



## THE BIBLE, LITURGY AND ETHICS: INSIGHTS FROM MALANKARA CATHOLIC RITE OF RECONCILIATION (*SUBUKONO*)

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the interrelation among the Bible, Liturgy and Ethics by analysing the use of the Bible in a particular liturgical context, namely the rite of reconciliation (subukono) in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. To achieve this purpose, this article starts with the question of whether a feasible connection is possible between the Bible and ethics irrespective of their complexities as articulated by Tom Deidum as those who easily applaud the use of the Bible for ethical engagement are those who fail to understand these complexities, and finds that a possible connection is possible when the narrative unity of the Bible is highlighted instead of its historicity. The "God reference" as understood by Paul Ricoeur proffers a rationale for narrative unity and "poetics." the Bible reveals a world of meaning and makes the encounter with the referent of that world possible. Liturgy is a proper context to have this encounter the effect of which is that the participants are transformed in their identities as the body of Christ and search for patterns of action in the acts of Jesus. These patterns for actions, the reference to the sinful woman and the tax collector in the rite of reconciliation (subukono) for example, are found in the Bible and the liturgical context, these patterns invite the participants of liturgy to have dynamic engagement with them and transform them into the new life situations by creative appropriation.*

Key Words: The Bible, Liturgy, Ethics, Malankara Catholic Rite of Reconciliation, Scripture

### INTRODUCTION

The ethical implications of the Bible and liturgy are investigated with new impetus after the first half of the twentieth century. It is true that there has been an emerging consensus about the relevance of the Bible and liturgy for ethics. However, the consequences of the Bible on ethics and that of liturgy on ethics are investigated separately (e.g. Spohn 1995; Harrington & Keenan 2002; Ramsey 1979; Ashbrook 2013). Comparatively less has been done to explore the interface among the Bible, liturgy and ethics (e.g. Fagerberg 1992).

This article is an attempt to find a connection among the three. To achieve this purpose, this article investigates into the use of the Bible in a particular liturgical context. Our questions in this essay, hence, are "how can the biblical references in the context of liturgy be ethically implicative?" How does liturgy provide us with a context for the exposition of the connection between the Bible and ethics? To be more concrete, we raise the question: what

ethical impacts do the biblical references/allusions in the rite of reconciliation in the Syro-Malankara Church, otherwise known as *Subukono* have against the backdrop of the connection between the Bible and ethics?

The article is structured into two sections. The first section explores the relationship between the Bible and ethics and examines the contribution of liturgy in providing a context for the interaction between the Bible and ethics. The second section analyses the biblical references to the sinful woman and tax collector as an illustration to the meeting of the Bible, liturgy and ethics.

### 1. BIBLE AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS IN CATHOLIC MORAL TRADITION

Though Vatican II called for an ethical engagement rooted in the Bible (*DV 24, OT 16*), comparatively less attention has been paid to this invitation in the Catholic moral tradition. The Catholic moral tradition is still pursuing natural law or personalistic argumentations. Human reason



is a primary factor in these kinds of ethics at the risk of discarding the faith context (Verstraeten 1997, 138). Alternative ethical methods seek for an interaction between faith and reason (Gula 1989, 46-47). If we admit the role of reason and faith context in ethics, then we have to turn towards the Bible as a source for ethics. Auspiciously, the history of moral theology reveals that significant ground work has been done in the fields of moral theology and Biblical studies which, if explored properly, can be a solid foundation for a coherent relationship between the two (Harrington & Keenan 2002, 1). What kind of relationship, then, is possible between the Bible and theological ethics?

### 1.1. CASE FOR AN INDIRECT RELATIONSHIP

Obviously, basing ethical thought on the Bible is difficult and limited due to the complex nature of the Bible and its historical and cultural distance from the present time. According to Tom Deidun, those who easily applaud the use of the Bible for ethical engagement are those who fail to understand these complexities (Deidun 1998, 3). This observation is partly true when we concentrate on the complications related to the bridging. First of all, the biblical ethical norms cannot be directly applied to contemporary ethical issues. The appeal is difficult because there is a disparity between the biblical ethics and Christian ethics (Curran 1984, 178).

The limitation arises when the historicity of the Biblical narratives is taken into consideration. The historicity approach is attached to two resultant assumptions: the first is that the Bible as a historical document is not a unity and the second is that using the Bible for ethics today means abstracting ethical laws or principles from the Bible. This disposition towards the Bible and ethics assumes truth as objectively verifiable. This approach connects the Bible exclusively to its context of formation and hence downplays the applicability of the norms to another historical context. Here the use of the Bible for ethics is restricted to the integration of direct moral commandments or prescriptions into ethics (Deidun 1998, 8). Is the direct appealing to the Bible for ethics the only way to establish a bond between the two? According to Ricoeur, the use of the Bible in ethics, understood as the application of direct moral commandments and prescriptions, is concerned only with the “what” questions. The focus on the “what” questions of

ethics fails to grasp the unifying principle which makes the action-chains into higher-order practical units (Ricoeur 1992, 57). Consequently this approach proffers a very little space for an interaction between the Bible and ethics.

On the contrary, when focus is on the narrative unity of the Bible, we are endowed with better opportunities to integrate Bible and ethics. According to Ricoeur, the God reference in the Bible gives unity to narratives in the Bible. (Ricoeur 1991, 97-98). Moreover, for Ricoeur, the Bible is not a diversity of literary genres to be interpreted fragmentarily. But the Bible as a whole as “poetics” refers to truth in the form of manifestation; not in the form of scientific objectivity. To make it clear, truth can be measured not in terms of verification or falsification but as manifestation (Ricoeur 1977, 3). This approach offers a different kind of interaction with the Bible. As “poetics,” the Bible reveals a world of meaning rather than giving certain moral imperatives or prescriptions. This potential meaning brought by the naming of God invites the reader to discover a world in which God, the referent of that world, is encountered. This encounter with God in his abundant grace leads the reader to interpret his/her world in a new light. This approach to the Bible does not yield new moral norms, rather, puts the common morality in a new and particular perspective (Thomasset 1995, 459). Here the quest is changed from the question “what?” to the question “who?” (Ricoeur 1992, 59), i.e., the identity of the moral subject comes to the fore. Who is reading the text(s) and what happens to the reader? The encounter with the referent of the text(s) transforms the being of the reader. This change in the being determines the doing of the readers and hence the relationship between the Bible and ethics becomes an indirect one. As we have seen, the relationship does not provide the moral agent with direct moral norms to be conformed in his/her actions. Conversely, this relationship offers new ways of being and thereby influencing the decision-making and actions of a person. The acts are judged within the framework of the question “who I am?” In other words, this kind of connection with the text(s) provides human reason with a proper context to function, i.e., faith context. In short, the interaction with the text(s) leads to the constitution of the identity and character of the reader.



## 1.2. TRANSFORMATION OF THE IDENTITY

Identity is the conscious dimension of character and hence transformation of identity directly refers to transformation of character. When the Bible is viewed as to be potential enough to transform the identity of moral agents, it touches the vital aspect of moral psychology. Since identity is the “deliberate core of personal experience and is shaped by one’s most basic commitments and convictions” (Spohn 1999, 24) transformation of identity refers to the transformation of one’s basic convictions and commitments. Likewise, the dynamic and relational dimensions of identity also are important. The identity is dynamic. Ricoeur identifies two parts of the “self:” *idem* refers to the permanent components of the “self” and *ipse* refers to the dynamic, shifting and evolving aspects of the “self.” (Ricoeur 1992, 118) *Ipse* is in interaction with others. The Bible not only provides an answer to the question about identity, rather it provides the opportunity to have interaction with the world of the text(s) as an alterity. Consequently, the moral agent interacts with the text(s) as an alterity which proffers new possibilities of being and meaning. A moral agent as a person as interpreted “self” is a distillation and an imaginative elaboration of the literature that he or she has experienced (Verstraeten 1997, 142). The Bible, hence, provides the moral agents with a narrative identity.

Moreover, this identity is neither an isolated entity nor individualistic. The relational aspect of identity changes the question “who I am?” to “to whom I belong?” and this relational dimension of identity is very central to the Bible (Spohn 1999, 24). The answer to the question “to whom I belong?” is provided in the Bible that the identity is communitarian. The “self” and its story are embedded in the story of others. The other people are part of the story of the “self.” The self finds the coherence of its story in the story of others. This embeddedness points to a community. The others are constitutive of one’s identity (Daughton 2011, 264). However, when the other is made as part of one’s own identity the possibility of objectifying the other becomes immanent. (Daughton 2011, 265). Nonetheless, in light of Biblical narrative, we can interpret this relatedness as the sharing of the same narrative. The “self” shares the narrative

with others and this sharing brings us together as a community. The community which shares the same narrative is the church. Consequently, the church becomes the pivotal place for justifying the relatedness of the self-identity with others. In the context of the activity of the church, the narrative common to self-identity and others achieves authority. It is in the activity of the church that the common narrative addresses the shares of the same narrative as a community. It is in liturgy that the very nature of the church is manifested (SC 2). Church is the community of the participants of the same narrative and liturgy is the context of hearing/listening to the narratives. This view is founded on the close relationship between church and liturgy. “Liturgy is the verb form of “Church” and “Church” is the noun form of liturgy” (Fagerberg 2013, 1). The realities of church and liturgy are the same. There is no church without liturgy and no liturgy without the Church. Consequently, the liturgical context where the narrative is retold, adds a new dimension to the ethical implication of the narrative.

## 1.3. BIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF LITURGY

The narratives of the Bible are witnesses to what has happened. In liturgy the same things happen again. Consequently, in the context of liturgy the questions “what happened?” becomes more central. The Bible narrates the paschal mystery and the question what happened as a result of that paschal mystery to the world and to us. Since in liturgy what happened to Jesus happens to the participants, our identities become Christ’s in liturgy. Accordingly, liturgy becomes the context which provides the Biblical narratives with a proper context to constitute the identity of the moral agents; it is in liturgy that the identity is constituted. More evidently, in liturgy, the referent of the Biblical narratives, i.e., God (Ricoeur 1991, 97-98) is present to accomplish the act of constituting the identity. Liturgy is a “means of action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals.” They become the body of Christ (Fagerberg 1992, 289). In the context of “identity-constitutive liturgy” the transforming nature of the Bible gains more meaning. As the body of Christ, the community searches for patterns for action in the acts of Jesus. These patterns of actions are given in the Bible. The liturgical context helps to grasp the ethical meaning of these patterns. The meaning of a particular Biblical narrative is revealed in



a particular liturgical context. The liturgical context where the Biblical narrative is read/referred/alluded brings new meaning to it. The ethical implication of a particular liturgical context where a particular biblical narrative occurs, helps the community to find out the ethical impacts of that narrative in their moral living. As an illustration to this point, in the next section we try to draw out the ethical implications of the biblical allusions in the rite of reconciliation, *Subukono*, in the Syro-Malankara Church.

## 2. USE OF THE BIBLE IN *SUBUKONO*

*Subukono* is a reconciliation rite which initiates the great lent in Syro-Malankara Church. The ceremony starts after the noon prayer of the first day of the great lent. The community, gathered for the noon prayer, performs an act of reconciliation. After formal prayers, the priest begs pardon from the community and the priest and community beg pardon from God and the community share the kiss of peace as an expression of reconciliation. Experiencing forgiveness and reconciliation is part of the immediate preparation for a life closer to paschal mysteries. The context of preparation for taking part in the paschal mysteries through lent gives new dimensions to the ethical meaning of biblical references/allusions used in this rite.

The Bible is used extensively in the Rite of Reconciliation both directly and indirectly. There are direct readings of some of the Bible passages and also the Bible is used in prayers and songs. Certain biblical references are used as prayers and biblical figures are referred to as models. Accordingly, there are three direct readings from the Bible in *Subukono*, namely, 1Jn 4:11-21, 1Cor 13:4-10 and Mt 18:18-35 (The Synodal Commission for Liturgy 2008, 125). The first reading is from 1 Jn 4:1-10 which speaks of love of God and the second reading is from 1Cor 13:4-10 which defines what true love is. Then the last but the most important reading is from the Gospel according to Matthew 18: 18-35, which is about forgiveness. The message of the gospel reading is introduced in the song which follows *Sedro*. The same message is repeated in the gospel reading.

There are certain Biblical references which occur mainly in the form of prayers or songs. Accordingly, Lk 1:26-28, 39-44; Lk 2:10; Mt 28: 9,10; and Jn 14:27 are referred to as

prayer and Lk 7: 36-50; Lk 18:9-14; Jn 10:17-18; Jn 20:20; Gn 18: 1-10; Rom 8:31-39; Ex 3:1-10; 2kg 2:11; Mt 20:1-16; and Ps 32:1 are referred to as part of songs. At the outset all these references are related to the theme of the rite, namely forgiveness and reconciliation. These references are used to highlight forgiveness and reconciliation or as plea for the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. In a general way all are directly related to forgiveness and reconciliation, as gift and task. Consequently, in the service of *Subukono*, these bible references get a new significance in relation to forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence to find out the ethical meaning of the biblical reference/allusion, we have to make the ethical implications of forgiveness and reconciliation clear.

### 2.1. THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION ACCORDING TO *SUBUKONO*

The prayers and liturgical actions in *Subukono* contain many dimensions of forgiveness and reconciliation. The forgiveness and reconciliation in the rite of *Subukono* reveals a horizontal and vertical dimension. In its horizontal dimension forgiveness and reconciliation are the gift of God to human beings in the person of Jesus Christ (The Synodal Commission for Liturgy 117,118, 119,120). In its vertical dimension forgiveness and reconciliation are a task of human beings. Those who enjoy forgiveness and reconciliation from God are called to share the same among themselves. What does it mean to forgive and to reconcile? Are these spiritual experiences achieved through the rite of reconciliation? As a gift, forgiveness and reconciliation are invitations to enter into the divine realm because through forgiveness and reconciliation God calls us to have interpersonal relationship with him through his Son Jesus Christ. In other words, forgiveness and reconciliation are not mere spiritual gifts of God, rather through forgiveness and reconciliation God calls the human beings to have participation in his life, to have a love-relationship with God. Human beings are given a new membership in God's family. This aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation, certainly, is eschatological (Geldhof 2012, 10). However, this eschatological dimension does not eradicate the ethical impacts of forgiveness and reconciliation. The gift dimension of forgiveness and reconciliation calls for the sharing of the same among human beings. To forgive and reconcile, hence, points to an intense and boundless love



relationship among human beings. God is the union of the whole creation, all nations and directions (The Synodal Commission for Liturgy 2008, 110). Consequently, human beings are also called to be in union with the whole creation; called not only to live in peaceful co-existence with all people and nations but also with the whole creation. Briefly, they are called to share unconditional love of God with other people, nations and creation as a whole.

Furthermore, the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation are framed within the love of God, expressed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the major message of the rite is that all are invited to participate in the love of God as is revealed in Jesus Christ. This participation in the love of God has multifaceted ethical dimensions. Therefore, the ways by which Jesus' love is shared with human beings is model for our lives. Together with many other dimensions, this love is conveyed through his attitudes and approaches to human beings in many ways. In the rite of *Subukono* there are considerable number of allusions to biblical events which reveals Jesus' attitude and approach towards human beings which have ethical bearing on our lives. The allusion to the sinful woman and tax collector is an explicit illustration.

## 2.2. SINFUL WOMAN AND TAX COLLECTOR

The sinful woman and the tax collector are referred in the *eniono* prayer, prayer in the form of response, which follows the introductory prayer (The Synodal Commission for Liturgy, 2008, 117). In this song the worshippers beseech for forgiveness of sins and in this context the sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50) and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14) are referred to as models for repentance. In normal understanding they symbolise true repentance and humility (e.g., the recurring references to the sinful women and the tax collector in the liturgy of the hour. Chempothinal (trs) 2004, 65-66; 69; 219). The reference to sinful woman and the tax collector, hence, reminds the community to pray with repentance and humility so that their sins may be washed away and they may find justification before God. If the sinful woman and the tax collector are models of repentance and humility, forgiveness and reconciliation are nothing other than forgiveness of personal sins and restoration of relationship with God. But, as we have discussed above, forgiveness and reconciliation in *Subukono* implies more than remission of sins and restoration of personal relationship with God. Can,

then, the allusion to the sinful woman and the tax collector has another meaning than a spiritual one? Certainly, the allusion to the sinful woman and the tax collector in the rite of *Subukono* brings in a platform to make an ethical interpretation. Two orientations are evident here. We can either expose how the encounter with Jesus has changed the life of them with consequences in their ethical living. Or focus on Jesus' attitude and approach to them as a pattern for our ethical dispositions and behaviour. We concentrate on Jesus and his behaviour. An exploration of the social context of the sinful woman and the tax collector is necessary to cast light on Jesus' approach.

### 2.2.1. SOCIAL CONTEXT: HONOUR AND SHAME

Once we recognise the social context of the sinful woman and the tax collector, we are better prepared to draw out the ethical dimensions of their stories. The social setting of these two biblical characters is the ancient Mediterranean world. Sociological studies of the New Testament time inform us that during this time the social life was very much controlled by the honour and shame construct. Honour was the core value of ancient Mediterranean world. While honour was one's reputation in the eyes of the public, shame was one's disgrace before the society. For the people of this time honour was dear as life itself. One's honour status played a great role in determining one's behaviour, interaction with others, manner of dressing, eating, marriage and even what happened at the time of death. Moreover, ones' public right, speech, friends, associates and even the guests whom one can invite, are all determined by the social honour one possessed (Rohrbaugh 2010, 109). The honour status determined "where one fit on the social scale of the community" (Rohrbaugh 2010, 111). Honour is of two kinds: 1. ascribed honour - which is ascribed to one by birth, family ties, or endowment by persons who have power, and 2. acquired honour - which is acquired by one's effort (Malina & Neyrey 1991, 28).

No doubt, the sinful woman and the tax collector are people who lack honour in the society. In a society which values honour very high, people like prostitutes, innkeepers, sailors and tax collectors were considered to be shameless people. These people are not bothered about their honour in the community. They are the people who disrespected the order of the society and thus transgressed the honour system of



the community (Rohrbaugh 2010, 113). During the time of Jesus, tax collectors were notorious as corrupt and untrustworthy in their demands and they even cannot give witness in a trial; they were despised people (Kilgallen 2008, 152). Furthermore, they are persons who are unable to find other jobs and hence they work under chief tax collectors. These employees of the chief tax collectors used to cheat and extort to make profit out of their work (Kilgallen 2008, 152).

The sinful woman also lacked honour since the sexual honour of a woman was very important in those days. Female honour was more serious than male honour. Female honour cannot be retrieved when lost. Female honour is the “emotional-counterpart of virginity.” In addition, the female who lacks honour brings shame to her family and associates (Rohrbaugh 2010, 112). The woman in Lk 7: 36-50 is not called as prostitute or there is no hint to her sexual aberration (Marshall 1978, 304). However, the label “sinner” points to the fact that she has no honourable position in her community. Evidently, the sinful woman and tax collector are people who are ranked very low in their community.

## **2.2.2. JESUS’ RESPONSE AS OUR PATTERN OF ACTION**

Liturgy is the act in which the participant’s identity is transformed. In liturgy, the moral subject is transformed into the body of Christ. In liturgy the being of the moral agent is transformed to the being of Jesus Christ and hence the moral agent is called to act as Jesus acted in his earthly life. Consequently, from an ethical perspective, what is more important is the attitude and behaviour of Jesus towards these people than the behaviour of these people before Jesus or their life after the encounter with Jesus. Jesus’ response to these people provides us with patterns for action in our context.

### **2.2.2.1. JESUS’ APPROACH TO THE SINFUL WOMAN AND THE TAX COLLECTOR**

The tax collector mentioned in Lk 18: 9-14 is not a real person whom Jesus meets in his life. He is a character in a parable which Jesus told the crowd. As obvious from the text, this parable is told to draw the contrast between the attitudes of the Pharisee and the tax collector and to point out the disposition of the tax collector as justified by God.

Moreover, this parable highlights the distance between the two in the temple as well as in social life. In the temple the Pharisee stands closer to the Holy of Holies as a person who is separated for a holy life and prays to God directly. The tax collector, recognising his sinfulness stands far away from the temple area and prays without raising his head to God (Kilgallen 2008, 150). This distance reveals the distance in their social status as well as their distance from each other in the temple. The parable states clearly that Jesus appreciates the tax collector and not the Pharisee. Jesus’ appreciation is not only for his prayer with humble heart. Rather it is an acceptance of the tax collector as a person with his humility on the one hand and his low social status on the other hand. As a person who lacks social honour the tax collector cannot raise his head towards those who have honour (here God) and claim their friendship or acquaintance. But by recognising his humility and prayer, Jesus proclaims himself as the friend of the tax collector and honours him. This is evident from the complaint against Jesus in the gospel according to Luke that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 5: 30). Coming to the position of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple, the temple in the gospel according to Luke is a place of conflict (e.g., Lk 2:41-50; 19:45-47), and Jesus prophesies about the destruction of it (Lk 21:6). The temple is replaced by a new Christian house which would be a place of salvation. This surrogate family, the Christian group, is the locus of the good news. This family transcends the normal categories of birth, race, gender, education wealth and power and is inclusive (Rohrbaugh 2010, 382). In this household the criteria of honour and shame will be different from that in the society in which the temple was an integral part. This family provides the one who are entering with a claim to honour in a very special way. In this family one is claimed by God and hence shares His glory.

The sinful woman is a character in the narration of Luke in 7:36-50. She is also a woman who lost her honour and is labelled by her society as “sinner.” The Pharisees are shocked by her coming to his house and touching Jesus. The Pharisees have considered Jesus as his equal and that is why he invited Jesus for a meal. But when the sinful woman touches Jesus and makes him unclean, this uncleanliness of Jesus questions the status of the Pharisees because one’s social status is highly determined by the guests one invites to one’s home (Rohrbaugh 2010, 109). As a result, from the



point of view of the Pharisees and Jews gathered there, Jesus loses his honour by accepting the sinful woman and thereby the host of Jesus is ashamed. But what happened is the contrary. Jesus' acceptance of the sinful woman raises her status and she becomes equal in status to Jesus who defends her honour. Normally, the honour of a female is defended by her brother, father or husband. For the older married woman, it is her son (Rohrbaugh 2010, 113). Jesus defends her honour and thus he proclaims himself as a close family member, even brother(s), father, son or husband of her. She is regained to the new family of Jesus and she is honoured there. This is also clear from the analogy used for the forgiveness of sins. This analogy is drawn from the peasant life. In a peasant's life debt to someone means a loss of land, livelihood and family. Those who are indebted are unable to defend their social position. Forgiveness of the debt, thus, becomes the restoration of land, life family and social status. This restoration is a new opportunity to live because by this forgiveness of sins (debts) one regains one's social position. In an honour shame constructed society public accusation had the power to destroy the life of the people and forgiveness had the power of giving the life back. When God forgives one, he is liberating one from all the fears and takes one as his own (Rohrbaugh 2010, 303-304). Honour, here is ascribed to the persons without their effort or achievement. The honour given by God is gracious gift (Neyrey 1991, 28; Plummer 1922, 209). In the case of the sinful woman and the tax collector, honour is thus ascribed to them by God through Jesus. The powerful not only can ascribe honour to others but also can enforce the acknowledgement of the same (Rohrbaugh 2010, 303-304). Consequently, the honour ascribed by Jesus becomes unquestionable because it is God in Jesus that ascribes honour to them.

The honour which Jesus ascribes to the sinful woman and the tax collector can also be interpreted as acquired honour. Honour is acquired by someone by riposting the challenge by others. In the pattern of challenge riposte, one is challenged about one's honour and one has to riposte to claim it. In the case of the sinful woman, she is challenged by the Pharisee who said to himself, "if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him - that she is a sinner (Lk 7:39)." In a sense he is challenging both Jesus (his prophethood) and the woman. Normally it is the one who is

challenged who has to riposte. But in the case of the woman, she is silent and Jesus ripostes for her. In the case of the tax collector the challenge is of a different manner. The Pharisee contrasts himself with the tax collector and thinks of himself as high. Here also the tax collector is silent and Jesus justifies his action. There is a further assertion of the tax collector's justification by a proverb (Lk 18:14) which points to a different reading of honour and shame. The honour acquired on behalf of the sinful woman and tax collector by Jesus also is unquestionable because it is God who defends through Jesus.

#### 2.2.2.2. JESUS AS THE PATTERN FOR OUR ACTION

The act of Jesus provides us with paradigms which invite us for imaginative engagement and moral discernment. Our actions should conform to, correspond to or embody aspects of Jesus' actions (Spohn 1995, 99). The paradigm is given in the original and this paradigm gives certain patterns for dispositions and actions in new situations. The original is not a determining archetype to be copied as such and hence there is a need for creative and faithful appropriation (Spohn 1995, 100). Accordingly, Jesus' disposition to the sinful woman and the tax collector cannot be replicated by us in our situations. The social context of Jesus' time and ours is different in many respects. However, there are certain similarities we can identify which help us to model our dispositions and actions corresponding to the disposition and action of Jesus in those similar situations.

At the outset, we saw a society which excludes some of its members as "sinful" and "tax collectors." The woman in LK 7:36-50 is called a "sinner." Luke does not call her "prostitute," and hence the "sinner" in Luke 7:37 may not point to the sin of prostitution (Marshall 1978, 304; Bock 1994, 690). It is not clear for what kind of sin she is accused of. Nonetheless, what is noteworthy from the ethical perspective is that the woman is labelled as a sinner and on that reason, she has been excluded from the mainstream society. The attitude of the Pharisee which is in contrast to that of Jesus (Bock 1994, 689), manifests the exclusive attitude of the society. Moreover, she may not be the one of such kind. She may be the representative of a group of people who have been marginalised, who are accused as "sinners" and unclean and to whom no one of honour would



like to have friendship or collaboration. The same is true of the tax collector. He represents a group of people who are accused as cheaters and extorters.

We can see a similar situation in our society too. There are people in contemporary society who are looked down upon for many reasons. They are not active in public life of the society. They have no position of honour in the society. No one accepts them as friends or view them as precious and worth having company with. In a broader sense, our society also keeps an attitude of exclusion towards many people. Though in our society they are not labelled as “sinners” and “tax collectors,” we have similar labels to be attached to certain people stick to people of certain kinds. This situation makes the society of Jesus and ours similar. This similarity calls for similar response as that of Jesus. Jesus, as is evident from the foregoing discussion, becomes the voice of the voiceless. He loses himself to win them. He is critiquing the society by his corrective action.

## CONCLUSION

The Bible in the context of the liturgy invites us to engage with its world of potential meaning and way of acting. It is in the context of the transformation of the identity of the moral subject that the Bible and liturgy are linked. Since liturgy is the context where the Biblical narratives re-happen and transformative encounter takes place between the referent of the Bible, God, and the reader, the use of the Bible in liturgy contains ethical implications. The reader is transformed into the body of Christ in liturgy thereby being enabled to act as Jesus acted in his life. Jesus’ dispositions and actions provide the moral agent with patterns for disposition and action. Accordingly, against the background of the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation as conveyed by the rite of reconciliation in the Syro-Malankara Church, Jesus’ attitude towards the sinners and tax collectors function as prototype for action in the contemporary context, a social context where there exist similar situations of labelling some of its members with stigmas of exclusion and alienation. In such contexts, we are called to act in ways corresponding to the acts of Jesus towards these excluded people.

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