it is a way of accessing state benefits.

To offer a further example, Keith Hebden claims that many Gujarati Christians:

> …are registered with the government census as 'Hindu', particularly those who have retained a low-caste surname. Registered Christian faith prevents a low-caste person from receiving Dalit state benefits (Hebden, 2011, p. 62).

So it would seem that this is a practice not limited to Robinsons and Kumar's community of Lutheran Christians. It appears that some dalit Christians are accessing reservations, despite the law not working in their favour[219]. Either way, Hebden is right to assert that "…the distinction between 'Hindu' and 'Christian' is not always clear" (Hebden, 2011, p. 63) and I see this as an example of double religious identity at work. Unlike some of the other case studies examined in this thesis, this double religious identity does not arise out of inculturation or spiritual syncretism but because of a desire (and perceived need) to access reservations. I will then categorise such double religious identity as 'political', as it is in political status (e.g. in census declaration) only that a Hindu identity is being embraced.

I want to end this section with an observation by Felix Wilfred, as this ties in well with the theme of feigning identity. He writes that:

> There are numerous cases all over the country where middle or upper caste people manage to get with connivance of state officials "false certificates" in order to grab the government jobs and other privileges intended for the Dalit people (Wilfred, 2007, p. 124).

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[219] Again, it is important to point out here that I am not wishing to make a judgement on such practices, but merely relay the facts.

There is something deeply ironic about this (provocative) statement, for it is being suggested that there are cases of non-dalits feigning a *dalit* identity, despite the cultural implications that being a dalit can often carry.

Christian political identity

Webster's case study of the dalit Avataris chooses a very different option, being a Christian community who are explicit in their religious identity and a dalit Christian community who choose not to access state reservations. He highlights a church in the Etah district which is part of a religious group known as the Dalit Avataris. Just the name itself explicitly refers to the social background of its congregation, and Webster stresses that they "…represent an intentionally and highly self-consciously Dalit form of Christianity" (Webster, 2010, p. 110). This congregation then is not only sensitive of its dalit situation but keen to emphasise it; Webster records that they "…saw no advantage in hiding one's Dalit identity" (Webster, 2010, p. 112). But that does not really make them different to Kumar and Robinson's case study, they too are proud to be dalit, because they access government reservations put aside especially for dalits. The difference lies in their approach to their explicitly *Christian* dalit identity. Unlike the Dalit Lutheran Christians, this particular Church would not 'trade scheduled caste benefits for the blessings their faith has brought them' (Webster, 2010, p. 111).

 Why is it that Webster's case study church, the Dalit Avataris, do not choose to have a double religious identity, which could be used to benefit them politically? A second source might help to shed light on this matter. David Mosse argues that the label 'Dalit Christian', which we have seen used both negatively and positively, is in fact used not as a reaction or "…a religious protest against Hindu caste society, but as a clergy-led popular protest against institutionalized caste discrimination within the churches" (Mosse, 2010, p. 242). However, Webster records that the Dalit Avataris' Christianity is 'intentionally' and 'self-consciously' dalit. Is it then a reaction to the discrimination they feel from the church? On closer inspection it seems to be a reaction to their old Hindu lives, as Webster comments that "In their eyes the Dalit Avatari movement means independence, self-respect, progress (especially through education) and hope for their *jati*, none of which they enjoyed as Hindus" (Webster, 2010, p. 111). So whilst Mosse might be right in regards to some other churches, with Webster's own case study at least, the 'self-conscious' dalit label is a way of reacting against their old Hindu lives. Furthermore, Webster comments that the rural area where these Dalit Avataris live still experience untouchability (Webster, 2010, p. 111) and so their affirmation as specifically *dalit* Christians (through the dalit Avatari movement) is more of a reaction to Hindu experiences of caste discrimination than one within the church - indeed its entire congregation is dalit (Webster,

2010, p. 112) so 'casteism' from upper caste Christians is impossible, if there are no high caste Christians in their congregation! Presumably then, pride in their new Christian lives which moves them away from upper caste Hindu casteism is one reason why these dalit Avataris do not claim political privileges – to do so they would have to claim to be a Hindu, and actually being a dalit *Christian* is an important experience for them. However that is not to say that pride in the dalit label is unanimous; Webster mentions one young person who said "I am not a Dalit because I accepted Christ" (Webster, 2010, p. 112). Whilst Webster offers no further comment here, it is to be expected that even a church with an outward looking and affirming attitude to Christian dalithood should have some in its congregation who are less confident or happy with having such an obvious dalit identity.

Another example comes from Felix Wilfred; in a discussion about the empowerment of dalit Christians he points out that most dalit Christians:

> …refuse to change officially their Christian names into Hindu names, which will bring them the benefits of reservation enjoyed by other dalits. They forego at great cost the material benefits for the sake of their faith (Wilfred, 2007, p. 149).

So Webster's example is not necessarily unusual, but this does contradict what Hebden said earlier. What's more, Wilfred's remark emphasises that this is not an easy decision to make, when he points out the 'great cost' paid in not benefiting from reservation. Wilfred rightly points out earlier on in his text that 'the whole issue of reservation causes agitation' (Wilfred, 2007, p. 119) and this can be seen from the conflicting views over who is accessing it, and by what means.

According to Rowena Robinsons' report, the Dalit Christian Liberation Movement asserts that "Whether or not the government acts in favour of Dalit Christians…the churches must do what they can through a policy of reservation in their own institutions" (Robinson, 2010, p. 20). There are many Christian churches, organisations and associated movements which consciously seek to rid casteism from its churches in India by advocating change and who also, alongside dalit Christians themselves, petition the government for Scheduled Caste status. The Church is aware that it has not always been active in promoting the wellbeing of dalit Christians.
For example, the Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu is aware that they need to address the balance within its own institutions as well, if they are calling on the Central and state government to

recognise dalit Christians as a Scheduled caste.[220] This position is stated more explicitly in a letter published by Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council (TNBC) for Lent 2010, whereby the Archbishop declares that:

> …it is a great injustice that the Dalits who have embraced Christianity and Islam are denied such legal protection, freedom of the choice of religion, rights and opportunities assured for the Dalits by the Indian Constitution. (Chinnappa, Lenten Circular 2010)

What is important about this remark is the comment on the status of both dalit Christians and dalit *Muslims*; a previous section of this chapter spoke about the need to work together, across faiths, to bring about the recognition of Scheduled Caste status. TNBC then, whilst being an explicitly Christian commission, is also concerned with the need for Muslim dalits to be recognised by law too, which is a great example of the social justice that interfaith dialogue can evoke. So even though government reservations are not extended to dalit Christians by law, there are initiatives which demonstrate that reservations for dalit Christians in church organisation, and their schools etc are also being implemented.

Government Reservations

A further comment and detailed analysis on the policy of reservation is needed to understand the issues at stake here. Whilst the Indian Constitution enshrines reservation quotas for dalits, it is claimed that "…Dalits have to be constantly vigilant to convert the legal provisions on paper into reality" (Wilfred, 2005, p. 124). For example, an Indian university might have a set amount of dalit students that they have to intake that year in order to meet the reservation criterion. However, this does not necessarily mean that all places will be filled, which can be due to a number of factors. Firstly, staying with the university example, this is dependent on a dalit man or woman not only having access to education previously (which can be a challenge in itself) but also *adequate* education so as to meet the demands of achieving said university place[221]. Secondly, some dalit theologians and dalit rights activists claim that not all reservation quotas are filled by dalits; recall what Wilfred said earlier about the issuing of false certificates. A third important argument is also raised by Wilfred, who points out that some might argue

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[220] There are numerous other examples, such as promoting vocation amongst dalits, socio-economic development and participating in administration.

[221] "The only source that is left open for them is social mobility through reservation. But since they are denied the opportunity to get educated or trained they loose (sic.) out here too, to the upper castes" (Louis, 2007a, pp. 15-16).

"…that such a protective discrimination in rights to lower castes and outcastes will further reinforce the caste-consciousness, rather than abolish it" (Wilfred, 2005, p. 126). The policy of reservation is a form of positive discrimination, whereby one has to declare that they *are*, in fact, discriminated against, if they wish to access such rights. This means that the dalit identity is very much a part of life. Returning to the contrasting case studies, both the Dalit Avataris and the dalit Lutherans make known their dalit status, although because it is linked with a Christian identity, their decision reached regarding rights to reservations are widely different. Nonetheless, the dalit label is very much 'out there', in such a way that means in order to gain access to reserved seats in education, government etc. one has to keep acknowledging the stigma associated with such an identity.

Prabhakar writes that the current situation regarding Scheduled Caste status has brought the following situation to the fore:

> Their general poverty and marginalisation both in the society and church impels Christian dalits to covertly or overtly declare themselves and get enumerated as SCs to avail of government reservation and welfare benefits (Prabhakar, 1995, p. 96).

Kumar and Robinson's case study is both a 'covert' and 'overt' declaration of SC status to access government reservations. It is covert in the sense that because there are no records of Christian 'membership' to the Church (i.e. particularly of baptism) then these dalit Christian could register as Hindu in order to access reserved seats. On the other hand, the publication of the chapter by the authors makes what they are doing overt! It is now 'out there' that this happens, that people deliberately blur their religious identity between Christian and Hindu because the government does not recognise that the dalit stigma carries over into Christianity as well. And as Prabhakar points out, this is not just a case of people pretending to be Hindu simply because they want these reservations; 'general poverty and marginalisation…impel Christian dalits' to do this. It is a very real situation, whereby access to reservations can change people's lives, be that through getting a government job or being able to access education. The Rev. Raj Bharat Patta is particularly vocal about the issues that these two case studies highlight, that of feigned identity. A former executive secretary of the commission, he states quite bluntly that:

> Hundreds of Dalit Christians have been forced to assume a double identity…This is because the Dalits cannot avail themselves of Scheduled Caste rights if they make public their Christian identity (Patta cited in CWM, 2011).

The issues at stake are very clear: the poverty and marginalization of some dalit Christians in need of such SC rights are not only denied to them, but *on that very basis* their religious identity is 'forcibly' subsumed, through a *political* need. This 'double identity', then, as Patta calls it, is very clearly not a vocational one, nor a syncretic one, but the result of political inadequacy, whereby being a Christian under law means that certain rights are inaccessible to them. That identity, of being Christian, is kept away from the public eye so that SC rights can be accessed, and in some cases, a double religious identity is embraced – a *political* Hindu one, and a spiritual Christian one.

I have examined one approach which takes sees the feigning of a legally Hindu identity; not because they are syncretising Hinduism and Christianity but because such a performed double religious identity offers them legal protection from caste based violence and 'compensatory positive discrimination' because of their dalit status. They are then politically registered as Hindu, whilst remaining spiritually Christian. On the other hand, there are those who choose to affirm their Dalit Christian identity in very obvious ways – the naming of their church, for example, and also through a conscious refusal to access reservation. There is no 'Hindu-Christian' identity for them, only an overtly dalit Christian one. Hopefully this contrast has made the point that not all dalit Christians are active in seeking the label of 'dalit Christian', but on the other hand it also serves to makes the point that there are entire movements, like the Dalit Avataris, whose faith and worshipping community is built around such a premise. Finally, reservation should not be understood as the be all and end all of the reason for legally presenting oneself as a Hindu; there are far greater implications of expressing a dalit Christian identity, if not least because Christian persecution can be a reality faced by some Christians in contemporary India.

Closing Remarks

This chapter has highlighted some of the ways in which contemporary Indian politics can impinge on dalit Christian religious identity, in some cases causing it to be blurred for political need. To a large extent, this is due to the on-going debate regarding the political status of dalit Christians in India; currently without Scheduled Caste status this means that there are certain laws which dalit Christians cannot engage with or are not protected by. One of them is the policy of reservation, and another is the Prevention of Caste Atrocities Act. Whilst the importance of gaining Scheduled Caste status might be understood as heavily influenced by the possibility of accessing reserved seats in education, employment etc. it is also pertinent to recall that dalit Christians might be left vulnerable by not being covered by the aforementioned Prevention of Caste Atrocities Act. Wilfred passes interesting comment that even if all reservation quotas were taken up by all dalits, it is still only 15% of jobs that are reserved for

that purpose. In real terms, that is 2.6 million dalits being employed, which in the grand scheme of things is actually only 2% of the entire dalit population![222] This is why he advocates that "Reservation can be only one factor in a broader movement of empowerment" (Wilfred, 2007, p. 126). Coupling his reasoning also with the recognition that SC status is as much a need for protection as well as for gain; yes certainly the call for SC status for dalit Christians should not overshadow the holistic aim of dalit Christian liberation both within and without (outside of) the church.

Hindu-Christian dialogue has an important role to play in dalit Christian identity; for one it needs to address issues such as Christian mission and the ways in which mission is practised. Through responsible mission and dialogue with other faith traditions, a better understanding of conversion (i.e. not simply as an act of social mobility) could perhaps lead towards an acceptance of dalit Christians demand for Scheduled Caste status – because casteism does not get left behind when they convert to Christianity, but as earlier case studies have testified (like de Nobili) the Church has been impacted by the caste system in India since at least the seventeenth century, if not before in the case of the Syrian Christians in Kerala. Responsible mission, and a need for dialogue between Hindus and Christians in India, is even more urgent in the light of the Christian persecution which can occur in some parts of the subcontinent.

Wilfred comments that "There is, perhaps, no realm in Indian life today in which theology is challenged to be truly political as in the issue of dalit liberation" (Wilfred, 2005, p. 134). This chapter has highlighted ways in which the Church is seeking to practise what dalit theology is demanding of them. Casteism is a reality in some churches in India, as the two case studies have highlighted. They each encourage and promote awareness of the need for political and social justice for dalit Christians, one such area being the need for dalit Christians (and Muslims) to be given Scheduled Caste status. However, it also goes beyond that by attempting to address the needs of its own dalit Christian communities within their churches, whether that is through its own system of reservation in church institutions or through awareness campaigns like protests and Dalit Liberation Sunday. The double religious identity of those dalit Christians who declare themselves Hindu in a *political* sense is one formed out of necessity, and ultimately Scheduled Caste status for dalit Christians would bring an end to that.

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[222] Figures are taken from p.138 of Mendelsohn and Vicziany, as cited in Massey, 2007, p.124.

Chapter 11: **Dalit Christians, spontaneous Christian inculturation and double religious identity**

This final chapter focuses particularly on what Bob Robinson calls an "informal dialogue" (Robinson, 2004, p. 41) – not dialogue in the academic environment, or even in any structured form between institutions or people. Instead, it is the type of dialogue which is encountered by people in their daily lives, as well as that which arises because of responses to issues of social justice, a dialogue 'on the ground'. It also deviates from previous chapters in that these case studies do not look at any particular missionary or their attempt to inculturate – instead, these are examples of spontaneous inculturation. Conversion is understood as the transition from one religion to another, hence the change from one religious identity to another; however as both sets of case studies will demonstrate that change sometimes leads to a double religious identity. This may be understood as syncretism, but the extent to which that syncretism is viewed either negatively or positively often depends on the individual passing comment; admittedly, 'syncretism' in Christian terms is often viewed negatively. In these cases, conversion is not an end result and syncretism is viewed with less suspicion, as a means of expressing two religious views simultaneously and thereby having a double religious identity.

The first case study will explore Christian dalits; in some sense they have to participate in two religious worlds, because of negotiating the boundaries between their dalit cultural identity (as others see it, anyway) and their Christian faith. It is important to remember here the discussion from chapter three; not all dalits would see themselves as Hindu, and in fact dalits can, and often do, have a distinct religiosity which is very different from 'traditional' Hinduism –it might even be seen to be reacting against it in some cases. This part of the chapter is used to demonstrate that examples from Hindu-Christian dialogue still fit into the 'traditional' idea of what constitutes double religious identity, e.g. the *cultural* facet. This is important because in order to expand the current terminology, there must also be examples of how some Hindu-Christian case studies still fit in with the established theory. The apparent crossovers of dalit and/or Hindu culture with Christianity may not be a deliberate attempt at inculturation; indeed such efforts are sometimes out rightly rejected.

The second case study will examine some of the interactions between Hindu deities and Christian saints as just one of the ways in which inculturation manifests itself contemporarily in South India. This links the reader back to the very first case study, the St. Thomas Christians, as Kerala is where some of the oldest communities of the St. Thomas Christians are to be found even now. It also shows how the church continues to be involved in 'informal dialogue' and spontaneous inculturation, some of which manifests itself in unusual ways, for example in constructing/envisaging relationships between the Hindu gods/goddesses and Christian saints

themselves (Dempsey, 2001, p. 55f). However, it can also be much simpler than that, in the borrowing and sharing of festivities, symbolism and devotion; this will be briefly explored through looking at some of the ways in which Jesus is aesthetically represented in Indian Christianity. Essentially, some churches exhibit spontaneous inculturation which blur the boundaries between Hinduism and Christianity quite significantly and hence religious identity also. Yet it is also an impressive example of how different religions and cultures interact and how this overspills into everyday life, and could then be seen as both an expression of *inculturated* and *cultural* double religious identity. Indeed, Dempsey comments that "…there is no doubt that many Christian practices in Kerala, fully approved by their respective denominations, are derived from the prevailing cultural context" (Dempsey, 2001, p. 67), presumably a context whereby Hindus and Christians not only tolerate each other's presence in the same geographical space, but engage on a regular basis. It is perhaps then, this type of informal day-to-day dialogue which has given rise to spontaneous inculturation in Kerala, as people facilitate different religious views and participations in the same inhabited space. Importantly, this final case study exhibits the continuation of an Indian Christianity that the previous case studies envisioned, but also demonstrates how it is not reliant on deliberate inculturation to flourish; indeed, it nicely illustrates the effects of bottom-up theologising and the *spontaneous inculturation* which can manifest itself from that.

Dalits who inhabit two worlds: Christian dalits and the work of Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation Sunday

Christian dalit theology, under the guidance of A.P. Nirmal and other early dalit theologians[223] emerged from the 1980s onwards[224]. The following case study begins at this point, hoping to

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[223] The 'father' of dalit theology, A.P. Nirmal, is a good place to start reading dalit theology. In particular, 'Towards a Christian Dalit Theology*'* [1994] discusses how "This Brahminic tradition in the classical Indian Christian theology needs to be challenged by the emerging Dalit theology" (Nirmal, 1994, p. 219). See also his edited volume *A Reader in Dalit Theology* [1991]. Further, see K.P. Aleaz - e.g. 'The Gospel of Indian Culture' [1994] and 'In Quest of a Dalit Theology' [2004] and Gnanavaram, M. '"Dalit theology" and the Parable of the Good Samaritan' [1993]. Contemporarily, there have been internal criticisms of dalit theology (i.e. by dalit theologians). Peniel Rajkumar, for example, is invaluable in his call to move away from suffering servant images (which Nirmal advocated) towards being empowered by the synoptic Gospel healing stories – see *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities* [2010]. For a dalit theology from a feminist perspective, see Surekha Nelavala's *Liberation beyond Borders: Dalit Feminist Hermeneutics and Four Gospel Women* [2009]. A good summation of contemporary dalit theology can be found in *Dalit theology in the twenty-first century: discordant voices, discerning pathways,* edited by Clarke, S. Manchal, D. and Peacock, P.V. [2010].

For discussions surrounding the methodology of dalit theology, see not only Rajkumar (as mentioned above) but also J. Jayakiran Sebastian's article, '"Can We Now Bypass That Truth?" – Interrogating the Methodology of Dalit Theology' [2008]. For secondary literature discussing dalit theology, see Michael Barnes' *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* [2002], pp. 170-173; Bob Robinson's *Christians*

reflect on dalits who are caught between two cultural (and religious) worlds as they seek out a dalit Christian identity which is both affirming and liberating. To demonstrate how the Church is working against casteism, I have examined a particular initiative of the Dalit Commission of National Council of Churches in India. This initiative is 'Dalit Liberation Sunday' and I have examined the liturgy of this particular day in 2011 to explore how even though dalit Christians have to contend with casteism, some churches and church bodies are doing excellent work in trying to eradicate that.

Dalit Theology

Dalit theology highlights the paradox of being a dalit in a Christian community, whereby the assumption that Christianity is based on an equality of all peoples is proved to be distorted by the ways in which casteism[225] has been absorbed into Indian churches. Many dalit Christians take pride in their dalit status as a marker of identity, but that is not to say that being a dalit Christian is a straightforward process. Soares-Prabhu suggests that to say one is a dalit Christian is a contradiction in terms (Soares-Prabhu, 2003, p. 129) because "…caste discrimination in any form whatever is wholly incompatible with Christianity" (Soares-Prabhu,2003,p.127). However, that is not to say that the term dalit, as a point of reference of one's origins, cannot be empowering and used in positive ways. Indeed, dalit theology is centred on affirming and seeking out such an empowering identity for dalit Christians within the Church. This 'for dalit Christians' is one of the criticisms that dalit theology has to face: exactly who are they empowering, and why should the dalit identity be empowering for all dalits? Indeed, the academic rigour of dalit theology might alienate those dalits who have had little or no access to education, and has been accused of side-lining other dalits and being a

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Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India [2004] pp. 307-312; Sara Singha's chapter in Paul Hedges and Alan Race's edited volume, *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths. A Reader* [2009] and Rowena Robinson's *Christians of India* [2003], pp. 193-202. In particular, Singha gives a comprehensive overview of the origins of caste and points to the oppression that dalits may experience from both caste Hindus and high caste Christians. Furthermore, she observes "Not all human beings are physically Dalit. However, all human beings will or have experienced Dalitness in some aspect of their lives". (Singha, 2009, p. 164). Therefore, according to Singha, dalit theology can reach out to non-Christians on the basis of shared human suffering.

[224] Rajkumar observes that Nirmal's 1981 paper *Towards a Shudra Theology*, despite not using the word 'dalit', "...provided a strong foundation for the Dalit theology which emerged subsequently. Kothapalli Wilson's work, *The Twice Alienated: Culture of Dalit Christians* (1982), marked a clear shift in the direction of Indian Christian theology in the line of Dalit theology". (Rajkumar, 2010, p. 39) Paul M Collins also dates the emergence of 'Dalit Liberation Theology' (as he calls it) during the 1980s (Collins, 2007b, p. 93).

[225] Discrimination based on one's caste.

mouthpiece declaring empowerment for all dalits despite not all dalits being able to access (or even wanting to!) this particular type of theology.

A.P. Nirmal initially advocated a new direction in Indian Christian theology on the basis that up to that point it had not been representative of dalit struggles, even though the Church was made up predominantly of dalit converts[226] (Nirmal, 1994, p. 217). Despite the fascinating and indeed fruitful groundwork of some of the case studies this thesis examined, like Robert de Nobili and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (which led to the development of the principle of inculturation) theirs was nevertheless a fiercely caste – i.e. sanskritized and Brahminical – shaped Christian theology and praxis. This is because it drew on elements of caste Hinduism which were actually alienating for dalits, rather than reflective and incorporative of their experiences and religiosity. Essentially then dalit theology came about because of the ways in which Indian Christian theology was becoming preoccupied with high-caste culture; for example Indian Christian theologians like Upadhyay were using caste philosophy (such as Advaita) and Brahminical traditions (like sannyāsa) to develop an Indian Christian theology. Even European missionaries like de Nobili had not seen fit to ignore the caste system, thinking it useful, if not essential, to engage with it alongside Christian mission. However, through that embracing of caste and Brahminical culture, it was leading to a dis-location of Indian Christians who were of dalit origin. Furthermore, casteism was recognised as existing in the majority of Indian churches in some form or another, be that through physical discrimination (e.g. separate seating/services/communion and walls which separated churchyards) or emotional discrimination. (e.g. receiving communion last and discrimination based on dalithood alone).

It was this realisation which led theologians to deliberate on the essentialness of a Christian theology that was specific to dalitness. A.P. Nirmal advocated for a Śūdra theology in 1981, which quickly took root as a dalit theology (Rajkumar, 2010, p. 39). Despite making up well over seventy per cent of the Indian churches, dalit Christians were finding that changing their religion had not meant that they had left the caste system and casteism behind. In a way, they were trapped between Hinduism and Christianity by the discrimination of the caste system – by becoming Christian they no longer fitted a Hindu religious world (if they believed that they ever fitted that mould at all) yet as Christians who were discriminated by the church and high caste Christians, they still were not fully accepted into a Christian religious world. Their blurred religious identity came about because of the casteism that had followed them, as dalit Christians, into the Church. Hence, the creation of a specifically dalit theology was meant to break the bonds of casteism in the Church and emphasise an Indian Christian theology for the

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[226] Also see Rajkumar, 2010, p. 35.

majority *of* the Indian Christians – the dalits. However, it has also been remarked upon that this type of Christian dalit theology does not adequately reflect grass-roots Christian dalits reflections on their own situations. For example, Vincent Manoharan John Packianathan's recent PhD thesis centres solely on this question about the relevance of dalit theology to grass-roots dalit Christians. He comments that:

I noticed through interaction with grass roots Dalit Christians that the well-formulated liberational themes and faith articulations of Dalit theologians seem not to have adequately engaged with grass roots Dalit Christian activists to influence them theologically (John Packianathan, 2012, p. 29).

 This then feeds into the question about who is doing dalit theology, and on whose behalf are they doing it?

There is an interesting blurring of the boundaries of religious identity here: a dalit Christian is one who has left behind Hinduism, despite never actually being accepted as a caste Hindu, and at the same time is a Christian, yet one who may not be fully accepted by the Christian community because that label of dalit, and its loaded implications, seem impossible to shed. Dalit Christians, then, might find themselves caught between Hindu and Christian worlds as they struggle to make their voices heard, particularly within the Indian Church. What's more, their attempts to reconcile their previous dalit religious and cultural experiences from a 'Hindu' context jars with the mission policy of a Church that sometimes seeks to reconcile itself with the very culture that initially oppressed them. However, I would not want to give the overall impression that little or nothing at all is being done for dalit Christians, as that would be far from the truth. I will offer here just one example of a particular initiative, Dalit Liberation Sunday, to demonstrate how churches are responding to criticisms of casteism and dalit Christian alienation.

Dalit Commission of National Council of Churches in India [NCCI] *and Dalit Liberation Sunday*

The NCCI has a commission dedicated to the dalits, and one of its biggest initiatives spearheaded by them is 'Dalit Liberation Sunday'. This day is held on the Sunday closest to International Human Rights Day (December 10th) (Commission on Dalits, National Council of Churches in India, 2011, p. 2) and the NCCI produces resources including prayers and orders of services to encourage churches to mark this day as a show of solidarity with India's dalit Christians. The readings are particularly in line with Dalit Theology[227]; for example an Order

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[227] Consciously or otherwise

of service for 2011 include Moses and the Burning Bush and Jesus' rejection at Nazareth, when he reads from the Isaiah prophecy, "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". (Lk. 4$^{18-19}$, cf. Is. 61$^{1-2}$). Later on, the Dalit Litany used explicitly refers to the injustice of denial of reservation status for both Christian and Muslim dalits:

> O our God of justice, your Dalit children under the fold of Christianity and Islam face injustice and discrimination in India. They are deprived of the reservation they deserve. The governments in power are not willing to hear the cries of these Dalit brothers and sisters. They are thus deprived of thir (sic.) rights and privileges (Commission on Dalits, National Council of Churches in India, 2011, p.10).

This litany is then followed by a responsorial prayer for realisation by those in power of the unjustness of this reservation discrimination. A few comments regarding this litany: Firstly, both Christians and Muslims are described as 'God's children'; at the very heart of this litany lays the recognition by the NCCI (the producers of said order of service) that all people belong to God. Secondly, it is a very politically charged statement; however that does not discredit it. The political dilemma that dalit Christians face regarding reservation is here brought right into the church: not only is the church community recognising this injustice, it is petitioning God to bring about a change in this situation. I see this as a very real example of the church engaging in and empowering dalit Christians and non-dalit Christians alike to recognise and protest against the current political situation.

Dalit Liberation Sunday is just one of the ways in which the NCCI Commission for dalits operates, but is perhaps its most adventurous and prolific one. The liturgies it produces are firmly rooted in both political and social justice, as well as recognising its own role in caste based discrimination within the church and repenting for that. It has a strong inter-faith element, whereby reservation is not just prayed for so that only Christians may benefit, but for their Muslim neighbours and friends too. Dalit Liberation Sunday not only serves as a day of prayer and worship through dalit solidarity, but also highlights the difficulties dalit Christians might face even within their own churches as well as in the political arena. What is particularly significant is the repentance of the church, which is very public, in its failure to stand in solidarity with dalits, and a renewed commitment to work for an end to caste based discrimination.

Concluding Remarks

Dalit Theology is an alternative to caste/Hindu based inculturation, demonstrating that religious identity may at times appear blurred because of the dalit label which locates people on the margins of both Hinduism and Christianity. However, it has to endure criticism directed at its own methodology, for the way in which dalit Theology is a directed, academic approach, perhaps not vocal enough about the dalit Christian theology occurring on the ground, particularly through grass roots initiatives. Once again, double religious identity is proved to be more of an over-arching term, with dalit Christians occasionally embracing double religious identity. This, I will argue, may have arise as a natural consequence of rejecting Hinduism in favour of the Church, only to discover the Church to be unwelcoming because of the converts' culturally dalit status. Dalit theology arose as a means of *cultural* acceptance within the Church. Their double religious identity then is one of profound complexity: the dalit label, which they paradoxically both seek to embrace and reject, reflects a *cultural* facet to their religious identity – one that may be manifested or lived out through a specifically Christian spirituality which seeks to incorporate that dalithood. However, hopefully I have shown here just two of the ways in which dalit Christians and other Indian Christians are working against casteism in their churches, through the embracing of a specifically *dalit* theology, and also through initiatives such as dalit Liberation Sunday.

Saints and Deities – Inculturation through aesthetic representation and relationship

The very first case study of this thesis explored how Christianity has a strong history in India, predominantly attributed to either the arrival of St. Thomas, or the arrival of Thomas of Kana. It also spoke briefly about some of the inculturation that occurred 'on the ground'; this case study will look at the contemporary liturgy and practice of the churches in Kerala which trace themselves back to St. Thomas' missionary adventures there and demonstrate their integration with Indian culture. Interestingly, relationships between people of different faiths and their religious communities spill over into shared participation, especially in style of worship. This section will examine some of the practices of the Keralan churches and Christianities, and their symbolism, to demonstrate how double religious identity might be seen as 'culturally normal' – because of the religious landscape, double religious identity can occur both *culturally* and *spiritually*, in part due to the 'permeable boundaries of other religions, but also as a result of the *spontaneous inculturation* of the churches there. This will be explored through the ways in which Christian saints and Hindu deities are paralleled in India, and through exploring their relationships to each other. Of course, these topics are worthy of research in their own rights, but I will use them as examples only here to explore further the spontaneous inculturation of Indian Christianity and how this might lead to perceptions of double religious identity in one

way or another. I will also briefly refer to the artistic representation of Jesus in Indian Christian art, as one way of illustrating an *aesthetical* double religious identity.

Basis for appropriation

It is important to point out that the Christian company of Saints and the Hindu pantheon might share something in common. Collins points out that "…Catholics express their faith in similar fashion to the Hindus in statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Saints" (Collins, 2006, p. 25). Of course, the comparison is in *aesthetics* only, for this is a complex theology of darśan and living presence in a Hindu mūrti that you do not find in Christian use of statues (although there are of course the exceptions; "…those countless miracle legends in which images are said to move, speak, weep, strike out, and eat" (Freedberg, 1989, p. 291)). However, even just the similarity in aesthetics might explain the apparent ease of appropriating the Christian saints to a more inculturated, Indian style Christian worship. It is possible that Catholicism [in Kerala] may be so easily appropriated because of the existence of a plethora of Christian saints with which parallels can be drawn; just like Hindu temples are dedicated to certain saints, gurus or deities, Christian churches can also be dedicated to certain saints, for example 'St. Thomas', 'St. Catherine', 'St. Anne' etc. Also, some Christian saints are considered 'patrons' of something; that is they are associated with particular types of praying, or for certain needs, or perhaps groups of people. For example, St. Jude is the patron saint of lost causes[228]. Hindu deities are also associated with certain things; for example Gaṇeśa is the Lord of good-fortune and the remover of obstacles. Whilst the Christian saints are not worshipped, or considered divine, they are petitioned to in prayer, for example 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death'[229]. Mary is particularly revered as the Mother of God, and yet she has also been associated with the Śakti, or power, of the divine feminine[230]. Rowena Robinson comments how:

> …many groups developed ideas about a complex pantheon of Christian divine beings
> and the ritual modes by which their power could be accessed parallel to those existing

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[228] An explanation for this association is given in *Exciting Holiness*; "Owing to the similarity of his name to that of Judas Iscariot, Jude was rarely invoked in prayer and it is likely that because of this, interceding through him was seen as a final resort when all else failed. He became known, therefore, as the patron saint of lost causes" (Tristram, 2003, p. 463).

[229] From the prayer 'Hail Mary'.

[230] For example, Rowena Robinson alludes to this when discussing a Goan story. She says that "In Goa, the relationship between Mary as benevolent mother of God and as powerful female divine embodying *shakti* is often articulated through the story told of the seven sisters, who once represented seven temples in Goa" (Robinson, 2003, p. 96).

deities within Hinduism…Catholicism, with its panoply of saints and the different advocations of the Virgin, was much more likely to partake of such traditions (Robinson, 2003, p. 112).

These parallels then might make it easier to negotiate boundaries between Catholicism and Hinduism, as there are grounds for comparison between praying *through* the Saints, and *to* the deities. As far as spontaneous inculturation goes, it would make sense that these parallels would have been noted and drawn upon, and the multi-religious[231] culture of Kerala appropriated to Christian worship 'from below'.

David Mosse, in his paper 'Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon in Rural Tamil Nadu, India' [1994] gives a slightly different perspective, whereby in his investigations he found that village Catholics:

> ...incorporate forms of Hindu divinity as complementary but inferior powers, potentially dangerous but subordinate to the saints (and ultimately to Christ). Catholics order their pantheon in a way which admits both continued interaction with Hindu deities and the reality of shared social life with Hindus, and thus avoids demonizing the gods of their neighbours (Mosse, 1994, pp. 315-316).

In other words, it is not just superficial parallels which allow the adaptation of saints to Indian culture so easily, but in this case there is an example of the Hindu gods being incorporated into this Catholic world as 'complementary but lesser' powers. I find this an interesting example of dialogue and inculturation on the ground, because of what Mosse calls 'avoiding demonization' of Hindu gods, but it also demonstrates once again how similarities exist between the community of Christian saints and Hindu deities which allow for adaptation. Indeed, it would seem that the company of saints has an important role to play in Keralan Christianity, for it is they who are often appropriated and at times seen to interact with the Hindu pantheon.

Mary and the concept of divinity

Hindu religious traditions have a strong concept of the divine feminine in the Goddess tradition, unlike Christianity which traditionally has no such understanding. I will explore one appropriation of Mary as divine in an Indian Christian tradition, 'Mukkuvar popular Christianity'. A good ethnographic introduction to the Mukkuvars is P.T. Mathew's *We Dare the Waters: The World and Worldview of Mukkuvar* [2001], and in this text he writes that "The parallel existence of the Christian and the Indic religious traditions in the Catholic Mukkuva

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[231] Of course, this thesis examines only its interaction with Hinduism.

community today appear to be a good example of a *dual religious system*" (Mathew, 2001, p. 150). In Rowena Robinson's writings about Mukkavar popular Christianity she states that the "…goes far beyond the doctrinal limits set by the Catholic church" (Robinson, 2003, p. 108). Interestingly, she points out how it draws on Tamil Hinduism, but at a more popular level i.e. not Brahminical. It is through this, she argues, that Mary is altered drastically because:

> …all reference to her virginity, a motif so critical in Catholic theological discourse, is suppressed and she is revered simply and unequivocally in her maternal aspect as Maataa…she is worshipped as a divine being in her own right (Robinson, 2003, p. 108).

It is fair to argue that this is a blurred boundary of religious identity along *spiritual* lines, because Mary is experienced in a different way; the way she is approached has been altered through the Mukkavar's interaction. However, P. T. Mathew seems to take a slightly different perspective. He agrees that "The Mukkuva religious mind is likely to have felt at home with the ambivalent nature of Mary as *Virgin and Mother*, for the pre-existing Devī image is akin to such ambivalence" (Mathew, 2001, p. 158). Here we can see how parallels between a Saint (in the form of Mary) and a deity (in the form of the Hindu goddess tradition) is not just noted but actuated through *Cintāthira Māta* (the name given to the female divine). However, what is a crucial critique here is Mathew's suggestion that "*Cintāthira Māta*, from a Mukkuva point of view, may mean more a Christianised *Devī* than an inculturated Mary" (Mathew, 2001, pp. 159-160). Indeed, he calls this a "*reverse process of inculturation*" (Mathew, 2001, p. 160). Hence, perception of who this divine figure is actually rests on the interpretation of the person perceiving her. Either way, it could be argued that this represents a *spiritual* double religious identity of the Mukkuvars which is grounded in syncretism. However, Robinson says that to say this is 'syncretism' is "…too easy a tool to be employed" (Robinson, 2003, p. 137) here, "…particularly when what is usually studied is the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity and what the second takes from the first" (Robinson, 2003, p. 137). Robinson is right to talk of it in terms of 'relationship', but it is also possible to use 'syncretism' if that term is actually devoid of any negative connotation; a blending of popular Hinduism with Christianity has produced an understanding of Mary very different from her 'traditional' role. By thinking of it instead as a *spiritual* double religious identity which comes about because of a blending (i.e. syncretism) of popular Hindu religions with Christianity, it takes away the negative connotations of that 'syncretism' label but also shows a spontaneous *inculturation* on the ground, which has occurred precisely because of interaction with the local religious cultures. However, personally I struggle with the conception of a Christianity which has deified Mary, but then this is of course just personal opinion and possibly a reflection of my own spiritual and cultural context. That aside, it is important to remember that not everyone views

syncretism in such a way, and there are theologians who are trying to rehabilitate the term. Perry Schmidt-Leukel's work in his *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* has already been appraised in this thesis[232] for its views that syncretism can lead to a transformation, rather than a loss of religious identity (Schmidt-Leukel, 2009, p. 85). Another theologian, Paul Hedges, chastises those who 'disparage syncretism unnecessarily' and argues that:

> In our contemporary context, it marks out the religious life of many, and we should not disparage unnecessarily what may well be meaningful and uplifting voyages of spiritual discovery for those involved (Hedges, 2010, p. 238).

To some extent, that is one of the sentiments of this thesis; whilst 'syncretism' may not be considered conventional or even orthodox by some Christians, there is no denying that Christianity has been reconciled with their indigenous culture and probably helps people (e.g. Mukkuvars) express their Christian faith in ways meaningful to their own contexts. However, where there is concrete change in core Christian beliefs, as per the divinization of Mary by the Mukkavar Christians, it could be argued that this is not always a positive step, at least for Christian unity. Personally, this is the sort of syncretism that remains negatively perceived by me. Whilst I agree with both Schmidt-Leukel and Hedges that syncretism can have positive aspects too, and that the term needs to be rehabilitated, I must admit that there is still something about syncretism that makes me uneasy. But that may be because syncretism is not part of my own faith journey or my culture, and I hope that my appraisal of syncretism is not taken as disparaging, but rather as honest, highlighting the difficulties of understanding the validity of syncretism as a religious and cultural outsider. Perhaps that is what Hedges means when he talks of not 'disparaging unnecessarily': that whilst I might not be able to understand syncretism or any impetus behind it, it does not make it okay for me to dismiss such spirituality as weak or lesser than my own. Syncretism, then, is perhaps best approached in context and with the understanding that it can, for some people, be a positive and helpful mode of expressing their own religious convictions, but that it is still okay to have reservations about it from one's own standpoint. I hope that this is what I have made clear in chapter 11, examining Mukkavar Christians as an outsider, but nevertheless attempting to see the positive influence that such syncretism has had on their own double religious identities.

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[232] See page 22.

Relating to one another

To give a final example, Dempsey describes the nature of Kerala's religious context as giving rise to metaphors and mythologies of 'sibling rivalry' between certain Christian saints and certain Hindu deities, which themselves are metaphors for dialogue and worship 'on the ground' between Christians and Hindus. One extensive example she gives is of St. George and Kālī in Puthupally:

> As it was believed that the smallpox was brought on by Kālī's anger, the members of the community, both Hindu and Christian, decided that they should appeal to St. George for their release from the disease. They conducted a procession, complete with drumming, music, and prayers to which they marched all along the village roads. That night, when the people were all in bed it is said that the sound of horse hooves could be heard. The next morning, the disease had vanished. Word of this incident became well known by people all around, and so worship of St. George grew beyond the Orthodox Christian community, especially among Hindus (Dempsey, 2001, p. 58).

Dempsey expounds that often the interaction between saint and deity is associated with keeping the peace, and thereby caring for both Hindu *and* Christian (Dempsey, 2001, p. 58). The religious other then is not just tolerated, but seen to interact in ways which is beneficial to the local community irrespective of religious identity. Notice how she hints at an easy negotiation of religious boundaries; 'both Hindu and Christian' worship St. George because they fear that Kālī caused the smallpox, and by petitioning him, he quite literally chases it away.[233] However, Dempsey also gives an example of how an episode of intolerance in a community was also believed to have an adverse effect on the sibling relationship between St. Sebastian and Kālī (Dempsey, 2001, p. 60). In one community, the RSS "…decided that this local tradition of Hindu-Christian familial relations had gone on long enough" (Dempsey, 2001, pp. 59-60) and persuaded the temple officials to not keep the door open for Kālī to see her brother St. Sebastian as he processed past (as was the local custom) (Dempsey, 2001, p. 60). In the year after, some problems arose and it was argued that "…the goddess was angry for being kept from her annual viewing of her brother and was therefore seeking revenge by causing trouble" (Dempsey, 2001, p. 60).

Someone who worships another deity because of an immediate need fits Cornille's description of those who take on a double religious belonging on a 'needs only' basis; their Hindu deity is

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[233] Note the reference to horse hooves during the night; St. George is of course associated with slaying that which represents evil – the dragon – on his horse, hence the noise of hooves is associated with his hagiography.

seen to cause the threat, yet St. George is appealed to in order to rid the disease from the community. Whilst syncretism, in the Church at least, has negative connotations, this practice might be described as syncretism because of the interactional relationship between Hindu deity and Christian saint. On the other hand, maybe it is not syncretism because the petition to St. George does not directly change any Hindu doctrines (This is unlike the disregarding of Mary's virginity in Mukkavar popular Christianity; the virginity of Mary is an intrinsic Catholic doctrine and to disregard it changes the perception and even the meaning of her *theologically*) as he has clearly been accepted as having some sort of influence over his 'sibling'. Presumably, Kālī is still worshipped because of the idea about appeasement, so in order to keep smallpox at bay[234], but when that petition has not worked, then St. George is called upon to vanquish it. This type of double religious identity than, is not permanent, but is in a state of fluctuation dependent on circumstance, being both a *spiritual* and *cultural* type of double religious identity.

Finally, *aesthetical* relationships are also apparent between Hindu deities and Christ or Christian saints; by this I mean that there is a sharing of symbolism and artistic representations[235]. For example, in an article on adapted chariots[236] for Christian festivals, Joanne Punzo Waghorne comments that the mūrti usually found at Hindu ceremonies has been replaced with Jesus instead (Waghorne, 1999, p. 108). But this is not a European representation of Jesus; this Jesus is 'wearing a dhoti' (Waghorne, 1999, p. 108) and has therefore been adapted to reflect Indian culture. This is reminiscent of the images found on top of Saccidananda ashram's chapel, where Jesus and saints including Benedict and Peter are modelled in an Indian style. These, as previously mentioned, were designed by the artist Jyoti Sahi; he is based at Jyoti Art Ashram in Bangalore[237], and his Indian Christian artwork has

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[234] As a short aside, Māriyamman̲ is believed to be a regional Goddess of smallpox (Flood, 1996, p. 195) and it is interesting that in both caste Hindu religiosity and in a regional religiosity smallpox is associated with a female deity.

[235] For a further reading, see Amaladass and Löwner's *Christian Themes in Indian Art* [2012], chapter 7 'Popular Christian Art', p. 329f

[236] Chariots are used in temple processions for festivals. George Michell comments that "These chariots are assigned to the different divinities normally housed within the sanctuary, but which are brought out of the sacred precinct into the streets of the town on the auspicious days of temple ceremonies" (Michell, 1992, p. 30). See his edited volume *Living Wood: Sculptural Traditions of Southern India*. The chapter 'Chariot Panels from Tamil Nadu' is written by Michell, pp. 29-52.

[237] See Jyoti Sahi's blog for examples and explanations of some of his artwork, http://jyotiartashram.blogspot.co.uk/. Also see R.W. Taylor's *Jesus in Indian Paintings* [1975] for an overview of some Indian Christian artists, including Jyoti Sahi from pp. 143-153.

become well known. For example, one piece depicts Jesus on the cross, but drawing on the symbolism of naṭarāja. It is called 'Jesus, Lord of the Dance' (Sahi, 1980)

(see http://jyotiartashram.blogspot.co.uk/2007/10/jesus-lord-of-dance.html) and in it Jesus is surrounded by a halo of flames reminiscent of the flames that encircle Siva in his Naṭarāja form. An example from my own visit to India springs to mind, where an image of Jesus on a wall had been garlanded with flowers, much like a mūrti in a temple would have been. Personally I find such representations fascinating and clever, in the same way that I find exploring other representations of Jesus so[238]. But as R.W. Taylor points out, there are some who criticize Sahi for "...excessively Hinduizing Christ" (Taylor, 1975, p. 152). However Taylor concludes that he admires him, for he feels that "...when the artist uses Hindu motifs for Christian contemplation he is in the same difficult position as the theologian who uses non-Biblical scriptures" (Taylor, 1975, p. 152). Again, it really comes down to individual perception, but like Taylor I admire Sahi's work and can, whether it is Sahi's intention or not, reflect theologically on his images. To return to Waghorne, she says that:

> There must be a common idiom for dialogue, an accepted grammar in which to pose debate. Yet at the same time, this common public religious idiom, if it is to function commonly, does not negate difference…It matters that the Risen Christ is pulled through the street and not Lord Shiva (Waghorne, 1999, pp. 99-100).

Of course it matters, if it did not matter then we would be witnessing a negatively construed syncretism. However, positively understood, what is seen through this Christian appropriation of the chariot is that it has been carefully adapted so as to make it clear that Christ (or Mary or other Christian saints) is being processed and worshipped, and that this is different to the worship and procession of Śiva. What it does is to give that common language of symbolism, what Waghorne calls the 'common idiom for dialogue'. People know what a chariot is used for in Hinduism, and that symbolism is still overt enough when used in Christianity to convey that meaning; importantly though it is not too similar so as to 'negate difference'. Essentially, the theology is Christian, but expressed in cultural terms. The same can be said of the example I gave of Jyoti Sahi's work. These aesthetics are all examples of an inculturated Christianity, and the reason I mention them is that if they were taken out of context, they might look more Hindu than Christian. But correct recognition is made possible precisely because they are contextualised within Christian settings.

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[238] For example, there is a book called *Christ in the Margins* [2003] by Robert Lentz and Edwina Gateley which explores Lentz's own icons. His icon of 'The Apache Christ' "…celebrates the beauty of Apache culture, specifically the culture of the Mescalero Apaches of New Mexico" (Lentz, in Lentz and Gateley, 2003, p. 29) and depicts Christ as a "Mescalero holy man…" (Lentz, in Lentz and Gateley, 2003, p. 29).

Concluding Remarks

These examples have shown some of the ways in which inculturation not only spontaneously occurs, but how for some people the crossing over between Hindu and Christian religious identities may in fact be seen as a cultural norm, and that whilst it might be viewed as syncretism, that has not always been viewed negatively. It has examined how some interactions radically alter *theological* understanding (for example, the way in which Mary is worshipped in her own right according to Robinson's study of Mukkavar popular Christianity) Geographically, Hindus, Christians and many a religious other live on one another's doorsteps and that should be understood as at least one possible reason for crossovers naturally occurring, such as that which Dempsey highlights as 'sibling rivalry'. This *cultural* facet of 'Hindu-Christian' religious identity is an important one, because it offers ways of demonstrating how i*nculturation* occurs spontaneously and informally, as does dialogue. This is because of the cultural and *spiritual* needs of the people engaging with two religious identities and traditions simultaneously. Also, Indian Christian artists who represent Christ (or the Saints) as Indian in their appearance can be understood as producing *aesthetical* double religious identities, as a reflection of Indian *culture*. If this is to be understood as inculturative, then it is best understood as a spontaneous inculturation which arises as a response to the specifically *Indian* Christianity they experience and interact with.

Closing remarks

Attitudes to worship, prayer, ritual and belief among Christians and Hindus are much more flexible in some parts of India than might have been expected. At times they can be fairly surprising, for example the extent to which the Mukkavar Christian approach to Mary results in her being exalted as divine. Sometimes religious boundaries are negotiated on a needs basis (as with the example of dalit Christians who still worship the Mother Goddess for protection) or at other times it is simply that it appears to be the cultural norm to engage with (at least) two religious identities simultaneously. Raj and Harman[239] describe this simultaneous engagement as "…violations of normative boundaries…" (Raj and Harman, 2006, p. 62) which:

> …are a source of anxiety for the church hierarchy that tends to view these ritual manifestations as signs of a dysfunctional Catholicism and as a "disease" of popular religiosity (Raj and Harman, 2006, p. 62).

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[239] They are talking in reference to shared ritual vows, but it could also be applied generally.

This is certainly true, and it has been seen with other case studies too, like the St. Thomas Christians: negotiating religious identity and religious boundaries has often been seen as a sign of weakness, a syncretism that is viewed negatively rather than open-mindedly. It might even be viewed as a 'lesser' expression of Catholicism because it has been diluted through its engagement with Hindu/dalit/adivasi religions and cultures. However, whilst there are certainly arguments to be made for supporting such opinions, (particularly in the light that in some instances, like with the Mukkavars, doctrines have been altered) at the same time there is also the argument to be had that what is being witnessed here is in fact a truly Indian Christian church and theology. India is made up of many religions and cultures and peoples, and hence there can surely never be such a concept as 'an' Indian church; such a church would have to incorporate all the cultures and peoples of India. Instead, what this chapter had found is differing responses to an Indian church, none of which have been directly inculturated by European or American missionaries, but churches which have naturally come to terms with the culture it is part of.

Despite the criticisms of dalit theology as not reflecting grass roots Indian Christian theology and being, it has the same directive and focus as the Mukkavars or the Keralan Christians who pull an adapted chariot through the streets for St. George's patronal festival – a church and religiosity which reflects the culture of the people who are practising it. Of course, there are questions about what is appropriate to be inculturated, and how, and to what extent it is welcomed, but when inculturation is spontaneously arising, it is infinitely better than the arrival of foreign missionaries who attempt to dictate the direction of an Indian church and its theology. Dalit theology heralded a change in direction for Indian Christian theology; the issue of caste within the Church was taken up as negatively impacting on dalit Christian lives – whereas previous pioneers in Indian Christian theology and those who advocated the need for an Indian Church (like Upadhyay and Abhishiktananda respectively) had emphasised a theology reliant on caste Hindu philosophies[240], dalit theology made a statement about the need of a theology which reflected the experiences of the majority of Indian Christians. Despite the many criticisms that can be made of dalit theology, it is a relevant theology because of its concentrated efforts on emancipation and liberation, ironically from a religious and cultural identity (dalit) that was imposed rather than declared, yet by turning it on its head the term 'dalit' became a symbol of power and resistance in its own right.

What this final case study has demonstrated is that the *cultural* facet of double religious identity is extremely important, as is the *spontaneous inculturation* one. The two can work

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[240] such as Advaita Vedanta, and the model of sannyāsa and pandâraswamis missionaries.

together – if it is culturally normal to transgress religious boundaries and share in the participation of the celebrations of the religious other, than inculturation is perhaps more likely to happen, and is perhaps more easily appropriated. At times, that inculturation may give way to changing doctrinal Christian truths, such as Mukkavar popular Christianity appropriating the Virgin Mary as divine and therefore to be worshipped, and if that is the case, then the extent to which that inculturated religious identity has also become a *spiritually* and *theologically* double religious identity needs to be addressed. What at times can be labelled syncretism might be inculturation; this has to do with issues of perception. Further, because the term 'syncretism' has been predominantly cast in a negative light, if such confusion did arise between syncretism and inculturation, then this could also lead to negative perceptions of the latter. There are also really interesting relationships construed between Hindu deities and Christian saints, which again is a spontaneous inculturation but perhaps also a reflection of a culture which is infused with a plethora of religious traditions. There are also the simplest of crossovers found in many churches (and homes) in India, such as the garlanding of images of Christ, Mary and the saints, just as in Hindu temples, and the offering of fruit and flowers at the Mass in the same way they are offered in pūjā. There is also a shared symbolism (for example, the crossovers of aesthetical representations of the saints or Christ and Hindu deities); Paul Collins summarises that:

> From removing footwear before entering a worship place to welcoming visitors with a garland and waving of the lamps…these practices in all the church traditions express a common culture shared between Hindus and Christians (Collins, 2007b, p. xvi).

Because of this 'common culture', then, it is easy to see how, with an understanding of the relationship between religion and culture as ambiguous one, that Christians who incorporate Hindu religious culture into their Christian expressions might give the impression of syncretism, which is negatively construed. But actually, the religious identity is blurred because of *cultural* interactions, an outcome of the pursuit for an authentic Indian Christianity which does not regard its rich cultures but tried to incorporate them into the Church and the life of an everyday Indian Christian. There can be, then, a crossover of participation and worship – it may be syncretic, it may be out of need, it might even be a result of crisis but it could also be a natural consequence of Christianity becoming *inculturated* and even just an acceptance of the religious other of, if at least not valid, then having a space which can be shared across religious boundaries, particularly in the sharing of rituals and practices.

The issue of attempting to reconcile Hindu culture with Christian conversion, which de Nobili and Upadhyay tried to address, is still ongoing to some extent; however it could be argued that this is being countered by a rise in spontaneous inculturation. Yet simultaneously there have also been other pressing concerns for the Church in India to tackle, such as casteism and the right to reservation. These two case studies have hopefully demonstrated how the expression of a double religious identity is at play in both spontaneous inculturation and the need for attaining government benefits secured through reservation entitlement.

In the first contemporary case study, two examples were given of two very different reactions to the current situation whereby dalit Christians are still unrecognised as dalit by Indian law. The first example, drawn from Kumar and Robinson's study of a group of Dalit Lutheran Christians, demonstrated how this desire to claim their rights to reservations as dalits was so pressing that they adopted a Hindu identity *politically.* That was very different to how Webster's Dalit Avatari Christians reacted, who felt that on no grounds could or would they claim a politically Hindu identity in order to benefit covertly from government reservations. First, this political identity that was claimed by the group of Dalit Lutheran Christians is very different to Upadhyay's claiming of a political identity; the first case study does so in order to benefit from all that reservation offers whereas Upadhyay's claim was a reaction to a colonial power, and maybe even a colonial church. This means that it is necessary to make a distinction between the two types of 'political' double religious identity: 'national' (Upadhyay) and 'needs basis' (dalit Lutheran example). Secondly, such a case study as this makes absolutely clear that a contemporary 'Hindu-Christian' identity can be completely unrelated to a spiritual or even a cultural stake in Hinduism – instead it has arisen out of a need to be politically and socially alleviated. This is fascinating for this thesis because it demonstrates once again that 'double religious identity', as a generic term, simply does not do enough justice to what having such an identity actually entails, or what might cause it to arise. But also, the importance of highlighting the political situation of dalit Christians should not be overlooked.

Chapter eleven was split into two sets of case studies. In the first section, one example here demonstrated a moving away from an Indian Christian theology which might draw on caste Hindu culture, like Upadhyay's, towards a more explicitly dalit theology. Yet for dalit Christians, conversion to Christianity still does not eradicate casteism and hence there is this tie to a cultural world which they never really belonged to, but at the same time that cultural world (despite being linked to Hinduism) followed them into the Church. This example within chapter eleven then, argued that dalit Christians were spiritually Christian, but *culturally* dalit. The culturally 'dalit' label is not necessarily desired; it represents in a way their blurred religious

identity which comes about from being on the periphery of Hindu culture, but also the Church because of the issue of casteism.

The final case study of this thesis used three examples to demonstrate the vibrancy of spontaneous inculturation and a growing Indian Church, whilst at the same time also pointing out the possible dangers foreseen by some in the 'syncretism' it might lead to. One example was of the Mukkavar Christians, who showed a real moving away from mission based inculturation, to a *spontaneous inculturation* which took in their *culture*. But it could also be suggested that by attributing divine status to Mary, they have also *spiritually* and *theologically* altered their Christian identity. The syncretism (which comes under the 'spiritual' facet) that spontaneous inculturation might on occasion give rise to is understood negatively by the official Church; this means that there can be a tension between the results of spontaneous inculturation and what the official church expects or dictates of its communities. The complexities of such a broad 'spiritual' facet will be addressed through dividing it into three parts: Crisis (as Abhishiktananda was on the brink of experiencing), Needs Basis (construed relationships between Saints and deities) and Syncretism (Mukkavar Christians). By doing this, it can be explained in more detail how these Christians engaged the spiritual facet of their religious identity with Hinduism or dalit religiosity. Also, representations of Christ (and the Saints) in Indian apparel are *aesthetical* double religious identities, which change merely the way Christ is expressed rather than any theological assumptions. It would depend on the artist of course, but if this was a case of inculturation then I think it would be best categorised as *spontaneous*, as their art is not being directed by the Church for the purposes of mission. It is also a reflection of their own cultural situations and the Indian Christianity they experience.

 This pair of contemporary case studies, then, has given a wealth of examples to demonstrate how a double religious identity, at least within Hindu-Christian dialogue, is not a simple matter of a dual spirituality, or a needs basis; it can be political for example. But it has also demonstrated that within Hinduism and Christianity, a double religious identity can also arise out of a needs basis or a syncretism, as it has in Buddhist-Christian studies, and demonstrates an important continuity with existing theories of double religious identity. Cornille, for example, speaks of both a 'needs-based identity' and a spiritual engagement, which she calls 'categorical'. (Cornille, 2012) On the other hand, to translate that effectively into Hindu-Christian dialogue and double religious identity studies, further clarity is required and hence the division of the 'spiritual' facet into 'needs basis' and 'syncretism' specifically.

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General Conclusion

It is not enough to say that someone simply *has* a double religious identity, it is also important to explain *how* they have come to this point and also in *what ways*; this is a subject which has received scant attention in Hindu-Christian dialogue. The very nature of the interaction between Hinduism and Christianity (through, say, inculturation or colonial mission history) means that new facets need to be factored in to explain the presence of these double religious identities, which in turn gives greater clarity and insight into their development. It also means that double religious identity can move away from this perception of being a consumerist or syncretic attitude towards what one chooses to believe and practice; as the case studies have demonstrated it is so much more than that because religious identity is this flexible, fluid entity which is both open to influence and to change. Being a 'Hindu-Christian' sounds like a dilemma in need of a solution, but what this thesis has found is that it is not something to be solved at all; rather it is a way of life, a religious identity which can occur for some people, for a variety of reasons.

Reflection on current research in double religious identity

To return to the literature review in the first chapter of this thesis, where I analysed and related current thinking concerning double/multiple religious identities to my own research, I think it is fair to say that the literature expressed double or multiple religious identities in different ways. Precisely, I mean this not in terms of the actual religious traditions that were engaged with but in the *ways* those engagements took place. In particular, Michael von Brück, Catherine Cornille and Rose Drew each identified that multiple/double religious identity or belonging can occur in a variety of ways. For example, von Brück spoke of 'emotional' and 'intellectual' possibilities (von Brück, 2007, p. 199); Cornille gave examples in her Heythrop lecture that included 'serial belonging' and 'cultural' (Cornille, 2012) and Drew expressed this in terms of a 'scale' of Buddhist Christian identity, which ranged from 'soft' to 'hard' (Drew, 2011, p. 3). I felt that these distinctions actually have a large role to play in facilitating the understanding of such identities, and rather than restrict my research to one kind of double religious identity, I felt that there was new ground to be broken in starting off with a definition of double religious identity as multi-faceted. From there I chose to explore Hindu-Christian double religious identity, as this has been little explored directly in the theology of double religious belonging, and because the people I initially came across varied so much in their double religious identities. By its very nature the theology of double or multiple religious identity argues that religious identity is not static but something which develops; therefore we cannot allow the category of 'double/multiple religious identity' to become a static concept either. By suggesting a way of addressing the problem of terminology in discussing and analysing such identities, through a

faceted approach, I feel I was able to explore a particular kind of double religious identity, the Hindu-Christian, more thoroughly. Naturally some of the categories that other scholars picked up on, such as Cornille's 'cultural' belonging, were built upon and utilised in this thesis; but I also picked facets which were as a result of the departure from Jewish or Buddhist Christian belonging into Hindu and Christian double religious identity. For example, in her lecture Cornille pointed out that there is debate over whether inculturation counts as double belonging (Cornille, 2012) and clearly by choosing this as one of my facets I believe that it does. But that comes with an important qualification; it can *only* be seen as a kind of double religious identity *if* a multifaceted approach is taken. Without such an approach, there is a risk of ;double religious identity' just becoming a generalised term, which presumes that double religious identity is simply one thing (e.g. a cultural matter or the result of a syncretic spirituality) when actually it can be so many other things as well. In short, I feel that this research has addressed a gap in the knowledge, in that it has approached the study of a) double religious identity in a field – the Hindu and Christian – which has been lesser studied than other fields and b) by defining from the outset what the broad term 'double religious identity' can actually mean in this field, and then exploring double religious identity from there. Hopefully, such an approach has meant that I have been able to do greater justice to the case studies explored here, by being able to describe in what *ways* their double religious identities occurred.

Double religious identity in Hinduism and Christianity

Like other studies of double religious identity within Buddhist-Christian/Jewish identities, double religious identity can happen in Hindu Christian dialogue because of spiritual crisis, cultural norms or even because of personal theological convictions. However, the history of Christian mission in India and its (at times) volatile relationship with the particular strategy of inculturation has resulted in a double religious identity for some of its advocates. Furthermore, the identification of Hinduism as being both cultural and religious means that a double religious identity can occur when someone identifies themselves as 'culturally' Hindu and 'spiritually' Christian. The arguments and explorations in this thesis lead to the conclusion that inculturation *should* be considered a type of double religious identity, at least when applied to the context of Christianity in India and Hindu-Christian dialogue. Inculturation is, at one level, about the adoption of certain aesthetics; however whilst they might be believed to be cultural, they could also contain deeply religious meanings or symbolism. This has the potential to cause confusion about a person or place's religious identity. It all boils down to issues of perception, and that 'difficult to define' relationship between religion and culture, brought to a head in the debates which surround the practice of inculturation and the relationship between religion and culture in Hinduism. These two issues make the studying and exploration of double religious identity in Hindu-Christian dialogue very different to studying it in, say, Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

Hence, there is an obvious need to expand the terminology associated with double religious identity to adequately and appropriately represent what is actually meant when someone, say Abhishiktananda, Upadhyay or politically Hindu dalit Christians, is said to have a 'double religious identity' within the sphere of Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Indian Christian Theology, Mission and Inculturation

Certainly there were many people I could have chosen as case studies for this thesis, especially in terms of *theological* double religious identity. This is because, as mentioned in the methodology, people like Appasamy and Goreh drew on Hindu concepts to explain Christianity, champion it even. There are, in short, a wealth of Indian Christian theologians who have drawn on Hindu concepts to express Christianity. I think a really interesting future study could focus on just the *theological* and *cultural* double religious identities of Indian Christian theologians, and this is where the contributions of people like Appasamy, Azariah, Goreh and Banerjea could be explored. But in this thesis, I wanted to explore the perceptions of people's *spiritual* double religious identities too, and so chose case studies where their religious identity was either called into question or was considered controversial. For example, I chose studies like Sen and Upadhyay because there is a certain amount of ambiguity reading their *spiritual* identity, plus they could be examined from other facets too (e.g. cultural, theological, political). Eight case studies might have been considered limiting in terms of scope, but on the other hand I wanted to explore them properly and in depth; hence I chose case studies that covered different combinations of facets and allowed me to explore my argument both thoroughly and concisely.

To turn to the mission based case studies, for example de Nobili and Monchanin, helped to inform the development of inculturation as a mission -based practice, but this was by no means a smooth process or indeed a perfect approach. What a person *aesthetically*, *theologically* and *culturally* claims or demonstrates about their religious identity can be very different to how it is perceived by others. This is certainly one of the biggest problems for inculturation as a mission-based practice – no matter how much a missionary might try and defend their use of inculturation, by claiming a dichotomy between religions and cultures which allows them to appropriate certain symbols etc., if they or their church look Hindu, the likelihood is that they are going to be *perceived* as Hindu. Hence, this issue of perception is a very important one regarding double religious identity, as is trust – if inculturation is to be used in mission, or even as the basis for developing an Indian Church, then it needs to be done so in dialogue (Collins, 2007b, p. 189), so that inculturation is not perceived as deceitful, but rather an adoption and acceptance of elements of Indian culture which are relevant to the Christian faith. This might not only lead to a greater harmony and understanding of mission practice but also of the

theologies that inform both Christian and Hindu religiosity and faith. This in turn might lead to greater understandings and appreciation of the other's religious position, especially regarding conversion. Both inculturation and the relationship between religion and culture play key roles in the formation and perceptions of double religious identities. That is not to say that all the case studies were practising Hinduism and Christianity at the same time, but certainly some were *perceived* as doing so because of their involvement in mission or in their attempts to ground an Indian Christian theology. Upadhyay was a prime example of this: he knew that what he was trying to express was a cultural Hinduism that could still be part of an Indian's identity if they converted to Christianity. However, this was not always understood or appreciated by others. Whilst early on in mission history foreign missionaries took a greater role in trying to determine such a theology, in the contemporary period mission-based inculturation is becoming less and less focused on, and spontaneous inculturation is becoming more favoured. This might be because missionaries were failing to understand the ambiguous nature of the relationship between religion and culture in India[241], which led to discord between Hindus and Christians they were in direct contact with. Also, a directed inculturation might be considered imperialistic – who better to understand how to inculturate a Church than the Indian Christians for whom it is intended?

The problem with inculturation, deliberate or spontaneous, is that it depends on a particular way of viewing the relationship between religion and culture, when actually the relationship between the two is by no means straightforward, as was explored in chapter two of this thesis. Indeed, it could be argued that inculturation runs aground because it believes it is possible to infuse Christianity with other cultures – whilst not problematic in theory, if those parts of culture used also have a religious symbolism in another religious tradition, then that leads to difficulty. As previously argued inculturation is, by necessity, an act of dialogue (Race, 2001, p. 150) and this study agreed with that assertion throughout. In order to be inculturated, especially if this involves 'borrowing' or 'adapting' other religious practices, *ipso facto* one must first have a deep and thorough knowledge of that which is being appropriated. However, the rules of dialogue such as those of the World Council of Churches can also come into play here to encourage and challenge the methods of inculturation. If Goel's *et al.* biggest criticism of inculturation, in particular of Christian sannyāsa, is that it is inappropriate and misguiding (Goel cited in Bharat, 2007, p. 7), then further linking the values of dialogue and inculturation can only better the representation and reputation of inculturative movements like Christian āśramas. This might be achieved by a respectful recognition of the limits of inculturation, and

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[241] Think for example of de Nobili's classification of the sacred thread as cultural and not religious – this was widely debated by his colleagues.

being responsible towards the extent to which other religious cultures, liturgies, practices and symbolism are being engaged with. This would also apply to issues of dalithood within the Church; Bob Robinson suggests a dialogue between Hindu and Christian dalits would be "…far more appropriate than the usual meetings between upper caste Hindus and westernised, often urban, Christians" (Robinson, 2004, p. 143).

When paired with theories about religious identity, inculturation seems to lose out, as it is often criticised for being deceptive or of watering down Christianity so as to fit with other cultural norms and expectations. Contemporarily, both the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches are acutely aware that inculturation has come in for criticism as well as praise, and are starting to move away from Western directed or initiated inculturation – the case studies focusing on dalits and (contemporary) spontaneous inculturation in chapter eleven are testament to this. A Christian missionary from a Western church going to India, with the intention of instructing Indian Christians how best to understand Christian faith in the context of their own culture, is perhaps a bit too close for comfort to the colonial rhetoric of old. Indeed, as the dalit Christian case studies have shown, why would they want an Indian Christian identity, as some prefer the distinctively Western character of Christianity, but also, how does infusing Christianity with the elements of culture/religion that has made life difficult benefit them? If anything, dalit Christians might argue, inculturation should be based on dalit religiosity, not the Brahminical religious traditions, if it is to occur at all. This is a definite area of Hindu-Christian dialogue – if inculturation is to remain part of the Church in India (and the continuing development of an Indian Christian theology, dalit or otherwise, and a distinctly Indian Church is still being played out) then it at least needs to start reflecting the culture of the majority of the Indian Christian converts – seventy per cent of the Indian Church, after all, is made up from dalit converts. Religious identity, then, lies at the heart of this matter. To return to that idea about the importance of perception in religious identity, it seems to be a stumbling block in attempts at inculturation – places like Saccidananda ashram come in for such fierce criticism precisely because they are *perceived* as (at the very least) engaging in syncretism, or (at the very worst) as deceitful mission attempts. Essentially it is in danger of being (and has been) perceived as *Hindu religious* symbolism and architecture in a *Christian sacred* space, leading to misperceptions of double religious identity.

The case studies and the facets of their double religious identities

In the general introduction to this thesis, six facets were given as (non-exhaustive) examples of how double religious identity might occur or manifest when explored between Hinduism and Christianity. The diagrams will now be reproduced here, so as to make clear how each case
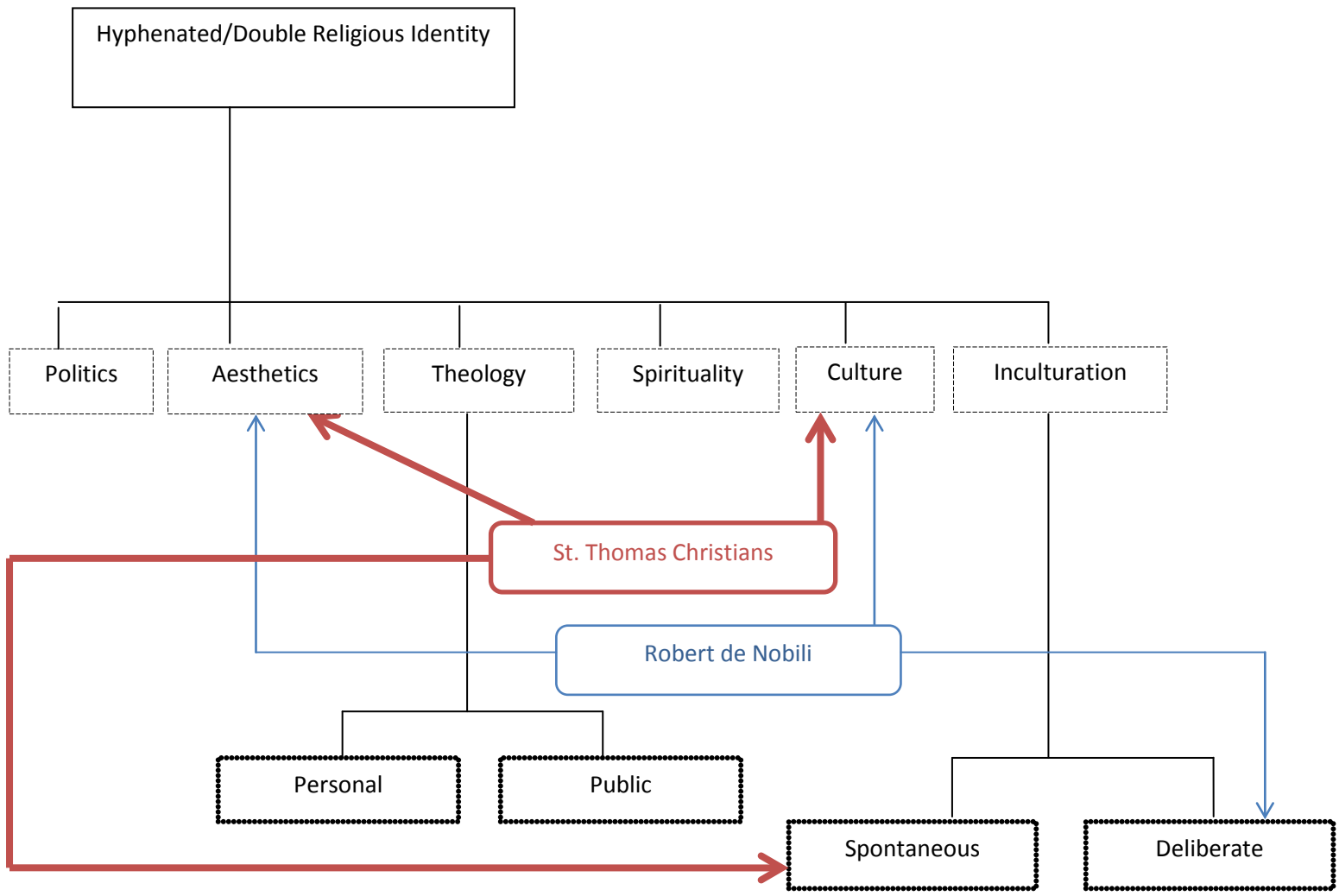
study fits at least one of these facets, and to demonstrate how, through their double religious identities, they have contributed to Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Early Case Studies

- The St. Thomas Christian communities – This case study's purpose was two-fold. First, to introduce the context of Christianity in India: The legends attributed to St Thomas introducing Christianity to India, and also the accounts of Thomas of Kana bringing Syrian Christianity to India, demonstrate how Christianity flourished in India long before European colonialism brought Catholicism and Protestantism there. Secondly, it was selected to demonstrate how inculturation can be a spontaneous phenomenon, rather than always being a deliberate initiative of foreign missionaries. The St. Thomas Christians were accused of Nestorianism, and their Christianity was based on (and sought authority from) the Eastern Church. The St. Thomas Christians did not recognise or feel the need for Papal authority, and this was problematic as far as the Roman Catholic missionaries were concerned. However, the Church of the St. Thomas Christian tradition had adapted Christianity to local culture in liturgy, practice, belief, language, even the use of symbols and objects, which in some form survives to this day, even though it has undergone a variety of schisms, some of which came about as a direct result of contact with the Western church. They can be seen as having a double religious identity because of their *spontaneous inculturation* and the extent to which they used *cultural* and *aesthetical* aspects of Hinduism (e.g. the use of tali in the marriage ceremony) which resulted in an indigenous Christianity. Also, the perception by Western Christians of the St. Thomas Christians as having polluted Christianity with Indian religion is an important factor in understanding them as having a double religious identity. That is not to say that a Christian from the St. Thomas Christian communities is a Hindu, or a Hindu-Christian: rather their spontaneous inculturation led them into difficulties when the European Christian missionaries arrived, who did not (could not, perhaps) appreciate that Christianity has become aligned with local culture. However, this also needs to be carefully balanced with the context of the St Thomas Christians being perceived as Nestorians, and therefore heretics, in the eyes of the (specifically Catholic) European missionaries.

- Robert de Nobili – The earliest missionary case study of this thesis was very much a product of his own time, and rather ironically, of his own culture – his acceptance of the caste system in India more than likely stemmed from his own Italian background, which also had a hierarchical society. However, that does not stop him coming in for heavy criticism for allowing the caste system to prevail in the Indian church, and he is

seen as heading a slippery slope which has resulted in the contemporary situation of dalit Christians still facing caste discrimination within the Indian church. In particular, his use of the pandâraswamis to convert the lower castes, and a separate Brahmin-based mission using sannyāsins, has placed him firmly in the realms of controversy, if not outrage, even when de Nobili is defended for simply reflecting the culture of his own Italian background. In defence of de Nobili, he recognised that his own European cultural ways, and that of the Church, were largely a hindrance rather than a help to spreading the Gospel and converting people to Christianity, which informed his decision to accommodate (what he considered to be) the acceptable elements of Indian culture, rather than remain European in an Indian context. This resulted in him largely changing his aesthetical religious identity – his adoption of the kāvi, for example. This might have been (according to his own perception) adoption of a cultural element, but in fact the disagreement and controversy this evoked are testament to others' perception of it as a religious element. However, the extent to which he dialogued and engaged with Hindus (in particular the Brahmins) such as learning various Indian languages, being the first European to study the Vedas, engaging in philosophical debates and going to extraordinary lengths to ease the conversion experience of Indian Christian converts, are testament to the radical nature of a sixteenth/seventeenth century missionary who not only engaged in dialogue but went to extreme lengths to prove that one could still retain certain elements of Indian culture, as long as they did not contradict Christian truths. de Nobili certainly does have a double religious identity, in *aesthetics* and *culture* but not as a spiritual Hindu– he was a devout Christian, but his adoption of (what he proposed to be) cultural elements through various aesthetics and attitudes, was a very early attempt at *mission – based inculturation*, which led to him having to defend not only his methods but also his Christian faith.
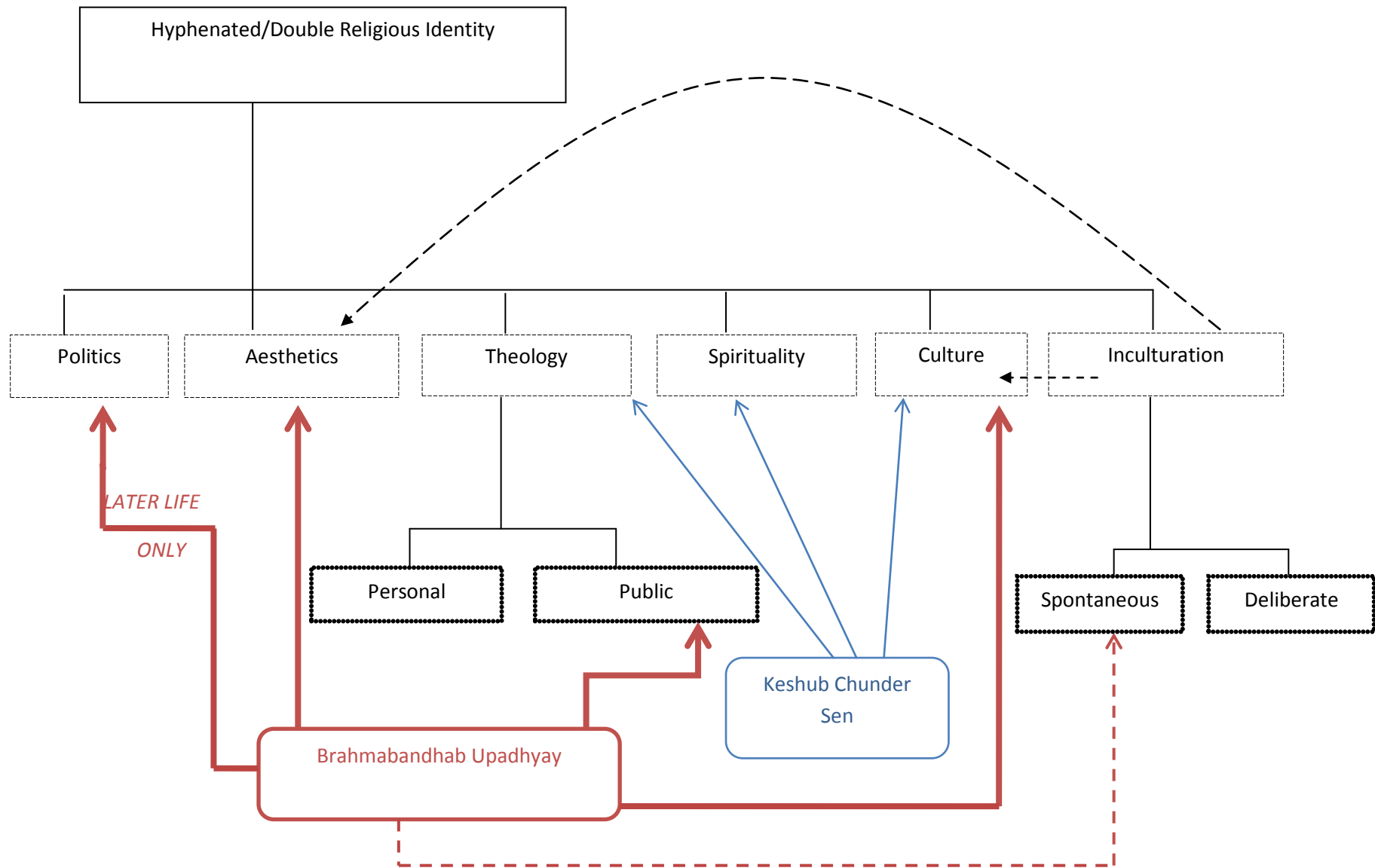
Hyphenated/Double Religious Identity

- Politics
- Aesthetics
- Theology
- Spirituality
- Culture
- Inculturation

St. Thomas Christians

Robert de Nobili

- Personal
- Public
- Spontaneous
- Deliberate

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- Keshub Chunder Sen: This Indian reformer was an interesting case study for a number of reasons: first, he was not a Western missionary but an Indian Brāhmo, although being a member of his Brāhmo Samāj did entail missionary work. Secondly, being a Brāhmo he was already critical of his 'home' tradition (Hinduism) urging reforms and, was hugely influenced by Christianity, in particular Jesus, but not the Western Church. Sen fused certain elements of Hindu, Brāhmo and Christian thought (along with other religious elements) to form what he called a church, 'of the New Dispensation'. What is fascinating is that Sen's varied approach to religion was based on his interaction with Hindus, Christians and Brāhmos which led to a very confusing religious identity – Christians were sure he was almost converted, Brāhmos saw him as a Hindu reformer, his followers as a great leader of a new universal religion. Rather unexpectedly incorporated into this was Sen's emphasis on the need for Christian missionaries to make the Church more Indian – it seemed that ethically he approved of Christ but believed that the only way to convert India was to give her a specifically Indian church. He had a strong Hindu *cultural* identity, and believes the Church should be rooted in Indian culture also. Sen paralleled Saccidānanda and Trinity, created a Eucharistic rite which incorporated rice and water (but had little of the theology of a Eucharist) and most importantly of all tried to fit Christian and Hindu thought together by talking about Jesus' 'divine humanity'. *Spiritually* then, Sen certainly has a double religious identity, maybe even a multiple one, as it is much more universal than any other case study; however his syncretic attitudes dilute the differences of the two main religions he immersed himself in. Either way, his emphasis on the need for an Indian Church from someone who was not actually a 'member' of the Church (or would not have called himself a Christian absolutely) is fascinating – it shows how an 'outsider' of the church recognised a need, at this point in time, for the Church to be more Indian. He was engaged in a constant dialogue not only with Brahmoism and Hinduism, but Christianity and Hinduism, and even Christianity/Hinduism and the New Dispensation, which gave way to a *theological* and spiritual double religious identity for him.

- Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: This was another intriguing case study from an Indian background, but this man actually converted to Roman Catholicism. In this context, such conversion included converting to Western lifestyle as well, but Upadhyay's dis-ease and dislike for it soon became apparent. He embarked on his own journey to prove how one could be spiritually Christian and culturally Hindu; as he called it, having a 'Hindu Catholic' religious identity. Whilst some of his experiments (like the maṭha) met with failure, other attempts of his were inspired and fruitful. As a former disciple

of Sen's, Upadhyay was influenced by his time in the Brāhmo Samāj, which can be seen nowhere better than in his hymn *Vande Saccidānandam.* He goes further than Sen, trying to build a theology around this parallel but it still lacks that deep, philosophical analysis to reason *why* and *how* he has related Trinity to Being-Bliss-Consciousness. Nevertheless, as Tennent pointed out, his is the fullest attempt yet for a genuine Indian Christian theology (Tennent, 2000, p. 379), despite Lipner's reservations that Upadhyay's use of Thomism to be more Western than indigenous (Lipner, 1999, p. 223). Upadhyay also borrowed ideas from de Nobili, such as wearing kāvi, but his desire for an Indian church was not a mission strategy *per se*: rather it arose out of his own situation, his own experiences as an Indian Christian convert, and his desire to situate and express the Church in and through his own culture. If he is to be understood as inculturative, I would put him under '*spontaneous inculturation';* however whilst some scholars such as Tennent perceive him this way I think that his double religious identity is more of a result of his pioneering efforts in Indian Christian theology. However, because I recognise that perception of identity plays a large role in this thesis, I have included the perception of inculturation on the diagram. There is that deeply troubling or at least ambiguous side to Upadhyay: the fervent nationalism, (which strongly demonstrates a *political* double religious identity) the prāyaścitta episode…was he a Hindu, a Catholic, culturally one, spiritually the other? I suppose the point is, that his *cultural* (which he did express through certain *aesthetics*) religious identity and his spiritual religious identity made sense *to him*; he was happy to experiment in this way and actually being a Catholic for Upadhyay was made easier through embracing his Indian culture. But on the other hand, that issue of perception rears its head again: it was most likely his downfall, as people could not understand why he was trying to express his religious identity in the ways that he did.

Both Sen's and Upadhyay's employment of Sanskrit terminology, in particular Saccidānanda, gives a *theological* edge to their religious identities, such was their eagerness and desire for an Indian Church that truly reflected their own culture and their own personal situations and convictions. Sen's emphasis on the Asian Jesus also advocates the need to situate Jesus in his historical context, although he is rather too preoccupied with Jesus' humanity, often side-lining his divinity, at least divinity from a traditional Christian point of view. However, his emphasis on Jesus' humanity, through which he stresses Jesus' Palestinian roots, does remind people of the Eastern origins of both Jesus himself and the early Church. On the other hand, Upadhyay embraced the divinity of Christ, which of course differentiates him from Sen – Upadhyay was formally baptised, whereas Sen was not. This meant that Sen perhaps had greater 'freedom' to be less orthodox, as he was not

within the boundary of the church's authority, but Sen's relationship with Christianity and Jesus himself would lead him down a rather creative path as he attempted to fuse Hindu, Brahmo and Christian thought, pinnacling in the creation of the Church of the New Dispensation. Upadhyay, on the other hand, was more of a practical pioneer who pushed religious boundaries to their limit in search of his 'Hindu-Catholic' religious identity. This led him to clash with the church authorities, and both Hindus and Christians who did not seem to understand his commitment to the religious other. Both men had religious identities which were blurred, being never wholly one or the other, be that as a consequence of trying to reconcile his spiritual, Christian faith to a Hindu, cultural identity (Upadhyay) or by creatively synthesising Hindu and Christian belief and practice, as part of a theological and spiritual attempt to express his own religious convictions and ultimately, his religious identity (Sen).

Hyphenated/Double Religious Identity

Politics | Aesthetics | Theology | Spirituality | Culture | Inculturation

LATER LIFE

ONLY

Personal | Public

Spontaneous | Deliberate

Keshub Chunder Sen

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

*(According to some perceptions of Upadhyay as inculturative)*

- Saccidananda ashram: The āśrama itself was unique for this thesis in that it was a place, not a person, which was the subject of a case study. Whether or not it was intended to be, Saccidananda ashram is this rather fascinating example of *inculturation* at work – in its liturgy, architecture, even in its approach to worship. This basically means that the aesthetics of the Christian Church have been broken down and rebuilt with Hindu culture being borne in mind, so that the āśrama has an *aesthetical* Hindu –Christian identity, but a purely Christian spiritual one. There is intense debate about Saccidananda ashram – what it does, whether it is appropriate, whether it is honouring the tradition of Vatican II or not, whether it attracts more Westerners than Indian Christians. If symbolism or aesthetics are borrowed from a different religion or culture, as in inculturation, then it can be confusing, essentially blurring the religious identity of that place. Saccidananda ashram is not spiritually Hindu – it is Christian, but its inculturation means that for cultural outsiders, it could be fairly blurred at times. This case study explored other reactions to/perceptions of Saccidananda ashram and Christian āśramas, most of which were negative, some accusing the āśrama of syncretism or deceptive mission praxis. However, the actual execution of a Christian āśrama like Saccidananda demonstrates to people that inculturation is not the same as syncretism (at least, not when that label of syncretism has negative connotations). What it does instead is to take note of how images are respected in Hindu temples, translating that respect by borrowing Hindu ideas such as garlanding the images with beautiful flowers, much more part of Indian culture than lighting a candle next to an icon, as can be the custom in Western Churches. Accusations that the use of religious identity in inculturation is underhand should act as a reminder to the Church to consider carefully the extent to which it portrays itself and uses other cultures, particularly for the purposes of mission and conversion. Whilst the Church is right to be prioritizing inter-faith dialogue and inculturation, because religious identity is a sensitive issue this is something to bear in mind particularly with regards to inculturation.

- Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths: The three founders all shared in the common *aesthetical* religious identity of sannyāsins, as a means of mission, although Abhishiktananda would claim to share in its *spiritual* heritage too as one who was pursuing the Oneness of Advaita. Although perhaps the term 'inculturation' was not overly prominent in this historical context, nevertheless the āśrama was a pioneering one in that sense. Hence Abhishiktananda, and even Bede to some extent, have a double religious identity based on *inculturation*, and certainly have *theological* double religious identities too.

Abhishiktananda illustrates quite a few facets of double religious identity, including the aesthetical one he shares with the other two founders. His *theology* is both personal, as the outpourings of his diaries show, yet also as a prolific published author he is advocating an Indian Christian theology; Abhishiktananda always believed in the value of Advaita for Indian Church. He is then the other side of the coin to Upadhyay's indigenous Indian Christian theology: Abhishiktananda, as a missionary (and therefore a foreign) advocate of the Indian Church, argued for the essentialness of an Indian Christian theology. But it is perhaps the *spiritual* facet of his religious identity which interests the reader most. Here is a clear example of a man who found himself on the cusp of two religious identities, and is unsure of how to tread. He averts existential crisis in its totality, for he never relents Hinduism (Advaita specifically) or Christianity's hold upon him, rather he carries on holding them in tension to the point of exhaustion. But his recognition that he had to go via "...the Hindu Scriptures in order to accept the Gospel paradoxes in their full truth" (Letter to Sr Marie-Thérèse Le Saux, 29/1/72 in Abhishiktananda, 1995, p. 262) is something which contemporary comparative theologians, like Knitter, recognise within themselves: that a deep dialogue with a different faith can enhance and change one's own faith in beneficial ways. However, that is not to brush over the warning that Abhishiktananda signals to others who find themselves in such a position: his diaries are testament to the painful emotions that such a situation gives rise to, and his situation certainly suggests a vocational aspect to having a double religious identity, rather than it being a conscious decision.

Bede Griffiths' universalist *theology* took the āśrama in the direction of dialogue as well as inculturation, and he believed in the validity of (and therefore the ability to be taught by and learn from) other religious traditions besides his own. He integrated the āśrama more fully into a religious Order, for it is under him that the āśrama became part of the Camaldolese Benedictine Congregation in 1980 (Pattathu, 1997, p. 220). However, he did evoke controversy in his own particular way: his design of the Chapel, the incorporation of multi-religious readings into the services at Saccidananda and his continuance of the sannyāsa tradition made him bait for those opposed to *inculturation*, in both the Hindu and Christian traditions. He is more at one with Monchanin; Rodhe even suggested that "Much of what Griffiths has said and written might have been said and written by Monchanin" (Rodhe, 2001, p. 181). His own double religious identity is best understood as a reflection of his personal Universalist understanding, and his continuance of an Indian āśrama as part and parcel of the Vatican's new edict for inculturation. However, it is also important to remember that in his later life, Bede Griffiths' had a powerful experience of the 'Divine Mother' which was interpreted in this thesis as a *spiritual* double religious identity.

Each of their theologies impacted on their religious identity, indeed they are an important component of it. However, Abhishiktananda's theology led him towards a spiritual Hindu and a Christian religious identity, whereas Griffiths' theology is more of a testament to his attempts at inculturation and his more liberal interpretations of Christian soteriology. As for Abhishiktananda, his double religious identity comes about as a consequence of entering a deep dialogue within himself, and a craving for an Indian Christian theology. Similar to Upadhyay, he advocates a Christian theology based on Advaita and, as the latter case studies demonstrate, this would be irrelevant to the majority of lower castes and dalit converts to Christianity, and therefore not an Indian Christian theology wholly representative of them. Separate from the other two, Abhishiktananda offers a vivid example of one torn between two religious identities, who chooses not to forsake one for the other, but instead tries to hold them together in tension. As a consequence of entering into Hinduism, and taking on *Hindu* sannyāsa, it could be argued that Abhishiktananda also took on the *cultural* religious identity of Hinduism – after all he participated in all its festivals, had his own Śiva lingam, partook of pūjā in Hindu temples, meditated on the mountains and renounced all in the pursuit of oneness - exactly what sannyāsa entails. Abhishiktananda also became an Indian citizen by law.

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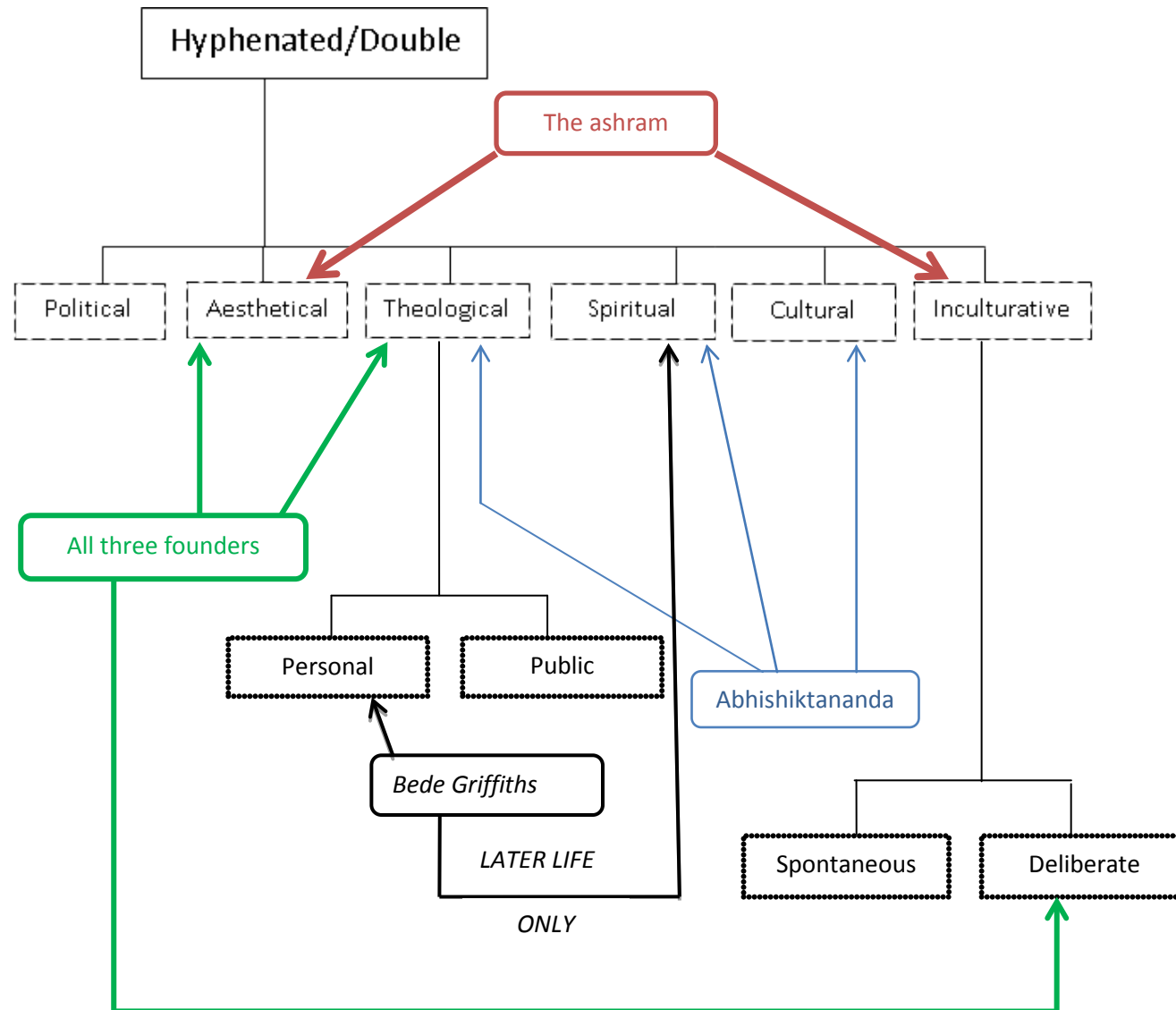
Contemporary Case Studies:

- Indian 'Christians', yet 'Hindu' for the purposes of government law: This case study moved away from the focus on inculturation to look at an issue of religious identity and politics in India, concerning Christian dalits who feign a Hindu identity for the purposes of benefiting from Indian law. Initially this might be believed to be for purposes of reservation only, because under current legislation dalit Christians (and Muslims) are not eligible for government reservations (in education, employment, government) on the basis of their religious identity. Christianity is perceived as a religion of equality, and on that basis dalit Christians are believed to need no extra aid from the government, as being a 'dalit Christian' is surely a contradiction in terms. Kumar and Robinson's, and Webster's case studies gave an interesting perspective on the way in which communities of dalit Christians might deal with this issue of reservation. Yet reservation was not the only reason for feigning a Hindu identity; if dalit Christians do not legally count as 'dalits', then they are also not protected by laws which protect dalits from attacks based on caste alone.

Essentially, this issue of double religious identity is a *political* one, but it is very different from the way in which Upadhyay has a political facet to his double religious identity: Upadhyay was informed by nationalist politics towards the end of his life; this contemporary case study however demonstrates a double religious identity which is based on a direct political need. It also demonstrates a skewed understanding of what a dalit Christian religious identity really means: a dalit Christian, sadly, can still face discrimination from within the church despite the egalitarian ethos of Christianity where 'all are one in Jesus Christ[242]'. The facet of 'politics' then needs to be further divided, as this first contemporary case study is different in its politics to Upadhyay's political double religious identity. Either way however, the political facet is in an important one for contemporary Hindu-Christian double religious identity: the necessity out of which some dalit Christians feel the need to feign a Hindu religious identity in order to access government reservations is an important matter of interfaith dialogue. This is because it is only through a better understanding of what Christianity is, and a renewed effort on the part of the Indian Church to combat casteism in its churches, that dalit Christians will be understood as still suffering from the stigma associated with that dalit label, despite belonging to a church which is meant to be anti caste.
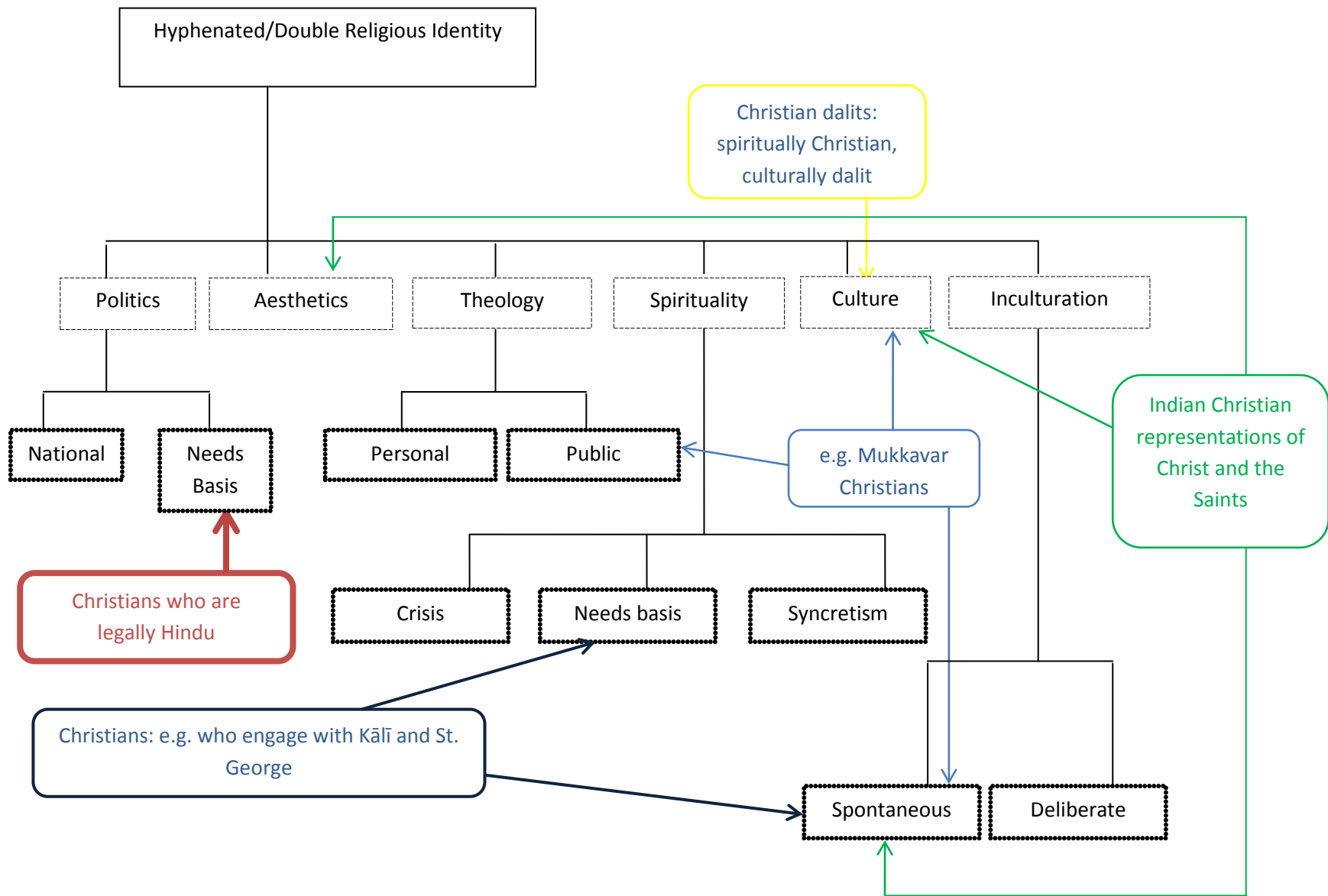
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[242] Galatians 3: 28 "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus".

- <u>Double religious identity, dalit conversion and spontaneous inculturation:</u> This final case study was split into two parts. The first examined dalits who were Christian converts yet often continued to engage with their previous religious identities, engaging in rituals, worship, culture and theology. They were understood as having a *cultural* double religious identity; as dalit Christians they are caught between a culturally dalit religious identity and a Christian spiritual one. The religious identity is blurred because dalit Christians may feel on the margins of both the Hindu world – which sees them as polluted – and the Christian world – which is still infiltrated by caste and hence that stigma of 'polluting' still follows them into the Church. Yes they are Christian, but at the same time that pollution stigma still leaves them marginalized within the Church, and dalit theology tries to rectify that situation by alerting people to the presence, and the necessary eradication, of casteism within the Church.

  The second set of case studies drew on three examples; one was the Mukkavar Christians and another was the relationships between saints and deities and the third was artistic representations of Christ. In some cases this blurring of religious identity occurred because of the cultural context – for example the Keralan Christians who interacted with Kālī and St. George did so because of an occurrence of smallpox. St. George was shown to be superior to Kālī, in that St. George had the ability to rid the community of smallpox, whereas the smallpox was actually associated with Kālī's presence. This *spiritual* double religious identity then came about as a result of a particular *need.* Other blurrings of religious identity could be attributed to a *spontaneous inculturation* that flourished in Indian churches, often as a result of shared *cultural* and religious symbolism, for example lamps and garlands of flowers. Perception of worship as involving both Hindu and Christian symbols mean that this spontaneous inculturation has been accused of syncretism (by those who perceive syncretism negatively) and hence a diluted Christianity. Their argument is further supported when a spontaneous inculturation leads to a change in *theological* and *spiritual (syncretism)* belief – for example, the Mukkavar worship of Mary. As for images of an Indian Christ (and the Saints), this is a reflection of culture (and therefore might be understood as an example of *spontaneous* inculturation) but what is most important is that it gives rise to an *aesthetical* double religious identity. But crucially whilst Jesus may *look* Indian (or in the case of Sahi's image, incorporate Hindu symbols such as Naṭarāja) nevertheless theologically and spiritually the intention is Christian.

In essence, this final case study shows how the facet of spiritual double religious identity is too broad, and should be broken down according to: 'needs basis', 'crisis' and 'syncretism'. This final case study fits the 'needs basis' aspect (for example, in the 'sibling rivalry' of St. George and Kālī where both are worshipped to eradicate and appease disease respectively) and the 'syncretism' aspect (for example, in the Mukkavar Christians). However, this 'syncretism' aspect needs to be carefully

addressed; syncretism has both a negative connotation (as a diluting or ill thought out process) and a positive one, which is more readily associated with inculturation. However, the difference in the positive connotation is that 'syncretism' is the use of outward signs and symbols of Hinduism, but adapted to promote a Christian (inner) meaning. It is essentially spontaneous inculturation at work; there is no missionary dictate. It could be argued that the Mukkavar Christians, by changing Christian belief about Mary from revered to worshipped, is a negatively connotated syncretism – this is because it challenges *theological* teachings, so much so that Mary becomes divine, and to do challenge this doctrine might be viewed negatively. Other case studies which have been fitted into the rather broad facet of 'spiritual' can also now be amended to fit into these aspects – Sen, for example, was certainly engaged in syncretism, and Abhishiktananda endured a crisis of double religious identity.

Hyphenated/Double Religious Identity

Christian dalits: spiritually Christian, culturally dalit

Politics | Aesthetics | Theology | Spirituality | Culture | Inculturation

Indian Christian representations of Christ and the Saints

National | Needs Basis

Personal | Public

e.g. Mukkavar Christians

Christians who are legally Hindu

Crisis | Needs basis | Syncretism

Christians: e.g. who engage with Kālī and St. George

Spontaneous | Deliberate

A final note on the diagrams before bringing this thesis to a close. The introduction of this thesis presented the facets as a way of expanding the term 'double religious identity'; whilst also recognising that these were not exhaustive examples it was also argued that there would be considerable overlap between some of the facets. Indeed, it transpired that there were four examples of overlapping occurring, or of further clarification of a facet being required, as the diagram in the final set of case studies showed. Here, the diagram will be reproduced with its clarified/overlapping facets, but without reference to any of the case studies, so as to represent the evolution of the diagram from introduction to conclusion.

First, the early case studies demonstrated that there would be a need to introduce a distinction between 'directed inculturation', like de Nobili's, and 'spontaneous' inculturation, like that of the early St Thomas Christian community. Second, the mission based case studies explicitly demonstrated that there was an obvious link between inculturation and two other facets – culture and aesthetics. This is because the very nature of inculturation is that it engages with and adapts the culture of the religious 'other' (Hinduism); one of the ways this manifestation can take place is through aesthetics. This explanation might seem rather simple and I could be accused of over-complicating the inculturation facet by having culture and aesthetics as facets too, when one would have sufficed. However, this was necessary because the cultural and aesthetical facets can also be ways of expressing a double religious identity *without inculturation.* This was evident from the two indigenous case studies, Sen and Upadhyay. Neither are considered in this thesis as pioneers in inculturation[243], but Upadhyay reclaimed his Hindu culture after conversion to Christianity, which also included taking on the aesthetics of a sannyāsin in the wearing of the kāvi. As for Sen, he stressed the importance for India to reclaim the Asianess of Jesus, and indeed the Asian culture of Christianity. Third, the 'spiritual' facet was considered too broad, and subdivided into 'crisis', 'needs basis' and 'syncretism' in the final set of case studies (the contemporary case studies), which was also advantageous in describing the double religious identity of Abhishiktananda. Finally, the politics of Upadhyay and the politics of those dalit Christians who feigned a Hindu identity for political reasons were quite different. Although they were both political double religious identities, it would be inadequate to group them under the same facet, hence 'politics' was split into 'national' and 'legal'.

In all, the diagram first set out in the introduction to this thesis has expanded (see the diagram reproduced below) as a result of analysing and exploring the case studies, which demonstrates the on-going consideration of what facets double religious identity might have.   It also

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[243] The reasons for which were discussed in 'Summary of Indigenous Case Studies'.

demonstrates that the facets do not stand alone, as there can be significant overlap and hence double religious identity might occur in various ways within an individual case study.
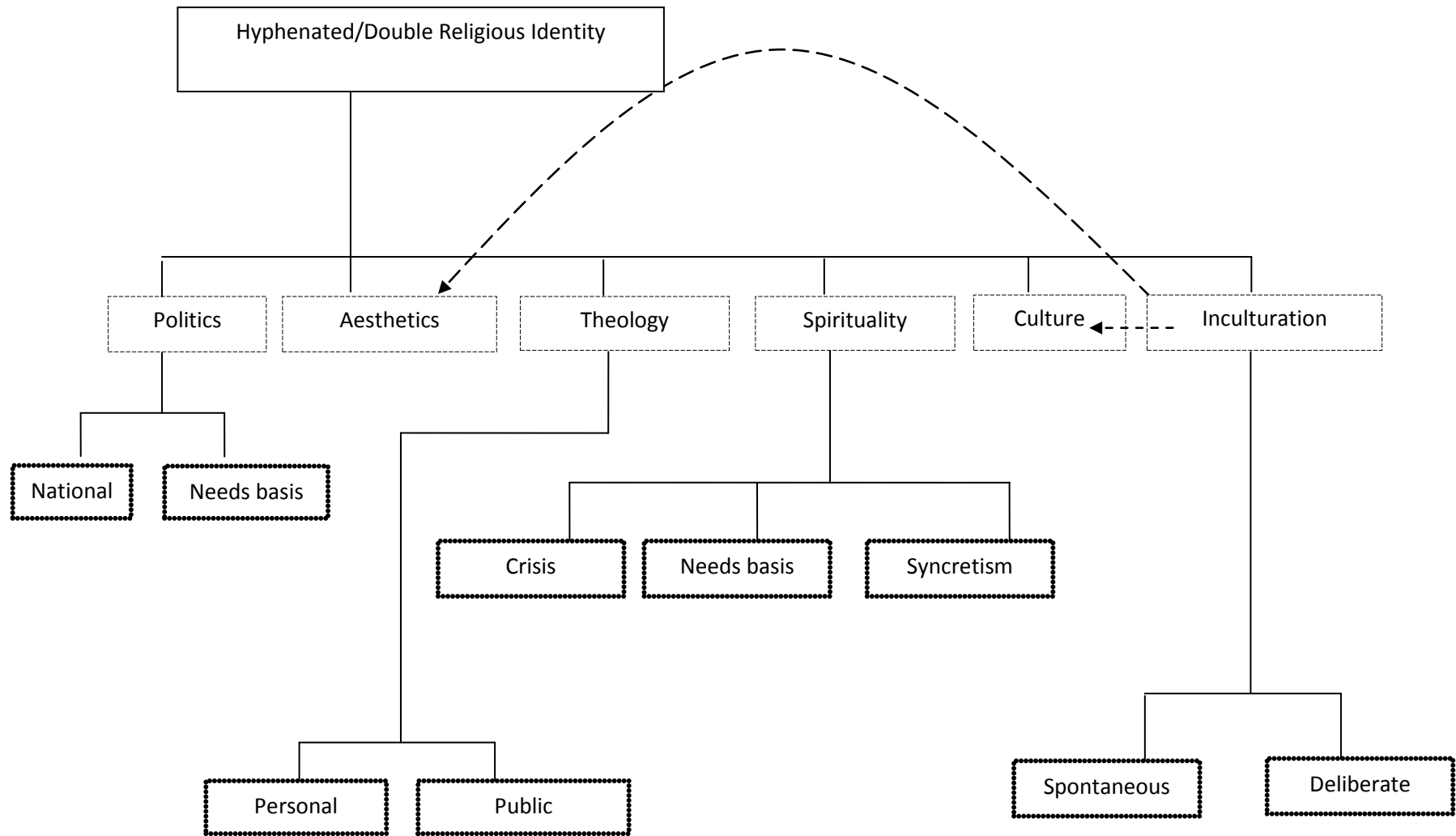
Final Observations

The six facets were initially presented in the introduction as a consequence of moving the exploration of double religious identity into Hindu-Christian studies. It was felt that the terminology of double religious identity was vague, and a deeper exploration of the ways in which people could have a double religious identity was found to go beyond syncretism, crisis and cultural norm, needing greater attention to detail. As a result of investigating double religious identity through the various case studies (picked from a variety of points in history to show that these issues have always abounded) some of the facets, notably *spirituality*, *politics* and *theology* needed to be further expanded. Also, some of the facets were shown to overlap or work hand-in-hand; this was particularly true for *aesthetics*, *culture* and *inculturation* – often Christian inculturation involved adapting aesthetical elements of Hindu religions and cultures as suitable expressions for an Indian Christianity. What was also found was that the relationship between religion and culture, whilst often dichotomised in inculturation, is not easy to separate, particularly in Hinduism. Hence the problem with Christian inculturation in India is that it has the danger to be perceived as syncretising Hinduism and Christianity spiritually, when actually the theology behind it is attempting to adapt Hindu cultural elements. Perception of religious identity, then, is of vital importance.

Double religious identities can be a combination of factors, not just in terms of spiritual cross over but because of social justice issues, inculturation and associated missiology and syncretism. This is perhaps most acutely expressed in Hindu-Christian dialogue because of the interaction of culture and religion in India – not just because of the tensions in Hinduism but also because of the ways in which Christianity has been founded and represented there. The facets that each of the case studies interacts with, resulting in their double religious identity, are not exhaustive categories, or even boxes to be ticked; instead they demonstrate the need to be more articulate about *how* double religious identities are expressed and have occurred. They are not meant to be rigid typologies to fit people into, but ways of describing the complex religious identities that people have found themselves encountering through their engagement with Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Of course this study has focused (geographically) on India – it would be interesting to see how or if double religious identity is also a phenomenon that occurs for Christians and Hindus in Britain. Presumably different laws, churches which are not inculturating with other religious cultures and the Head of State being the Head of the Church (albeit in an ever increasingly multicultural Britain) suggests that double religious identity might occur differently to those reasons outlined in this thesis. Other studies might choose to move double religious identity into different spheres of dialogue, if the scope exists for it, or even to explore different

demographics. Admittedly this study of Hindu-Christian double religious identity has focused on mainly male, mission or inculturation based case studies, which is largely a reflection of the historical contexts. Perhaps another study could choose to focus on Hindu-Christian women or even on young people in a particular Hindu diaspora.

For the sake of variety, this thesis has tried to use case studies which approach Hindu-Christian dialogue in different ways: there is de Nobili, who engaged in dialogue as a means for initiating conversion. Those like Bede Griffiths engaged in dialogue not just on a personal level but as a means of understanding other faiths from a Catholic perspective. There is also Abhishiktananda, who is engaged in an existential dialogue taking place in his own heart. There are also examples of informal dialogue which occurs in communities; for example that which contributes to issues of social justice between dalit Christians and Muslims petitioning for Scheduled Caste status. There is the dialogue which informs inculturation, such as the everyday dialogue encountered between Hindus and Christians in Kerala, nicely exemplified by Dempsey's telling of sibling rivalries between Christian saint and Hindu deity. As for dalit theology, it grew out of a necessity both to access and interpret Christianity in ways meaningful to their own social and cultural religious situations. To address issues like caste system in the church, both the cultural and/or religious roots of the caste system in Hinduism need to be examined, and so this is a serious matter of dialogue for those who have crossed the boundaries of Hinduism into Christianity and found the same old prejudices they hoped had been left behind. Each case study can therefore be seen to be, or have been, engaging in various types of inter-faith dialogue. The case studies are involved in a dialogue which has a profound effect on their own religious identities, to the point where they can be understood as double rather than singular in kind.

An important finding of this thesis is that perception plays a key role in the understanding of double religious identities. If someone like Bede Griffiths was perceived to be Hindu because of his adoption of the kāvi through taking on sannyāsa, then despite the theology behind such an expression to many people he seemed Hindu, despite Bede not seeing himself as one. These facets – and their expanded aspects- are all important parts of people's Hindu-Christian religious identities. Kenneth Cracknell comments that "It is sound ethical practice to approach another person with as few presuppositions as possible, and not to label or stereotype him or her" (Cracknell, 1986, p. 115). In a paradoxical way, this is often the reason why these case studies have been misunderstood or viewed negatively: because people try to label them as one or the other, and even when put under this umbrella term of 'double religious identity', there are still so many complications and misgivings! A theology of double religious identity is significant because it goes some distance to ensuring that such identities are understood as being genuinely experienced and expressed by people in a globalised and dialogical world. This

thesis demonstrated the need for a facet based approach to double religious identity as a means of furthering understanding and theologising about double religious identity: what it is, what it means and how people have them.

Why is it important to study such identities as these?

The topic of double religious identity is certainly fascinating enough to inspire further study, but perhaps the most important question is 'why write about it at all?' One reason is because the people and places examined here have something significant to contribute to missiology, especially in terms of appraising Christian inculturation in India. That is, that the praxis and methods of deliberate inculturation really need to be reconsidered. If it is to operate at all, it needs to be in tandem with Indian Christians and their communities, and certainly should be played out sensitively, so that the borrowing of symbolism etc. is not misconstrued as damaging, deceitful or imperialist. This is something that Paul Collins has specifically advocated in *Christian Inculturation in India*, that "...incorporation would be best done alongside ongoing dialogue with these communities" (Collins, 2007b, p. 189). The only way of achieving this is through dialogue; interfaith dialogue should be at the heart of Christian mission, especially in instances of inculturation. This brings me on to another reason for writing about double religious identities; to highlight the necessity and importance of interfaith dialogue. In this thesis, this has been particularly linked to mission (although obviously interfaith dialogue has other such remits, like social justice, community cohesion and mutual enrichment). Whilst there are some Christians for whom interfaith dialogue has little relevance, and therefore who would strongly disagree with my view, nevertheless I believe that dialogue is essential to mission, even if it is just at the level of learning about, rather than from. Of course, there are some Christians who believe that the religious other has nothing to teach them, but I believe there is real value in being able to appreciate and understand what the religious other can teach, as well as what they believe and practice.

Christian inculturation also needs to become more aware of the sheer diversity of Hinduism–one good reason is that this colonial definition of Hinduism ignores dalits and adivasis, who form the majority of Indian church communities. So inculturation needs to build upon dalit religiosity and culture if it is still to be relevant for contemporary missiology. Also, a greater understanding of the world church as richly diverse and differing in their approaches to worship, ritual and aesthetics is important, including the extent to which those churches interact with local cultures and religions. Sometimes this may be uncomfortable, particularly when a spontaneous inculturation has given rise to a confluence of beliefs and practices which may not be orthodox (thinking of the Mukkavar Christians in particular here, who worship Mary). As

was noted in chapter two, it is not just Hinduism that is incredibly diverse; Christianity is also diverse in its manifestations, ecumenically and globally.

Another reason for doing this research is to highlight the needs of dalit Christians, both politically and within the Church –the complete inclusion of dalit Christians and an eradication of casteism in churches are of utmost importance. Hindu and Christian double religious identities themselves are a rich resource not just for exploring missiology (in particular, inculturation) but also the development of an Indian Christian theology and current social justice issues, especially those faced by dalit Christians. A globalized world has led to a greater interaction with religions and cultures that centuries ago would not have been possible to engage with; hence double religious identity is a phenomenon that is bound to occur as people begin to interact with different ways of understanding the world and approaching the divine. This also leads to a greater need for interfaith dialogue, as a way of learning about and from the religious other, which in its very expression and execution opens up the religious identity of an individual to change and growth. However, in order to understand people's Hindu Christian religious identity better, a greater exploration and critical engagement with Christian missiology, the Indian church and the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity in India is needed; by doing so this greatly aids the way in which such identities are perceived.

At first, the declaration of a person's religious identity – 'I am a Hindu', 'She is a Christian' – seems fairly standard. As stressed in the introduction, most people would conceive in their minds that such religious identities are very different from one another and could tell you something about each one of them. Yet when someone is described as (or refers to themselves as) 'a Hindu-Christian', it seems paradoxical, confusing, even bizarre; yet it is such identities as these which make the study of religious identity appealing and attractive. It speaks of the extent to which religious identity might be complicated and sacrificial, but also defining and even normative in some cultures. For the case studies examined here, Hindu-Christian double religious identity can be a way of life, a vocation, a choice, politically motivated, a means to aiding conversion or faith itself, or simply the result of years spent in dialogue and/or mission. This thesis hopes to heighten awareness that double religious identity occurs in a variety of ways, and should not be dismissed as some sort of consumerist, pick and mix attitude, or a syncretism which is inauthentic. Rather it ought to be perceived as someone else's way of trying to approach the divine, or of offering a way of seeing the divine to others, or living out their faith on a daily basis. This can all be affected by different facets of one religious identity – politics, inculturation, aesthetics, theology, spirituality, culture – engaging with another religious identity and tradition. The contributions and relevance to interfaith dialogue of the individual case studies should not be underestimated, yet at the same time they also offer much needed space for reflection on the ways in which Christians have been, and still are, practising

mission. Above all, their stories need to be studied and shared; their perspective from both sides of the fence is not a position which many can claim, a blurring of the boundaries which may be difficult to grasp. That is of course, unless those stories also resonate with one's own religious identity.

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