

**ARE WE REDEEMED? THE THEOLOGY OF REDEMPTION AND THE CRISIS
OF FAITH/IDENTITY IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

By

John Kannu Musa

Vinzenz Pallotti University, Pallottistr. 3, 56179
Vallendar, Germany.

E-mail: kannufaje@yahoo.com

Phone Number: +4915219398525

ABSTRACT

Christianity came about through the story of the cross. The revelation of God to humanity is fully realised through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. Through the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts are distributed to believers for the common good of all. Should we deny the passion of Christ that led to our redemption? The event of Good Friday that leads to Easter Sunday reveals the suffering, new life, and unconditional love of the divine God to mortal humanity. In suffering, Jesus submitted to human authority to give salvation to humankind. God reveals himself in no other ways except in suffering, new life (through his resurrection), and unconditional love. The paper made use of expository and analytic methods of research. Data were collected from books and the Holy Book. The research reveals the emergence of various sects within Christendom, leading to significant issues based on controversial doctrines and teachings that contradict the true theology of redemption. Furthermore, today, in some of these new sects, prosperity is emphasised over and against the mainstream doctrine of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While true leaders of the Church are worried about the rising false doctrines about the Christian religion, some false leaders are using religion to confuse people more and exploit them for personal gain. The Church should communicate the Holy Spirit in which Christ himself continues to be incarnate, active, and visible to those who have faith. Leaders of the Church should proclaim and nurture the Christian faith to members for the common good of all. Christians should also know that redemption is the salvific foundation of Christian belief. Jesus' teachings reflect his character, and he embodies his teachings. Life without Jesus for the Christians is life without future hope and glory in God's Kingdom.

Keywords: Crises, Christian, Faith, Theology, Redemption and Religion

Introduction

The majority of Christians understand that Christ has redeemed and set them free from bondage and slavery to sin through his passion, death, and resurrection. That is the ideal of the Christian faith. This approach lays the foundation for understanding Christ better in his mission and teaching. However, it's tempting to question whether some Christians in our generation truly comprehend the essence of redemption. Some religious movements within Christendom tend to divert from the real theology of redemption, eventually leading them to

the crisis of faith and identity. Different sects within the Christian religion hold different theologies and doctrines, some of which are slightly or completely at odds with the teachings of Christ. Our theology, doctrines, and teachings should emanate from the reality of the crucified and risen Christ who lives in the Church and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, guides the Church to truly understand Him in His mystery. Do we allow Christ to be understood? Do we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us? Do we fully understand the mystery of Christ? Are we truly redeemed? I would like to explore these concerns in this article.

Are We Redeemed?

Redemption can be seen objectively and subjectively. While objectively, Redemption is the work of the Redeemer, subjectively, Redemption is the realisation of Redemption in individual people. "Through the Atonement, the insult offered to God by sin was counterbalanced, and the injury to the honour of God was repaired. Through the merits of Christ, the supernatural riches of salvation were acquired, which are to be dispensed in the subjective redemption" (193). Kereszty agrees with the meaning of redemption as taught by the Church Fathers. He says: "According to the Fathers, the purpose of the incarnation and redemption is not only to undo the consequences of sin but also to assume humankind into God's own Trinitarian life. However, our fallen state determines the concrete form of this assumption (206). Therefore, the Incarnation of Christ was not sufficient for our salvation. The whole existence of Christ, including His death and resurrection, makes our redemption and sanctification complete and perfect.

Jesus remains our mediator with the Father throughout the history of our salvation, from creation to the incarnation, death, and resurrection. St Gregory the Great expresses the theme of mediation: "The Word himself helped man by becoming man." A man left to his resources could not return to God. Only the God-man could open up the road to return. We, mortal and sinful, were far away from the Immortal and Just One. However, between the Immortal Just One and the mortal evil ones, there appeared the mediator of God and men. He is mortal but just; he shared death with man and justice with God. Since we were far away from the heights because of our lowliness, he joined together in himself the highest with the lowest; and by uniting our lowliness with his highness, the road for returning to God was opened for us" (Article 22 as qtd in Moralia 13).

However, we find salvation when we unite with Christ. For Jesus himself said, “Cut off from me, you can do nothing” (cf. John 15:5). Through Christ’s redemption, those who believe in him are co-heirs with Him in His Father’s house. Through his passion, death, and resurrection, Christ achieved for us two important things: victory and deliverance from sin and slavery. Sin as a necessary consequence alienates us from our human nature and deprives us of the choice of changing our pattern of life, which may result in death and docility to the devil. God initiated the plan to set us free from slavery to sin and the dominance of the devil in our lives. Therefore, objectively, redemption is the gift of communion offered to us by Christ, while subjectively, restitution is our free acceptance of this communion through faith.

With this understanding of redemption, what has changed over time? Why are most Christians in the crisis of faith today? Most Pentecostal movements and new religious groups postulate doctrines and theologies devoid of the cross. When prosperity takes the place of suffering, healing, and miracles take the place of medication, and when the Holy Spirit replaces God the Father and God the Son, then definitely, the adherents of these new movements are plunged deep into a crisis of faith and identity. People move from one church to the other seeking answers and solutions to problems relating to their faith and understanding Christ’s redemption. St Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, has this to say: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. You have passed away, and God has hidden your life with Christ.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (cf. Col 3:1-5). This text should be a source of motivation for those who have been plunged into a deep crisis of faith and identity. Only Christ can set us free. We are already redeemed. Let no false doctrine or teaching enslave us and lead us back to our old selves.

The Mystery of Christ through Redemption

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross appeared shameful to his followers and suggested that his mission was a failure. However, his resurrection convinced his disciples that he was exalted above heaven and earth as the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Through the

descent of the Holy Spirit, his apostles and disciples understood the full mystery of Jesus according to the Scriptures. While the purpose of the cross was to ridicule Jesus, it also served as a means to unveil his mystery to humanity. Pilate, in the Gospel narrative of St John, came closer to making a confession of faith about Jesus, but he got his attention eventually diverted. The question 'What is truth?' could be asked in the Hebrew original in two ways: 'What is truth?' and 'Who is truth?'. (Cf. John 37-38). When Pilate asked, 'What is truth?', Jesus did not respond. He had already told him the truth. Jesus went on to say, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). If he had asked, 'Who is truth?', Jesus would have answered Pilate immediately because He is the truth. "John sees the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as one event. Pilate had the charge against him hung above Jesus' head in three languages, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin: "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" and stubbornly defended it against the protest of the Jewish leaders. In doing so, he acted out of mockery. But in John's perspective, what took place is a case of supreme irony; unknowingly, Pilate became an instrument in God's plan and proclaimed to the world what really happened in the crucifixion: Jesus was enthroned on the cross as the king of the universe." (Kereszty, 169). (John 18:28-19:22).

The Jews who came to ask Jesus about his authority for preaching differently from the Jewish theology and doctrines were faced with the question of accepting the truth and setting themselves free, but they refused to accept the truth. "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do them? Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? 'Answer me.' They argued with one another: 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'of human origin'? - They were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So, they answered Jesus, 'We do not know'" (Mark 11:28-33). Despite their crisis of faith and identity, they chose to deny the truth rather than proclaim it. Our generation is suffering from the same denial of Jesus' redemptive victory through the cross. We cannot deny suffering or see it as punishment from God. If Jesus can suffer, who are you to deny suffering? Christianity as a religion should not be the means to solve our personal and physical problems. If it does, it must be based on a deep faith and conviction in Jesus Christ. Most Christians today realise their need for God only when they are sick, in need of a

breakthrough, poor, or in critical situations. When everything works out well for them, then God is kept aside.

The mystery of Christ is revealed clearly in the prologue of St John in his gospel, thereby indicating the eternal communion of God the Father and God the Son (Word) of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him" (John 1:1, 18). In the post-resurrection event, the doubting Thomas made Jesus reveal himself more by carrying the wounds of the crucifixion still on. "Put your finger here and see my hands, then put your hand in my side and believe. Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and my God.'" (John 20:27-28).

It is worth reiterating that, for our faith to be built and rooted in Jesus Christ, we must be willing to accept the reality of the resurrection. Without a claim to the resurrection, Jesus would have appeared to be like a rabbi, a miracle worker, or a prophet who was hanged on the cross, abandoned by his Father and his immediate disciples. To know Jesus is to grasp the mystery of his resurrection.

The Resurrection of Jesus as Revelation to the World

The passion and death of Jesus on the cross scandalised his disciples. All hope was lost. However, his rising from the dead vindicated his certainty in the future realisation of God's kingdom on earth (Mark 14:25). "The resurrection showed that, so far from being cursed by God whom he called 'Abba' (see Gal 3:13), Jesus had been divinely vindicated in himself, in his teaching, and in that utter fidelity to his vocation for which he sacrificed everything, even life itself. The resurrection disclosed that his self-sacrifice had been accepted and that, instead of being a mere messianic pretender as the title on the cross asserted, he was/is the Messiah and his crucifixion had truly been the death of the Messiah." (Collins, 104).

The resurrection also signified the exaltation of Jesus to the glory of God, which he shared with the Father before, during, and after his incarnation. Psalm 110:1, which Mark 12:35-37 shares, says: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" This Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus' exaltation saw its fulfilment in the resurrection. Jesus promised this during his trial before the Sanhedrin: "You will see the

Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62) (494-500).

The event of Good Friday that leads to Easter Sunday reveals the suffering, new life, and unconditional love of the divine God to mortal humanity. In suffering, Jesus submitted to human authority to give salvation to humankind. Therefore, the weak, marginalised, and despised who suffer for God’s sake will rejoice and be glad. Their reward will be enormous in heaven (cf. Matt 5:12). New life in God guarantees that our bodies will be raised to life again when we die. “The resurrection of Jesus led his followers to enlarge radically this notion and worship God as the One who not only gives life but even raises the dead to new life. Paul drew the conclusion: those who failed to acknowledge God as the Resurrector of the dead were essentially ‘misrepresenting’ the deity.” (1 Cor 15:15) (108).

The unconditional love of God towards humanity made Him send His Son to redeem us. This unconditional love discloses God more to us in a startling way. Therefore, his suffering, death, and resurrection brought about new life and unconditional love from God to humanity. God can reveal himself to us in no other way except in these three forms: suffering, new life, and unconditional love.

The Holy Spirit Our Counsellor

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was meant to lead all Christians to the complete truth of the mission and teaching of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person distinct from the Father and the Son. Spiritual gifts come from one divine source and should contribute to the common good of all believers. St. Paul puts it clearly: “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but the same God who inspires them all in everyone” (1 Cor 12:4-6). “When dealing with God’s spirit (Hebrew *ruah*; Greek *pneuma*), the Old Testament highlighted its power as ‘wind’, ‘the breath of life’, or the divine inspiration that comes upon prophets. In pre-Christian Judaism, ‘word’, ‘wisdom’, and ‘spirit’ were almost synonymous ways for speaking of God’s manifest and powerful activity in the world” (Cf. Psalm 33:6; 147:18) (O’Collins 52).

In the New Testament, Jesus is depicted as inspired by the Holy Spirit in His ministry of teaching and healing. But the full understanding of the Holy Spirit came to limelight after the

resurrection and exaltation of Christ from the cross. Therefore, the early Christians understood a characteristically new way of thinking about the Holy Spirit and its relationship with the Father and the Son. This relationship was understood to be transformed by the resurrection. This relationship is understood by St. Paul as a 'life-giving Spirit' (Cf. 1 Cor 15:45).

The Holy Spirit is a real Person. In the Trinitarian formula of Baptism contained in the Synoptic Gospels, the identity of the Holy Spirit as a real Person comes into play. (Cf. Matt 28:19). Divine attributes are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit possesses the fulness of knowledge: He teaches all truth, presages future things (John 16:13), searches the innermost secrets of God (1 Cor 2:10), and has inspired the prophets of the Old Covenant (2 Pet 1:21; cf. Acts 1:16). "The Holy Spirit is the divine distributor of grace" (Ott 66). Thus, he confers extraordinary graces (1 Cor 12:11) and the grace of justification in Baptism (John 3:5) and in the Sacraments of Penance (John 20:22). "As the Spirit transcends the personal distinction between Father and Son and joins both together, so does he transcend the distinction between himself and our spirits and joins us to the Son and through the Son to the Father. By uniting himself to us, his transcendent power raises us above ourselves, while actualizing rather than suppressing the unique personality of each one of us. By his presence, the risen Christ becomes ours and we become Christ's, so that Christ himself loves the Father and his fellow men and women through us and – through our incorporation into Christ -we become sons and daughters of the Father. The Church is then not only the means of communicating the Holy Spirit but also the community in which, through the Spirit's presence, Christ himself continues to be incarnate, active, and visible to those who have faith" (Kereszty 431-432).

Individuals are transformed wherever the Holy Spirit blows. This transformation leads to building human relationships that involve everyone in the community. This understanding reflects the perfect and complete working of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers in Christ. This understanding is depicted in St. Paul's letter to Romans 8:15-16. It says: "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!', it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:15-16). This is what we stand to enjoy in the Holy Spirit when we have faith in Jesus our redeemer.

Crisis of Faith and Identity

Even though Christ has redeemed us, our world today is faced with a crisis of faith and identity by followers of Christ. The majority of our crises are caused by religious leaders who choose to accept and teach doctrines that suit their congregation. People move from one church to the other seeking miracles, prosperity, healing, deliverance, wealth and other social amenities life can offer them. These people are meant to believe that when they visit these churches, all they desire will be provided for them by God. Of course, God has the power to provide all our riches in glory but first, he tells us to seek his kingdom. (Cf. Matt 6:33).

If such religious leaders can perform any miracle, the glory should be given to God and not to such individual leaders. Also, it is important to know that the significance and effectiveness of preaching in the Church bears in mind the reality of Christ's redemptive mission which faithfully transmits and affirms the doctrines of faith and bears witness to the truth in the Scripture.

What the Christian faith teaches must involve the act of faith (*fides quae creditor/fides qua creditur*) without which such teaching would be regarded as an intellectual enterprise. Such an enterprise would be regarded as part of the history of religions. Any act of the act of Christian faith is intentionally oriented: it is tied to its content, Christ, whose word and work call for the act of faith. "For Christian faith regards true human fulfilment as nothing other than the imitation of Jesus Christ and the striving for a life based in his spirit of love" (Augustin 89-90).

In the Church, it is expected that theology should not change what is believed or taught and bring in something different to replace any sound doctrine in the Church. On the contrary, what is believed and taught in the Church as theological is expected to measure up to established doctrines that lead the faithful daily to Christ. Is what is preached rooted or consistent with the Bible? Has the belief or teaching been expressed and defended, at least in substance, by the authoritative witnesses of the early Church?

Any particular belief or teaching that is accepted to be official doctrine in the Church, should be regarded as consistent with the biblical message, the writings of the early witnesses of the Church, and other traditional beliefs. People raise a lot of questions most often, if the Church

has employed the best theology and mode of expression in its doctrinal preaching and pronouncements.

In preaching, the theological foundation is always or should always be applied. It has to apply to God, the Scripture, and the people. God has to speak to us through the Scripture. Without God speaking to us, we would not have known him. Therefore, our preaching is our response to God's message. "The lion has roared: who will not fear? The Lord has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). God instructs, and we deliver the message to his people.

The foundation of every preaching should be grounded in the Scripture because it is an inspired Word of God. It is God's Word in written form. It is, therefore, inspired. (DV. No: 8). Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Because the Bible is inspired by God it is valuable for all generations. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "the Word of God is living and active." The Bible is not a dead document filled with ancient facts, but it is alive and has power in and over the lives of people today.

Scripture communicates truths that should be proclaimed to all people. But if the Word is to be proclaimed, the best means of proclaiming is expository preaching. "The type of preaching that most effectively lays open the Bible so that men are confronted by its truth is expository preaching" (Robinson 57). This is especially true for those who commit Biblical inerrancy. Since Christians believe that all Scripture is inspired by God and inerrant, we should be committed to the fact that "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). "The only response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it expositionally" (MacArthur 4).

The mission mandate of Jesus Christ to his apostles played a major role in the spread of the Christian religion. According to Ratzinger, "It was not the drive to power that launched Christian universalism but the certitude of having received the saving knowledge and the redeeming love to which all people have a claim and for which, in the inmost depths of their being, they are waiting" (55). "That is all quite correct if Jesus of Nazareth is truly the meaning of history, the Logos who has become man, the self-revelation of truth itself. It is

then clear that this truth is the sphere within which everyone can find and relate to one another and, in so doing, lose nothing of his value or his dignity. This is the point at which criticisms are made today. To lay claim to truth for one religion's particular expressions of faith appears today, not merely presumptuous, but an indication of insufficient enlightenment" (72). It is because religion has influenced the thinking of man, that the search for truth is the primary concern of man in our society today. "Hans Kelsen was expressing the spirit of our age when he represented the question of Pilate, 'What is truth?' as being the sole appropriate attitude for determining the structure of society within the state, in the face of the great religious and moral difficulties of mankind. Truth is replaced by the decision of the majority, he says, precisely because there can be no truth, in the sense of a binding and generally accessible entity for man" (Possenti 345 as qtd. in Ratzinger 72).

The major challenge of contemporary society is the acceptance of the truth about other religions. To tolerate each other's religions, there is a need for a deeper level of acceptance of doctrines and beliefs each religious adherents hold on to. Christians have to understand other religions as they are and the other religions have to recognize the person of Jesus Christ as the middle point of the Christian faith and doctrines. "For the knowledge that man must turn toward God, and toward what is eternal, is found right across all the cultures; the knowledge about sin, repentance, and forgiveness; the knowledge concerning communion with God and eternal life; and finally, the knowledge of the basic rules of morality, as they are found in the form of the Ten Commandments. It is not relativism that is confirmed; rather, it is the unity of the human condition and its common experience of contact with a truth that is greater than we are" (79).

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we have concluded that the interpretations of "redemption" as salvific through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the foundation of the Christian belief and theory. He performs and gives himself in all his actions. Ratzinger asserts that "the person of Jesus is his teaching, and his teaching is he. Christian faith, that is, faith in Jesus as the Christ, is therefore truly 'personal faith'. What this means can be understood only from this standpoint. Such faith is not the acceptance of a system but the acceptance of this person who is his word; of the word as a person and of the person as Word".

These interpretations do not spoil what is distinctive in “redemption” and the newness it offers in a person’s life through baptism and communion with God. It is intended to give life and salvation to the entire Church of Christ by assessing the triumphant work of Redemption in the history of man’s salvation.

St. Paul teaches emphatically that faith and baptism into the risen Christ are open to all. This faith transcends all pre-existing religious, social, and gender distinctions or barriers: “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

The resurrection of Jesus is the principle of our being. The mystery of the resurrection of Jesus Christ helped the Apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ to gain more insight into the real life of Jesus and his death. This helped them understand what the message of Jesus was all about. Therefore, our faith foundation as the Church of God lies in the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. His death assumes meaning in the context of the resurrection.

The world today is thrown into chaos and confusion in search of authentic religion. Today, doubts have arisen not just about the universality of the Christian faith or religion, but about the universality of other religions too. Many don’t view religion today with the eye of a body of doctrines that speaks about truth and love but as a process of alienation and domination by force.

As a result of the numerous problems created by religion, the human person has been plunged into crisis in trying to find answers and meanings to so many unanswered issues affecting society today. Needless to say, “some of the religious cults and groups depend on strong economic support and that their preaching tempts people with deceptive illusions, misleads them with distorted simplifications and sows’ confusion, especially among the simplest and those most lacking in religious instruction.

Works Cited

Augustin, George. *Called to Joy, Priesthood*. Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, Print. 2018.

Brown, Raymond. *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*. 2Vol. New York: Double day, 1994. Print.

Dei Verbum No 8. *Vatican Two Document*. Rome: Paulines Publication, 1965. Print.

Kereszty, Roch. *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*. New York: Society of St. Paul, 2002. Print.

Ludwig, Ott. *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. Trans: Patrick Lynch et al. Indiana: Baronius Press Ltd., 2018. Print.

Mac Arthur, John. "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching". *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 1.1, 1990. Print.

O'Collins, Gerald. *A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Pssenti, V. *Le societaliberali al Lineamenti di filossofadellasocieta*. (345 As qtd in Ratzinger 72). *Truth and Tolerance, Christian Belief and World Religions*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003. Print.

Ratzinger, Joseph. *Truth and Tolerance, Christian Belief and World Religions*. St. Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003. Print.

Robinson, Haddon. *What is Expository Preaching?* *Bibli0theca Sacra* 131, January, 194. Print.