

**REVISITING THEOLOGY: A HERMENEUTICAL
STUDY OF CHRISTOLOGICAL THEMES IN
SELECTED FICTION**

*Thesis
submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy
in
English Language and Literature**

SONY AUGUSTINE

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DECLARATION

I, **Sony Augustine**, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Revisiting Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of Christological Themes in Selected Fiction**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature**, is a bona fide work done by me under the guidance of **Dr M.V. Narayanan**, Professor, Department of English, University of Calicut, and that I have not submitted it or any part of it for any degree, diploma or title before.

Sony Augustine
Department of English
University of Calicut

University of Calicut
05.08.2019

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Revisiting Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of Christological Themes in Selected Fiction**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature**, is a bona fide work carried out by **Sony Augustine**, under my guidance and supervision. Neither the dissertation nor any part of it has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or title before.

Dr M.V. Narayanan
Professor
Department of English
University of Calicut

University of Calicut
05.08.2019

Countersigned by

Head of the Department

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Introduction

Postmodern fiction manifests, in its selection and treatment of subject matter, a host of divergent features which clearly differentiate it from prior fictional practices. Many aspects neglected by traditional authors have been assigned special importance in the works of postmodern writers. One such area that has emerged in a significant way has been that of theology which in earlier times had been confined primarily to religious narratives or treated principally in tune with official versions. Thanks to poststructuralist approaches and deconstructive practices, many theological texts including the scriptures have been re-read and re-analysed and several theological concepts have come to be adopted/adapted and given alternative representations in fiction. Though this practice of creative revision can be observed in the writings of all ages, it was with the second half of the twentieth century that the tradition came to acquire power and dimensions hitherto unknown.

These attempts at revision were, however, not without impediments. The reconsideration and iconoclastic treatment of theological themes in fiction stirred up certain problems. There was strong antagonism on the part of conservative religious circles since these concepts involved the faith and creed of the Church (the study focuses mainly on the precepts of the Catholic Church), maintained diligently for centuries, and consequently attributed an aura of holiness. As a result, conservative circles argued for the inalterability and authenticity of meaning provided by religious hierarchy. Even where there was obvious possibility of multiple versions and interpretations, as in the instance of the different gospels and the inconsistencies

among them, the official version invariably had been assigned the value of absolute truth. This absolutism of scriptural interpretation leads to the establishment of a monopoly over meaning which is essentially related to the maintenance of power. Historically, there exists a strong nexus between control over scriptural meaning and the hold over reins of power, both religious and political. It is the realisation of this possibility of power which inspires religious authorities to insist upon 'divine authorisation' claimed by them as the custodians and interpreters of the scripture and theological dogmas. The immediate effect is the condemnation of all those texts of fiction that are revisions of theology as ultimately inauthentic and therefore invalid. It is against this backdrop of institutional claims to absolute meaning raised by religious centres of power that postmodern revisions of theological texts have to be read and situated.

Hermeneutics, as the science of interpretation, possesses a long tradition as a tool in the explication of the inherent meaning of the Bible. From the very inception of the formative periods of the 'sacred text,' hermeneutics was involved in the act of bringing out the hidden meaning of scriptural passages which may best be termed exegesis. Coming to medieval ages, however, considerable change in the orientation of hermeneutics becomes apparent so much so that the primary concern here is to articulate proper principles or rules for biblical interpretation, including the fourfold meaning of scripture, a scheme that allows a text to be understood in at least four senses: literal, allegorical, moral and heavenly (spiritual). Hermeneutics underwent a paradigm shift when, in the Romantic tradition, it began to function as a secular method to understand all creative works. In the modern age, however, hermeneutics

has been developed into a systematic theory by such thinkers as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and others. Hermeneutics, at this juncture, addresses such problems as: What is the meaning of a literary text? What is the role of the author's intention in formulating this meaning? Can there be an 'objective' understanding? These and the related questions raised by hermeneutics partially paved the way for the flowering of various modern literary critical theories.

Another phenomenon which needs special consideration is the modern interpretations of sacred texts which seem to draw inspiration from the original impulses of hermeneutics. The practice of rewriting or revising established earlier works is being taken into consideration somewhat seriously in relation to many recent literary theories, modern hermeneutics being the most important among them. It is, of course, undeniable that the practice of revising older texts is a very old one. While in India epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata have undergone repeated revisions, in the West, several instances of the Bible being revised and adapted throughout the centuries can be observed. At the same time, though revisions have existed always, new theories and practices, informed by hermeneutic principles have made them much more numerous and radical. Since these revisions can be taken as part of the critical endeavour to decipher the different layers of meaning in the original text, it is the application of hermeneutic principles, both biblical and general, that will be of utmost help in analysing them.

The present study sets as its objective the hermeneutical analysis of selected works of fiction, which revisit Christian theology, especially Christology. A major

part of the work will be the detailed analysis of literary works of fiction which present reinterpretations of the scripture already manifested in and through various theological dogmas. In this regard, a close reading of *The Last Temptation of Christ* by Nikos Kazantzakis and *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* by Jose Saramago will be attempted with the aim of unravelling their fictional endeavours to dismantle the claims of a univocal theology and thereby, problematizing the whole question of meaning and understanding. A parallel concern of the work will be the enquiry as to how popular fiction approaches theology in the background of hermeneutic principles. Works such as *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, *Testament* by Nino Ricci, *The Gospel According to the Son* by Norman Mailer and *The Gospel of Judas* by Simon Mawer will be analysed in the light of hermeneutics in order to explicate the reinterpretation strategies employed by them and their social and ideological motivations. The present study will also touch upon the trajectory of hermeneutics and will attempt an analysis of how various hermeneutical practices have culminated in poststructural/postmodern theories of interpretation and how they have inspired the fictional revisions of Christology.

Hermeneutics, though brought to the limelight only recently, is an area where considerable work has taken place. Jeffrey F. Keuss' *The Sacred and the Profane: Contemporary Demands on Hermeneutics*, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer's *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* are some of the important works which attempt to place biblical hermeneutics in the philosophical domain. Many works are there which deal elaborately with both scriptural and general hermeneutics. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern*

Theology edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, comprises various writings on theology analysing it from both traditional and postmodern standpoints. Jon Sobrino, in his *Christology at the Cross Roads*, takes up the challenge to review the theological themes related to the Christological frame work and to place Christology at the backdrop of modern philosophical theories.

A good number of critical works have already come out with reflections on the salient features of the fictional and nonfictional works of Nikos Kazantzakis. *Scandalizing Jesus?: Kazantzakis's The Last Temptation of Christ Fifty Years On* edited by Darren J.N. Middleton makes a detailed study of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Peter Bien, in a scholarly article "Kazantzakis's Nietzscheanism," explains the philosophical influence Nietzsche exerted on the philosophical vision Kazantzakis manifested. There are also scholarly works like "The Dual Masks of Nikos Kazantzakis" by Adèle Bloch, "The Vision of the Negro in the Kazantzakian Universe" authored by Arthur C. Banks and Finley C. Campbell, and "Kazantzakis and Bergson: Metaphysic Aestheticians" by Andreas K. Poulakidas. These and similar works analyze the man Kazantzakis and the various aspects of his fictional sensibilities.

Saramago's works too have gained considerable critical attention in recent years. David G. Frier has written an article entitled "José Saramago's *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*: Outline of a Newer Testament," which makes a critical reading of the novel. Helena Kaufman, in "Evangelical Truths: José Saramago on the Life of Christ" takes up the influence of gospels in the novels dealing with Jesus' life. The research article "Introduction: Incarnations of Christ in Twentieth-Century

Fiction” by Andrew Hock Soon Ng serves as a guide to the literature which takes into account the image of Christ.

The popular fiction regarding the life of Jesus too has also received considerable critical attention. The book *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries behind the Da Vinci Code* edited by Dan Burstein is a scholarly investigation into the various historical and philosophical ideas connected with Dan Brown’s novel. Wallis Wilde-Menozzi makes a thorough study of Nino Ricci’s novel *Testament* in her review article “Testament by Nino Ricci.” *Norman Mailer’s Later Fictions: Ancient Evenings through Castle in the Forest*. Edited by John Whalen-Bridge, and “The Gospel According to the Son and Christian Belief” by Jeffrey F. L. Partridge contribute to the scholarship on Norman Mailer and his works. Though critical attention has been limited, Simon Mawer’s *The Gospel of Judas*, has been examined in works like Marvin Meyer’s *Judas: The Definitive Collection of Gospels and Legends about the Infamous Apostle of Jesus*, and Simon Gathercole’s *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity*. The observations here point to the theological implications of the novel.

Though there have been a good number of critical studies of the authors and texts proposed for the present work from other theoretical and critical perspectives, a thorough survey reveals that a comprehensive critical work in the proposed area is conspicuously absent. Approaching the works in the light of hermeneutic principles, with structures of theology providing the backdrop, would define the primary difference between the present study and previous ones. The objective is to bring out

through such an engagement, a dialogue and negotiation between the interpretative structures of both theology and literature.

The research comprises three major areas of study. In the first place, it deals elaborately with Christian theology. Considerable attention will be given to critically examine the long biblical as well as theological tradition and the various theories and methods employed to comprehend them. The next area of interest is the theory of hermeneutics. It is necessary to analyze the history of biblical hermeneutics in juxtaposition with general hermeneutics, giving due attention to theories of epistemology, culture, linguistics, etc. Finally, the selected works will be subjected to close scrutiny to discover how far they conform to and conflict with the principles of general and religious hermeneutics. Needless to say, the wide range of possibilities and objectives in the analysis will necessitate the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach, taking recourse to a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches belonging to different fields of study.

Any analysis of the rewritings of fictional works in the light of hermeneutical principles necessitates a preliminary understanding of the trajectory of hermeneutic practices as they developed in history. The first chapter of the thesis is an exploration of the shift from biblical hermeneutics to the secular hermeneutics. This paradigm shift was crucial to the history of the rewritings of biblical texts, because this justifies the treatment and interpretation of biblical texts using hermeneutic principle applied to secular texts. The evolution and development of hermeneutics from the biblical interpretations of the champions of the church, like Origen, Saint Augustine etc. to postmodern hermeneutic orientations, provides the referential framework for the

present study. At the same time, this chapter is intended to be only a framework in order to situate the topic and to form a background to the issues to be discussed in the following chapters.

The second chapter is a critical analysis of the theoretical standpoints regarding the Bible. The basic features of the bible as a literary text have been subjected to analysis in order to find out how meaning is generated in a religious text. The search for factors that contribute to the hermeneutics of the Bible cannot proceed without the study of different critical methods employed by biblical theologians. Various methods such as textual criticism, redaction criticism, source criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, historical criticism, and canonical criticism employed in biblical studies, give substance to modern revisitations of religious texts in the same manner that secular texts are dealt with. One of the significant questions regarding biblical hermeneutics is that of authorship, which deals with a tension between divine and human authorship. The question of authorship extends to that of inspiration and inerrancy. One of the crucial issues with far reaching consequences is the claim of the church over the infallibility of the Bible which calls for special attention. The status of the Apocrypha and the question of canon formation need to be critically addressed so that one may extract the politics behind the formation of the Bible. Finally, the synoptic problem is taken up to explain how biblical narratives themselves are pluralistic, a concept focal to the development of the argument forwarded in this study.

Analysis of Christological themes in fiction necessitates a basic understanding of the function and operative structures of theology in general. Its

relation to philosophy needs further investigations as theology makes use of reasoning to be one of the key means to arrive at conclusions. The shift from traditional theology to postmodern theology, with consequent changes in approach, deserves emphasis. A study on Christology cannot be conducted without preliminary knowledge of the various theological themes that explicitly or implicitly inform various biblical and theological issues. Diverse branches of theology like Mariology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology have been invoked in this chapter.

The fourth and fifth chapters are in-depth studies of theological themes which Saramgo and Kazantzakis critically engage with in their novels. The selected novels are analysed to find out how Christological themes are incorporated and critiqued. The various hermeneutical strategies employed by the authors to rewrite the life of Jesus are evaluated here. Through a close reading, the rationale behind the various possibilities for a new way of doing theology in and through literary fiction, and vice versa, is established.

The final chapter attempts to draw out the ways in which popular fictional practices revisit biblical accounts about Jesus, in the light of four novels by different authors. A common feature of all those works, with the exception of Norman Mailer, is that they set the entire story in the new social and political milieu, while making their interpretations of the precepts of the church. This chapter consolidates the strands of analysis, to provide footing for the concluding observations of the present study. Diverse reasons for justifying the hermeneutical stance taken by the novelists, selected for this study, are defined.

The interest in religious themes, especially those dealing with theological content, has been gaining a new eminence in contemporary literary circles. Even in the past, writers had been interested in topics related to religion. However, the focus had been more on the institutionalization and the consequent degeneration of religions. The difference today is the emphasis and improved interest in the theological aspects of these religious beliefs and practices. Hence literature is more concerned with theological themes to the emergence of what could be termed as Theo-Literature (a term, I hope, may do justice to the practice of writing and rewriting theology into literature). What I have attempted in this study is to address this process of theology being interpreted and reinterpreted through fictional practices. A substantial body of literary fiction seems to be emerging, which fruitfully engages with the religious sensibilities of readers. This engagement is likely to factor in the complexities of life and religious faith in our times, and engender a creative dialogue between this and the imaginative possibilities of literary fiction.

Chapter I

Interpreting Interpretations

No investigation into the meaning of the term hermeneutics can offer a simple and straightforward answer that is exhaustive in significations. According to Richard E. Palmer hermeneutics carried, traditionally, a duality of functions. It involves “the question of what is involved in the event of understanding a text, and the question of what understanding itself is, in its most foundational and ‘existential’ sense”

(Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer 10). Donna Teevan refers to this multidimensional nature of hermeneutics:

...the term hermeneutics refers to theories of interpretation. As some writers define it, hermeneutics includes the practice as well as the theory of interpretation. Most often in its history hermeneutics has referred to the interpretation of texts. But the term “hermeneutics” may also refer more sweepingly to the interpretation of meaning—whether it be the meaning of written texts, actions, or history itself.

(14)

An etymological enquiry into the meaning and significance of the term hermeneutics takes us to a more explicit understanding with regard to the nature and meaning of the entire hermeneutic process. Hermeneutics is a term whose origin can be traced back to the Greek verb ‘hermeneuein’ which means ‘to interpret’.

Hermeneutic tradition takes its origin from Greek mythology and therefore claims a sacred origin. It is derived from the name of Hermes, the messenger of gods, who

was assigned the role of communicating between the gods and human beings. The nature of Hermes' task is clearly explained by Kurt Mueller-Vollmer in his Introduction to *The Hermeneutic Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*:

In order to deliver the messages of gods, Hermes had to be conversant in their idiom as well as in that of the mortals for whom the message was destined. He had to understand and interpret for himself what the gods wanted to convey before he could proceed to translate, articulate, and explicate their intention to mortals. (1)

This leads to the recognition of understanding as a pre-requisite for the process of interpretation. It is this dual nature of the hermeneutic process which led to the flowering of hermeneutics in the modern and postmodern periods.

Hermeneutics is generally understood to mean exposition of the meaning of texts which, with reference to biblical understanding, is termed exegesis. But it is also conceived in a more comprehensive and broader sense as stated in the entry "hermeneutics" in the *Harper's Bible Dictionary*:

Often it is characterised as being primarily concerned with the theory of theories of interpretation, and in this respect it can be distinguished from exegesis, which may be thought of as the practical application of hermeneutical principles. As compared with exegesis, hermeneutics is more comprehensive in its scope as well as more theoretical in its orientation. (Holladay 384)

Hermeneutics has emerged more as a philosophical system concerned with principles of interpretation rather than as specific ways and methods of reading particular texts. This view is acknowledged by Paul Ricoeur in “The Task of Hermeneutics” where he defines that “hermeneutics is the theory of the operation of understanding of texts” (1). It is in this sense that the distinction between exegesis and hermeneutics can be validated. Daniel Patte clarifies that “exegesis aims at understanding the text in itself, while hermeneutics attempts to elucidate what the text means for the modern interpreter and the people of his culture. Exegesis and hermeneutics must be distinguished from each other despite the fact that the very foundation of exegesis is to lead to hermeneutics” (3). Patte is referring to another sense of difference where one is text-directed while the other is receiver-directed.

Further search for the meaning of hermeneutics leads one to the four dimensions of hermeneutics envisaged by Georges Casalis in his famous work *Correct Ideas Don't Fall from the Skies: Elements for an Inductive Theology*. For him, the first dimension is rendering what is divine and past into human and present. The second dimension considers hermeneutics as an attempt to translate that which was said ‘at that time’ into contemporary categories. It searches for equivalent expressions in one culture for what was given in an alien culture. The third dimension also involves recapturing of texts and their meanings from those who have monopolised them, as in the case of religious authorities who consider interpretation of religious texts their prerogative. Finally, hermeneutics entails revision of all ancient texts, especially religious ones, which would otherwise become dead or would retain only archeological value (61- 66). These shades of meaning attributed to

hermeneutics clearly assign it progressive and dynamic dimensions as against conservative and static traits.

Hermeneutics should not be regarded only as the discovery of the biblical exegetes or as the result of the recent theories in philosophy and theology. The relative beginnings of the theory of interpretation may be traced back to the Greek tradition of philosophy. Plato speaks of the understanding of intuitions in the religious realm. In Platonic philosophy, hermeneutical knowledge is contrasted with that of Sophia (A central concept in Greek philosophic tradition meaning wisdom. It is used with slight changes in nuance in other philosophical traditions). Religious knowledge is a knowledge of what has been revealed or said and does not, like Sophia, involve knowledge of the truth-value of the utterance. Aristotle carried this use of the term a step further, naming his work on logic and semantics *Peri hermeneias*, which was later rendered as *De interpretatione*. Werner G. Jeanrond encapsulates the Greek and Jewish attempts to develop some hermeneutical criteria:

Greek Philosophers attempted to understand the actual meaning of linguistic component of a text (grammatical method) and to appropriate this meaning within the wider spiritual framework of the time (allegorical method). Jewish scholars were concerned with the adequate interpretation of the directly legal parts of the Torah (Halacha), yet they also provided a more liberal explanation of the more narrative sections (Haggada). (462)

The Stoics, who tried to provide some valuable interpretations of myths, were concerned with a methodological awareness of the problems of textual

understanding. They, however, failed to develop a systematic theory of interpretation. Such a theory is only to be found in Philo of Alexandria, who, according to Werner G. Jeanrond, “united the Greek and Jewish hermeneutical traditions and developed the thesis that an interpretation should disclose the text’s spiritual sense on the basis of an explanation of the text’s literal sense” (462). Allegorical meaning anticipates the presence of the literal meaning of a text which conceals a deeper non-literal meaning that can only be uncovered through systematic interpretative work.

About hundred and fifty years later, Origen expounds on this view by claiming that the Scripture has three levels of meaning, corresponding to the triangle of body, soul, and spirit, each of which reflects a progressively more advanced stage of religious understanding. Confirming this, Frances Young enumerates five points which are repeated in standard literature:

1. Origen attributed “literal” interpretation to the Jews, and expected Christians to go beyond the mere letter to the spiritual meaning.
2. He believed that there were three levels of meaning in Scripture analogous to the body, soul and spirit; he developed this analogy from Philo’s dichotomous analogy of body and soul, and justified it on the basis of Prov. 22:20-21, “Describe these things in a threefold way.” These three senses were literal, moral, and spiritual. Simple believers might remain at the level of the letter, but the elite should progress to the higher levels.

3. Origen found “stumbling-blocks,” problems, impossibilities (*aporiai*) at the literal level in Scripture — indeed not every passage has a literal sense. These problems he thought were intended by the Holy Spirit in order to alert the reader to the need to look for the spiritual meaning.

4. Adopting the Jewish claim that every jot and tittle is significant, Origen encouraged often far-fetched allegorical explanations of details that have no obvious spiritual import.

5. Origen accepted without question the unity of the Bible and found it in the Holy Spirit’s *skopos* (aim) to impart the truth but to conceal it in a narrative dealing with the visible creation so that proper examination of these records would point to spiritual truths. (335)

St. Augustine remains one of the pioneers in the long tradition of hermeneutics with his spiritual and allegorical interpretations of the Bible using the categories of Plato’s philosophy. Under the entry “Hermeneutics” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Michael Inwood observes that “Augustine interpreted the Old Testament as allegory, using Neoplatonic concepts and recording the rise of the soul above the literal and the moral senses of the text to its spiritual sense” (161). Throughout the Middle Ages, the practice of biblical interpretation and exegetical practices retained allegorical interpretation as the authentic hermeneutic method.

This tradition of the allegorical interpretation of the scripture continued through the medieval period till the advent of Reformation. The significant

peculiarity of the development of hermeneutics of the time, which was confined to biblical exegesis and theological exposition of faith, was the authority of the church in regulating the hermeneutic process. Biblical interpretation was controlled by the norms of the church, in the sense that only those interpretations which the church authorities considered to be the traditional understanding of the scripture were accepted as valid. Thomas Aquinas and his followers tried to reinstate the importance of literal sense in reading the Bible. For him, the real interpretation is the right and the task of dogmatic theology. Here the role of exegesis is only to prepare the text for theological exposition (Jeanrond 462-463). This control over the interpretative task is officially declared by the church authorities in the Council of Trent in its decree on how scripture is to be interpreted:

Furthermore, to restrain irresponsible minds, it decrees that no one, relying on his own prudence, twist Holy Scripture in matters of faith and practice that pertain to the building up of Christian doctrine, according to his own mind, contrary to the meaning that holy mother the Church has held and holds- since it belongs to her to judge the true meaning and interpretation of Holy Scripture-and that no one dare to interpret the Scripture in a way contrary to the unanimous consensus of the Fathers, even though such interpretations not be intended for publication. (Dupuis 97-98)

It was not until the advent of Reformation that the absolute authority of the church over the interpretative meaning of the scripture was challenged. The protestant revolution gave a new direction to the hermeneutics of the Bible. Martin

Luther with his powerful slogan *Sola Scriptura* tried to obliterate the monopoly of the Church Magisterium over biblical interpretation. The need for individual reading and understanding of the scripture was emphasised, even when the scholastic interest on the theological understanding of the literal sense of the biblical texts were not given up. However, both Luther and Calvin did not altogether abandon typological and spiritual interpretation. Raymond E. Brown and Sandra M. Schneiders refer to the catholic and Protestant champions of the Reformation period and state that,

...there was a reaction against allegorizing and a stress on the historical background of the biblical works. However, we must not forget that while Luther attacked blatant allegorizing, he remained firmly convinced of the Christological character of the OT and, therefore, continued a typological exegesis that would be questioned by many today. Calvin was even less in favor of allegorizing than Luther; yet he too was often more than literal. (1155)

Though the Reformation could not contribute much to the theory and practice of hermeneutics, in the sense that it did not make any change in the scholastic importance to the literal sense in interpretation, it remained a great impetus in accelerating the popular interest in the reading and interpretation of biblical texts, liberated from the monopolizing claims of the church authority over the meaning of the scripture. What is to be noted at this stage of the development of hermeneutics as a systematic theory is the absence of a clearly demarcated boundary between general/secular hermeneutics and the biblical interpretation strategy, and hermeneutics was considered only as the handmaid of theology. Hermeneutics was

confined to various ecclesiastical institutions of theological study and research. This does not rule out the existence of a hermeneutic tradition that addressed secular texts. What is important here is that hermeneutics had no general principles which could guide the interpretation of those texts to be equal in importance with the religious texts.

However, renewed interest in the study of the scripture, together with the Enlightenment ideals, paved the way for a renewal in the developments in the field of hermeneutics and its areas of interest. The Enlightenment thinkers attributed utmost importance to human reason in the place of faith that prevailed through medieval and reformation period. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* refers to Enlightenment as “characterized by a rejection of superstition and mystery and an optimism concerning the power of human reason and scientific endeavor...The movement placed secular reason as the ultimate judge of all sorts of dogma or authority and attempted to overcome the control of the Catholic Church over human affairs” (Bunnin 210). Subsequently, hermeneutics dropped its garment of exegesis and put on a new mantle as a theory of interpretation itself. It implies mainly two changes: the first is that hermeneutics got secularised and religious texts were interpreted in the light of secular categories. The second change, more important than the first, is that secular texts also came to be included under its ambit, and thereby led to it being seen more as a general theory of interpretation.

It is through the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who is known as the father of modern hermeneutics, that a new philosophical foundation is laid to the theory of hermeneutics. The most important contribution of Schleiermacher to the

theory of hermeneutics is that he elevated its status from regional to a universal or general level. “Thanks to Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of modern hermeneutics, hermeneutics witnessed a Copernican revolution: from understanding a given text, hermeneutics shifted its focus to the understanding of understanding itself, thus leapfrogging from a variety of regional hermeneutics to a general hermeneutics” (Dorairaj 11). Hermeneutics, before Schleiermacher, had been confined to the interpretation of texts in various genres and different branches of knowledge. It was Schleiermacher who attempted and was successful in bringing together those regional hermeneutics like juridical hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics, and philological hermeneutics under the same umbrella of general hermeneutics. Gayle C. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift testify to this in their introduction to *The Hermeneutic Tradition from Ast to Ricoeur*: “Schleiermacher is credited with taking the first steps toward establishing a general hermeneutic methodology in contrast to a variety of regional hermeneutic approaches” (11).

One of the most important contributions of Schleiermacher is the paradigm shift he brought into the field of hermeneutics. Besides giving hermeneutics a universal character, he was successful in turning it to a thoroughly philosophical endeavor. Schleiermacher, in an attempt to provide hermeneutics universal appeal, turned the questions of interpretation from the explication of meaning of individual texts to the understanding of understanding itself. In “General Hermeneutics” he states, “since the art of speaking and the art of understanding stand in relation to each other, speaking being only the outer side of thinking, hermeneutics is a part of the art of thinking, and is therefore philosophical” (74). This philosophical orientation given

to hermeneutics brought a sea change in the interpretation of biblical and other classical texts in the sense that it could do away with mere allegorical and typological explications.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutical project sets as its primary objective the capturing of the meaning of the text as intended exactly by its author. The interpreter's task then is, primarily, to recapture and reproduce the mind of the author. Bontekoe observes that hermeneutics according to Schleiermacher is concerned with "the reconstruction of the author's intended meaning" (3). Meaning, therefore, becomes limited in the sense that it takes into consideration only the intention of the individual author and its reformulation. However, Schleiermacher's theory must be appreciated since it involves, compared with the mere explanation of the text in itself, the complex process of text formulation with the author and his intentions. The complexity of this process of reconstruction is acknowledged by Schleiermacher himself in "General Hermeneutics": "Just as every act of speaking is related to both the totality of the language and the totality of the speaker's thoughts, so understanding a speech always involves two moments: to understand what is said in the context of the language with its possibilities, and to understand it as a fact in the thinking of the speaker" (74). Thus, it is logical and justifiable that Schleiermacher postulates two distinct dimensions of reconstructing the intention or the message the author wanted to convey to his readers/listeners, namely, the grammatical interpretation and the psychological interpretation. Richard E. Palmer, in his influential work *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, remarks that this "reconstruction of the meaning

consists of two interesting moments; the “grammatical” and the “psychological” (86). The grammatical interpretation involves the analysis of the nature and characteristics of the language used by the author in the text, while the psychological or technical interpretation is concerned with the understanding of the person (author) behind the text. For Schleiermacher, the inherence of these two moments is a necessary prerequisite for the process of comprehensive understanding.

An act of speaking cannot even be understood as a moment in a person’s development unless it is also understood in relation to the language. This is because the linguistic heritage (angeborenheit der sprache) modifies our mind. Nor can an act of speaking be understood as a modification of the language unless it is also understood as a moment in the development of the person. (“General Hermeneutics” 75)

Attributing equal importance to these two interpretations, he remarks: “These two hermeneutical tasks are completely equal, and it would be incorrect to label grammatical interpretation the “lower” and psychological interpretation the “higher” task” (“General Hermeneutics” 75). Interpretation, in the Schleiermacherean view, is an art which requires a special mode of operation. In “General Hermeneutics” he proposes:

In order to complete the grammatical side of interpretation it would be necessary to have a complete knowledge of the language. In order to complete the psychological side it would be necessary to have a complete knowledge of the person. Since in both cases such complete

knowledge is impossible, it is necessary to move back and forth between the grammatical and psychological sides, and no rules can stipulate exactly how to do this. (76)

Another significant concept in Schleiermacher's hermeneutic theory is that of the hermeneutic circle, which, of course, is not an original idea discovered by him. He is certainly indebted to his predecessor Friedrich Ast in the formulation of the concept of hermeneutic circle as in the case of the notion of understanding as reconstruction. He declares that "the basic principle of all understanding and knowledge is to find in the particular the spirit of the whole, and to comprehend the particular through the whole" (43). Schleiermacher, along with many of the Romantic thinkers, with whom he shares many of his philosophical concepts, gave new implications to this idea. According to him "complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa. All knowledge which is scientific must be constructed in this way" ("General Hermeneutics" 84). This cyclic nature of understanding and interpretation is a challenge to the logical mind, since it pushes the interpreter into a vicious circle or to an impasse which is very difficult to break. However, Schleiermacher does not consider it from a negative standpoint, rather suggests a fruitful method to find a way out of this seemingly unsolvable dilemma. He declares that "within each given text, its parts can only be understood in terms of the whole, and so the interpreter must gain an overview of the work by a cursory reading before undertaking a more careful interpretation" ("General Hermeneutics" 85). However, one does not derive a satisfactory explanation to solve the seemingly

vicious circle as this operation of interpretation through the alternative readings of the parts and the whole, does not seem to break the hermeneutic circle.

Schleiermacher comes out with a debatable maxim in “General Hermeneutics,” while dealing with the tasks of hermeneutics: “To understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author” (83). Immediately after this statement, he puts forward two reasons in support of this rather difficult task. He explains:

Since we have no direct knowledge of what was in the author’s mind, we must try to become aware of many things of which he himself may have been unconscious, except insofar as he reflects on his own work and becomes his own reader. Moreover, with respect to the objective aspects, the author had no data other than we have. (83)

The basic question is how an outside interpreter can gain knowledge of those categories of which the very author himself is unaware or ignorant? Can such a proposal of meaning be attributed truth value? Anthony C. Thiselton in his scholarly work *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* defends Schleiermacher where he declares:

Because of the importance of context, situation, and the language on which the author draws, the historical rootedness of the text remains decisive for the meaning. Nevertheless, the interpreter may become aware of factors which evade the author’s consciousness, even though they play a part in the formulation of the text and its message. (233)

The explanation given by Zygmunt Bauman in *Hermeneutics and Social Science*, also clarifies the point of discussion. The totality of life would be visible only from the vantage point of an outsider and therefore the interpreter “knows more purely and simply because he, unlike the author, confronts the object, from the outside, as a strange phenomenon” (31). This aphoristic statement from Schleiermacher may be considered as a precursor to the postmodern/post structural denial of the significance of the author as against the importance of the reader/interpreter in deciphering the meaning of a text.

Understanding more/better than the author pertains, in the hermeneutic project of Schleiermacher, to the psychological or technical interpretation. Two interrelated methods may be employed in technical interpretation namely, the divinatory and the comparative. Schleiermacher explains that “the divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author as an individual. The comparative method proceeds by subsuming the author under a general type. It then tries to find his distinctive traits by comparing him with the others of the same general type” (“Grammatical and Technical Interpretation” 96). He immediately adds to the inseparability of these two approaches, “Since each method refers back to the other, two should never be separated” (96). He further develops the idea of inseparability of divinatory and comparative methods in *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*. “Both may not be separated from each other. For divination only receives its certainty via confirmatory comparison because without this it can always be incredible. But the comparative method does not provide any unity. The universal

and the particular must penetrate each other and this always only happens via divination” (93).

Hermeneutics after Schleiermacher developed through the works of Wilhelm Dilthey who popularised and analysed at length the hermeneutic theory proposed by his predecessor. One of the most important contributions of Dilthey was his attempts to establish an adequate methodology for human sciences. He realised the need for a comprehensive and effective method in humanities as against that of the natural sciences. Lawrence K. Schmidt clarifies this endeavor from the part of Dilthey:

He does not think that the positivistic methodology of the exact natural sciences can be used for the human sciences since the objects of the human sciences are essentially constituted by self-conscious human agents. On the other hand, idealistic theories in the human sciences lack the necessary empirical base for their conclusions. (29)

This strongly felt need paved the way for the formulation of a unique methodology where the subjective experiences of others could be reenacted imaginatively and, at the same time, they could be publicly verifiable. Dilthey termed this novel procedure as understanding (*Verstehen*) opposed to explanation (*Erklären*) that constitutes the approach of the ‘pure’ sciences. “Such a method of interpretation reveals the possibility of an objective knowledge of human beings not accessible to empiricist inquiry and thus of a distinct methodology for the human sciences” (Audi 377).

Dilthey, in one of his prominent works *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, defines hermeneutics as “the theory of the rules of interpreting written monuments” (238), and proceeds further to explain how hermeneutics as a systematic theoretical position evolved from the mere practice of exegesis. The art of interpretation or exegesis was rule-bound and required specific guidelines for its working. “And from conflict about these rules, from the struggle of various tendencies in the interpretation of fundamental works and the subsequent need to establish a basis for such rules, the science of hermeneutics itself came into being” (238). It should also be noted that he very rarely uses the term hermeneutics. However, he was very much aware of the philosophical nature of hermeneutics as pertaining to a broader sense of historical understanding. *The Rise of Hermeneutics* provides Dilthey’s concept of hermeneutics and its various purposes. The main purpose of hermeneutics, apart from its philological interpretations, is “to preserve the universal validity of historical interpretation against the inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity, and to give a theoretical justification for such validity, upon which all the certainty of historical knowledge is founded” (250). It is in this sense that Dilthey’s theory of understanding is related to hermeneutics.

Dilthey differs from his predecessor Schleiermacher in the formulation of the concept of historical dimension of interpretation. While the attempt of the latter is to explain historical events with a dialectical analysis of general concepts, Dilthey advocates a philosophical orientation in the formulation of judgments which alone can explain historical change. Dilthey postulates, according to Anthony C. Thiselton, three levels of historical understanding: The first level is that of the chronicler who is

interested in the narrative configuration of event. Another level is that of the pragmatic historian. The political motivations that inform the affairs of the state are what interest him most. Finally, there is the level of the universal historian who attempts to reconstruct the whole of inner life.

Hermeneutics takes a definitive turn in its long history with the fundamental ideas on interpretation proposed by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Taking the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl as a starting point, Heidegger delineates his hermeneutical principles which analyze the very nature of reality. The existential turn in his ontology brings to question the very idea of ‘being’ as expressed in the traditional western metaphysics. Richard Capobianco expresses this paradigm shift in the history of philosophy in the introduction to his interpretive work on Heidegger’s thought titled *Heidegger’s Way of Being*:

Heidegger was indeed determined to “overcome” the atemporal understanding of “being” as “beingness” (*ousia*, substance, *essentia*, essence) that had dominated Western metaphysical thinking since Plato, but we must also keep in mind that his very turn to the matter of *Being* was more immediately prompted by the prevailing tendency in the modern tradition of the philosophy of consciousness to relate everything back to the *logos* of the human being. In other words, from Descartes to Husserl he detected the ascendancy and triumph of the philosophical position that views “what is” principally in terms of the meaning constituting or sense-making activity of the human *logos*. It was this decisive turn in modern philosophy to the human *logos* – and

to the preoccupation with “meaning” – that he sought to counter by a decisive *return* to the question of *Being*. (4)

Before going to the analysis of the concept of Being and the characteristics of the hermeneutical project envisaged by Heidegger, the influence of phenomenology in the Heideggerian philosophical system needs to be mentioned. The prime purpose of Husserl, who is considered to be the father of phenomenology, was to find out a philosophical method which could guarantee absolute certainty as provided by the ‘cogito’ of Rene Descartes. This led him to the denial of the general attitude which postulates the existence of objects independently of ourselves in the external world.

Although we cannot be sure of the independent existence of things, Husserl argues, we can be certain of how they appear to us immediately in consciousness, whether the actual thing we are experiencing is an illusion or not. Objects can be regarded not as things in themselves but as things posited, or 'intended', by consciousness. All consciousness is consciousness of something. (Eagleton 48)

We can arrive at certainty of knowledge by excluding everything not subjected to the consciousness. Eagleton continues to elaborate on this point: “This, the so-called ‘phenomenological reduction,’ is Husserl’s first important move. Everything not ‘immanent’ to consciousness must be rigorously excluded; all realities must be treated as pure ‘phenomena,’ in terms of their appearances in our mind, and this is the only absolute data from which we can begin” (Eagleton 48). Hence phenomenology can be understood as the science of pure phenomena.

Explaining the meaning of phenomenology Heidegger himself points to the essential formulation of the Husserlian project on which he builds up his fundamental concepts. For him, phenomenology is an unprejudiced analysis “to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself” and it is equivalent to the phenomenological maxim “To the things themselves” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 30)

The Husserlian project with its emphasis on the consciousness of the knowing subject was nothing but a reaction to the theoretical positions preferring objectivity of knowledge. Rationalism which inheres in western culture and thought assumed metaphysical undertones that could undermine the everyday life experiences as valid sources of knowledge. Cartesian dualism which emphasised the distinction between subject and object had already taken roots in the epistemological systems of the western philosophy. Husserl, as Calvino Schrag opines in “Husserl's Legacy in the Postmodern World,” was trying to resist this metaphysical tendency:

According to Husserl, the sedimentation of Western rationality into a dogmatic scientism and objectivism has effectively occluded the intentionality of doxic comprehension that is operative in the pre-theoretical understandings of our everyday existence. His later project, particularly as exemplified in the *Crisis*, is that of staging a return to the life-world (*Rückgang auf die Lebenswelt*) so as to retrieve the configurations of meaning in our everyday, doxic preoccupations that have been suppressed by the abstracted logos of Western rationalism.

(127)

However, Husserl had no intention of jettisoning rationality as such. His goal was to rescue the logos from its rationalistic distortions.

The brief reference to the phenomenological project of Husserl given above reveals how effective was his influence on Martin Heidegger. Richard E. Palmer testifies to the nature and significance of this influence in his scholarly article “Postmodern Hermeneutics and the Act of Reading”:

He was clearly indebted to Husserl for the phenomenological concept of moving from what is explicit and thematic to the implicit horizon that makes it meaningful. This directly influenced Heidegger’s formulation of the hermeneutical circle in terms of recovering not just what is lost, obscure, or forgotten in the past, but implicit in the present. (59)

Nevertheless, it is easily discernible that both of them share a major difference with regard to the basic principles of their philosophical endeavor to decipher the very nature of reality itself. The philosophical standpoints they hold on are not similar in operational characteristics.

Philosophy, in its most basic mode, is concerned with the ramifications of what is called reality. Heidegger, who places his philosophical investigations on the principles of phenomenological understanding of world, comes out with the concept of reality which is accessible only in and through the existential experiences of the world. Heidegger points out this idea of the real with the employment of the term ‘Dasein’ in his famous work *Being and Time* “...cognition is a *founded* mode of

access to what is real. The real is essentially accessible only as inner worldly beings. Every access to such beings is ontologically based on the fundamental constitution of Da-sein, on being-in-the-world” (188). The primary object of his philosophy is to decipher the meaning of being understood in general terms, but revealed through the particular being of human existence. Dasein and its various manifestations are revealed through language. Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu expresses this essential project of Heideggerian philosophy:

In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger sought to understand the meaning of being in general, but addressed this central question through revealing the fundamental features of the being of human beings, which he termed *Dasein* (“being there”). He held that *Dasein* is the only kind of being that can raise the question of being and wonder about itself as existing. Instead of being a thing-with-properties, *Dasein* is being-in-the-world. (299)

The mode of being of Dasein is given in the very meaning of the terms which constitute it. Lawrence K. Schmidt explains: Dasein is composed of *da* meaning ‘there’ and *sein* meaning ‘to be.’ Hence the literal meaning of Dasein is ‘there-being.’ In German language the term Dasein is employed to mean human being though the usual word to refer to human being is Mensch. To avoid improper metaphysical connotations associated with ‘human being’, Dasein is used by Heidegger in the place of Mensch. Moreover, it is because he is very much aware of the fact that the mode of being of human beings is to be in the there, that is, in the world (52). One of the most important features of human being, then, appears to be its being in the

world. This is not to be taken as an indifferent presence in the world; rather the Dasein is dwelling in it. This active and dynamic engagement with and in the world is connoted by the word 'life-world' profusely used by Heidegger to indicate the existential characteristic of man. Schmidt further clarifies the Heideggerian sense of the 'world' as follows:

The usual ontic conception of the world is the totality of objectively present beings in the world, that is, the set of all things. The usual ontological conception means the modes of being of all those things objectively present in the ontic conception, that is, all the ways that things are in the world. One could think of Aristotle's categories. With reference to Dasein, world can also be understood in a pre-ontological, existentiell way as the set of things as they are encountered by Dasein in its daily life, which will be explained next. Finally, world can be understood ontologically as worldliness, which is the ontological sense of the existentiell meaning and is what Heidegger wants to clarify. (63-64)

Analyzing at length the entire existentialist hermeneutic principles of Heidegger, Anthony C. Thiselton summarizes the three basic assumptions on the basis of which his understanding of life and interpretation may be explained. The first assumption concerns time as the horizon for the understanding of Being. It postulates the historicity of the interpreter in the sense that the interpreter cannot escape being historically conditioned. The same is applicable with regard to what is being interpreted. Another assumption held by Heidegger is the relation between the

subject and object. As in Dilthey, Heidegger makes a sharp distinction between categorizations of science and existential characterizations of human life. The particularities of life cannot be exhausted with the mere description of it. Hence going beyond the subject-object relationship is needed. Finally, Heidegger delineates the 'givenness' of the world and existence as the thrownness or facticity of existence. This leads to the concept of life where one is being born into a situation which is not one's own making or thinking. The particularity of one's being is constituted by this. Hence Heidegger coins the term Dasein (being-there) which constitutes the existentiality of being in the world than to explain being in its abstract sense (279).

In the light of the above-mentioned insights into the philosophical world of Heidegger which has its foundations in the unique idea of the Dasein, an enquiry into his hermeneutical principles becomes easier. Heidegger's concept of meaning is different from prior theories which place the origin of meaning either in the objects in the outer world or in the knowing subject. "Therefore meaning is not, as other theories contend, added on to an already known object; nor is it constituted by consciousness. Rather, meaning is already given in the hermeneutic situation" (Schmidt 64). Heidegger is always conscious, in his discussion on the nature of the interpretative process of Dasein, of the phenomenological reduction of knowledge and meaning as the discovering of the being as it is in itself. The act of confirmation of meaning is discovering the being itself. He clarifies it as follows:

What is to be confirmed is *that* it *discovers* the being toward which it is. What is demonstrated is the discovering being of the assertion.

Here knowing remains related solely to the being itself in the act of

demonstration. It is in this being, so to speak, that the confirmation takes place. The being that one has in mind shows itself *as* it is in itself, that is, it shows that it, in its selfsameness, is just as *it* is discovered or pointed out in the assertion. (*Being and Time* 201)

Hermeneutics takes understanding as its major objective in the philosophical turn which, according to Heidegger, is deeply entwined with the very existence of Dasein. According to him, correct understanding is something ontologically grounded in Dasein's mode of being called deconcealment. In his scholarly work *The Essence of Truth* Heidegger analyses the very nature of truth as unhiddenness of being.

And in the history of man's essence it is precisely the occurrence of unhiddenness, i.e. of deconcealment, that is decisive. We first get to know what man is from the essence of unhiddenness; the essence of truth is what first allows the essence of man to be grasped...That is the mode of his *existence [Existenz]*, the fundamental occurrence of his Dasein. (55)

The human being, as Dasein, arrives at the correct understanding of truth not as a result of some phenomenon happening outside his being or due to the functioning of some internal forces. Rather, "Primordial unhiddenness is projective de-concealing as an occurrence happening 'in man' i.e. in his *history*. Truth is neither somewhere *over* man (as validity in itself), nor is it in man as a psychical subject, but man is '*in*' the *truth*" (Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth* 55). Therefore, human understanding acquires validity and receptivity only when man subjects himself to truth and

discovers his own being. Man, according to Heidegger, "...is in the truth only if, and only in so far as, he masters his nature, holds himself within the unhiddenness of beings, and comports himself to this unhiddenness" (*The Essence of Truth* 55).

However, the disclosedness of truth in the hermeneutic process is not complete in a single moment. It is a gradual development involving various stages of progression.

Dasein must explicitly and essentially appropriate what has also already been discovered, defend it *against* illusion and distortion, and ensure itself of its discoveredness again and again. All new discovery takes place not on the basis of complete concealment, but takes its point of departure from discoveredness in the mode of illusion."

(Heidegger, *Being and Time* 204)

Interpretation in Heideggerian terms encompasses Dasein as it projects its being as possibilities. This is what essentially differentiates Heidegger from Husserl. While Husserl's primary focus was on retention, in Heidegger the emphasis is on projection, which basically suggests not only possibilities, but future possibilities. Understanding always presupposes different possibilities of development. Heidegger explains this process of development as interpretation. "We shall call the development of understanding *interpretation*" (*Being and Time* 139). When something is interpreted, understanding tries to appropriate what it has already understood. Heidegger further explains the nature of this interpretative procedure. "In interpretation understanding does not become something different, but rather itself. Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is not the acknowledgement of what has been understood, but rather

the development of possibilities projected in understanding” (*Being and Time* 139). As for Hermeneutics, this indicates that interpretation is ultimately a set of projections of possibilities that are not necessarily of the present – that is the text – but of potentialities that can/may be discovered in various historical circumstances that could/would develop.

Heidegger addresses one of the most important issues in connection with hermeneutics viz, prejudice or presupposition that occurs in the very process of interpretation. According to him, interpretation is not an objective and presuppositionless activity.

The interpretation of something as something is essentially grounded in fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given. When the particular concretion of the interpretation in the sense of exact text interpretation likes to appeal to what “is there”, what is initially “there” is nothing else than the self-evident, undisputed prejudice of the interpreter, which is necessarily there in each point of departure of the interpretation as what is already “posited” with interpretation as such, that is, pre-given with fore-having, fore-sight, fore-conception. (*Being and Time* 141)

In order to unconceal hermenutic truth the interpreter should base the fore-structures of hermeneutic understanding on the things themselves. The question of tradition becomes significant in this context. The interpreter confronts an already interpreted system of meanings at the very inception of his hermeneutical endeavour

which is qualified by the term tradition. In the evolution of Heideggerian interpretative strategy of Dasein, tradition is a mask beneath which Being conceals itself. This happens because Dasein is not always interpreting itself in an authentic way, because even its self-interpretation is a covering up of itself not to be terrified. Being always conceals itself beneath the tradition, thereby making a dismantling of tradition necessary in the interpretative process. Interpreting human life is similar to the process of interpreting a text distorted by centuries of exegesis (Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* 87-88).

Any discussion on the hermeneutic principles laid down by Heidegger is rendered incomplete without mentioning the different meanings he attributes to interpretation. Michael Inwood summarises those senses of the term hermeneutics.

1. Hermeneutics is, primarily, interpretation in the sense that it is an uncovering of the meaning of being and the basic structures of Dasein.
2. Since hermeneutics in sense 1 'displays the horizon for every other ontological study of entities that are not Dasein-like, it is also hermeneutics in something like Schleiermacher's sense': it elaborates the 'conditions of the possibility of every ontological investigation.'
3. Dasein's ontological priority over other entities depends on its possibility of existence. Thus in interpreting Dasein's being, hermeneutics in sense 1 must analyse the 'existentiality of existence.' This sense of 'hermeneutics' is 'philosophically primary.'

4. The ‘hermeneutics of Dasein’ ontologically works out the historicity of Dasein as the ontical condition of the possibility of history. So the ‘methodology of the historical sciences’ is rooted in hermeneutics in sense 3. This is a derivative sense of hermeneutics. (*A Heidegger Dictionary* 88)

Heidegger is followed, in the tradition of the hermeneutical philosophy, by Hans-Georg Gadamer whose investigations into the nature of hermeneutics elevated it to the status of philosophical hermeneutics. Analyzing the preceding hermeneutical traditions envisaged by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger, Gadamer points to the shift in the very nature of hermeneutics. He claims that the theory of interpretation has been developed into a system and has become the basis of all human sciences.

It wholly transcended the original pragmatic purpose of making it possible, or easier, to understand written texts. It is not only the written tradition that is estranged and in need of new and more vital assimilation; everything that is no longer immediately situated in a world- that is, all tradition, whether art or the other spiritual creations of the past: law, religion, philosophy, and so forth- is estranged from its original meaning and depends on the unlocking and mediating spirit that we, like the Greeks, name after Hermes: the messenger of the gods. (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 164)

The fore-structures of understanding proposed by Heidegger are taken up by Gadamer.

Gadamer's task in philosophical hermeneutics is to demonstrate how correct understanding may be achieved by grounding the fore-structures of understanding on the things themselves. While Heidegger reveals understanding as an ontological structure of human being, Gadamer will examine understanding epistemologically.

(Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics* 100)

Gadamer employs the term 'prejudices' to designate those fore-structures. However, the term should not be used, claims Gadamer, in the modern sense of the term developed subsequent to the Enlightenment Philosophy. Analyzing the etymological formation of the term reveals its original meaning.

Gadamer employs the word "prejudices" (*Vorurteile*) to designate collectively Heidegger's fore-structures of understanding. In German "vor-" means "pre-" and "Urteil" means "judgement" so with reference to Heidegger's fore-structures "Vorurteil" would mean prejudgement. In normal German usage, however, "Vorurteil" means prejudice. (Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics* 100).

Gadamer places Enlightenment in a defensive position when he accuses it to be responsible for the negative connotations attached to the term prejudice. "The history of ideas shows that not until the Enlightenment does *the concept of prejudice* acquire the negative connotation familiar today. Actually 'prejudice' means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 283). These prejudices are inevitable for human understanding since they constitute the very nature of the being as in the case

of Heideggerian fore-structures. “That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 289). This necessitates the need to reinstate the significant status of prejudice in the hermeneutical endeavor. Gadamer affirms this in *Truth and Method* before discussing how it could be realised. “If we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices” (289).

The first task Gadamer carries out is the refutation of the Enlightenment idea of the opposition between reason and authority, and its reluctance to the submission of human reasoning to the authority of any mode. He admits that ultimately it is persons who have authority, “but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge- the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence- i.e., it has priority over one’s own” (*Truth and Method* 291). Therefore, acceptance of authority is not against reason. Enlightenment rejection of tradition also is countered in Gadamerian hermeneutics with an in-depth analysis of the concept of tradition. According to Gadamer there is no unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. “The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, and cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change” (*Truth and Method* 293).

Preservation becomes an act of reason so much so that those who partake in a tradition will not try to cultivate it unless it appears to them reasonable. Tradition provides us with legitimate prejudices in the hermeneutical process. Therefore, Gadamer emphasizes the importance of tradition in human life and in the hermeneutics of human sciences. He declares:

At any rate, our usual relationship is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process- i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a kind of cognizance that our later historical judgment would hardly regard as a kind of knowledge but as the most ingenuous affinity with tradition. (*Truth and Method* 294)

So the role of tradition in hermeneutics is intelligible when juxtaposed with Gadamer's concept of prejudices. "The task for hermeneutic understanding is to differentiate the legitimate prejudices from all the illegitimate ones that need to be criticized and dropped" (Schmidt 102).

Gadamer too concerns his philosophical hermeneutics with the cyclic nature of interpretation. The Heideggerean idea of fore-structures of understanding is integrated by Gadamer with the introduction of a new component to them which he calls the "fore-conception of completeness," a *sine qua non* of intelligibility. "So when we read a text we always assume its completeness, and only when this assumption proves mistaken- i.e., the text is not intelligible- do we begin to suspect a

text and try to discover how it can be remedied” (*Truth and Method* 305). It is this idea of the completeness of meaning which makes the questioning of one of the prejudices in confrontation with other prejudices in the text possible. As far as meaning is concerned, the legitimate prejudice can be sieved out from among the text which is a mixture of both legitimate and illegitimate prejudices only when this completeness is granted. Fore-conception of completeness is necessary because, “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked” (*Truth and Method* 310). Tradition becomes important again when the distancing between the text and the interpreter is considered. This apparent difficulty in the hermeneutic process is taken as an enriching element of interpretation in Gadamer. Temporal distance is not considered to be a gulf to be bridged but, “it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted” (*Truth and Method* 308). Gadamer makes the significance of distance in time clear when it is considered to be the arena of enriching ideas and experiences kept in tradition. It is important to recognize “temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding... is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents to us” (*Truth and Method* 308). What passes through the tradition is in a process of continuous correction on the one hand and on the other it is getting richer with the accumulation of new components to it.

Another significant concept in the interpretative procedure envisioned by Gadamer is that of horizon which is explained as “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” and in philosophy it is

used to “characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one’s range of vision is gradually expanded” (*Truth and Method* 313).

Horizon indicates one’s hermeneutic situation in the sense that it is the sum total of all the prejudices possessed by one. This horizon is not static. It is dynamic in the sense that it gets altered when it encounters other horizons whereby the prejudices constituting it get changed. Nicholas Davey, in his famous work *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, explains the way this encounter of horizons bring about different possibilities in understanding:

The hermeneutic encounter grounds a civility among those who have come to know what it is to become different to themselves and who realize, as a consequence, that they are indeed mutually dependent upon each other for expanding the possibilities within their understanding. Such individuals know that their ability to understand and become “more” does not depend exclusively upon a recognition of what is entailed *within* their horizon but also upon a recognition of that otherness which challenges their horizons from outside. (12)

The dynamic dimension of horizon paves the way for this fusion of horizons which cannot be limited to the level of individual understanding alone. According to Gadamer, what happens in the hermeneutic process is a meeting of the horizon of the reader/interpreter with that of the text. In understanding a text, the reader projects the text’s horizon within his/her own horizon. Gadamer makes it clear that “*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*” (*Truth and Method* 317) (emphasis original). The horizon of the text

involves the historical consciousness of the past and that of the reader presupposes the present. The understanding of the text involves historical consciousness but when we transpose ourselves to the historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon, we commit the fallacy of making the other an object of knowledge which involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth. The horizon of the past is not a standpoint that is closed, but is always on the move with the holder of the horizon. Hence Gadamer disagrees with the Schleiermacherian concept of reconstruction of the historical past in the hermeneutical process (*Truth and Method* 314-15). So hermeneutics always involves a tension on which the entire process of interpretation rests. Gadamer declares:

Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out. This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own. On the other hand, it is itself, as we are trying to show, only something superimposed upon continuing tradition, and hence it immediately recombines with what it has foregrounded itself from in order to become one with itself again in the unity of the historical horizon that it thus acquires. (*Truth and Method* 317)

Language acquires an important place in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Language becomes the locus where the fusion of horizons takes place. The dialogic conversations between the interpreter and the text, representing a tradition, require a common language and as a result "they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community" (*Truth and Method* 387), and "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (*Truth and Method* 387). Hence the communitarian aspect of the hermeneutic project is foregrounded by Gadamer and this shift from the individual to the community turns out to be an important factor which could be upheld by the authoritarian abduction of the monopoly over the entire trajectory of meaning, as happened in the case of the biblical interpretations offered by the church, which grabbed the reins of interpretation of the Bible in its own hand.

The shift from an interpretative project which emphasised the role and significance of the author to one that is focused on the text itself happens with Paul Ricoeur whose hermeneutics of the text is an integration of the theories of his predecessors like Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg-Gadamer. He goes on to explain this text-oriented dimension of hermeneutics in many of his works. He proposes that "By hermeneutics we shall always understand the theory of the rules that preside over an exegesis- that is, over the interpretation of a particular text, or of any group of signs that may be viewed as a text" (*Freud and Philosophy* 8). In other words, "hermeneutics is the theory of the operation of understanding of texts" (Ricoeur,

“The Task of Hermeneutics” 1). The emphasis placed on the textual nature of the interpretative process raises another basic question with regard to the meaning of the term ‘text’ in the hermeneutical theory proposed by Ricoeur. He addresses this issue rightly when he declares that “a text is any discourse fixed by writing” (*From Text to Action* 106). This new way of looking at the text gives way for the debatable prioritization of writing over speech and for a judgment over the relative superiority bestowed on the act of speech as a linguistic skill anterior to that of writing. This seemingly controversial issue is again solved when Ricoeur explains the meaning of the text and its fixation by writing:

What is fixed by writing is thus a discourse that could be said, of course, but that is written precisely because it is not said. Fixation by writing takes the very place of speech, occurring at the site where speech could have emerged. This suggests that a text is really a text only when it is not restricted to transcribing an anterior speech, when instead it inscribes directly in written letters what the discourse means. (*From Text to Action* 106)

This shift from speaking to writing brings in the issue of meaning that is problematised with change in the focus on psychological dimension of the speaker to the textuality of the text. What the author intends to convey, when juxtaposed with the verbal meaning of the text, undergoes considerable changes which make the interpretation rather difficult, if not impossible. This happens as a result of the non-correspondence between what the author intended to communicate and what the actual textual marks convey. Ricoeur sees in this seemingly negative differentiation

between the authorial intention and the textual meaning a more fruitful engagement of the hermeneutics when he declares that “This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention of the author gives to the concept of inscription its decisive significance, beyond the mere fixation of previous oral discourse”

(*Interpretation Theory* 29). The text escapes the burden of deciphering the ‘original’ meaning generated at the time of the author and retains a relative autonomy with regard to the understanding of the discourse it tries to represent. This is what Ricoeur means when he says,

Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means. The text’s career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it. (*Interpretation Theory* 29-30)

This shift from speaking to writing encapsulates what can be described as a process of distancing or alienation which unfolds manifold implications as far as hermeneutics of text is concerned. The movement from speaking to writing or the process of the formation of the text involves a triple distancing. Ricoeur enumerates them in “The Hermeneutical Function of Distnciation” as distancing from the author, distancing from the situation of discourse, and distancing from the original audience (134). These three categories of distancing act as the justification for the semantic autonomy of the text which is inbuilt in the text. The

three-fold semantic autonomy liberates the text from the eclipse of the authorial intention, the historical context, and original community or recipients. In “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” Ricoeur elaborates on this productive aspect of the process of interpretation:

The essence of a work of art, a literary work, or a work in general, is to transcend its psycho-sociological conditions of production and be open to an unlimited series of readings, themselves situated within different sociocultural contexts. In short, it belongs to a text to decontextualize itself as much from a sociological point of view as from a psychological one, and to be able to recontextualize itself in new contexts. (133)

This transition of the text from its ‘original’ context assumes greater importance in the Ricoeurian theory of interpretation when he declares in his famous work *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus of Meaning* that the above discussed semantic autonomy of the text is of tremendous importance for hermeneutics, because “Exegesis begins with it, i.e., it unfolds its procedures within the circumscription of a set of meanings that have broken their moorings to the psychology of the author” (30). This autonomy operates not in the realm of the relationship of the text with the author alone; rather it addresses that of the text with the reader too. As a result of depsychologization as well as decontextualization, the text presents itself openly to readers of any time and place and thus realizes a universal character in its interpretative possibilities. Ricoeur declares that “A written text is addressed to an unknown reader and potentially to whoever knows how to

read” and adds that “this universalization of the audience is one of the most striking effects of writing. Because discourse is now linked to a material support, it becomes more spiritual in the sense that it is liberated from the narrowness of the face-to-face situation” (*Interpretation Theory* 31). This aspect of the text makes it open to any reader and to indefinite number of possible interpretations, adding to the polysemous readings. It is here that we find adequate justification for the various and sometimes different (from the religious authority) interpretations of religious texts and scriptures, a relevant issue discussed in the coming chapters of this dissertation.

The discussion on the distanciation and the meaning of the written text postulates the question revolving around what is termed as life world in Ricoeurian hermeneutics. This new way of understanding the term ‘text’ involves more than a singular dimension where one has to envisage a more general and broader aspect, namely, life. It is the life which is deciphered from the text as in the mirroring process. This close affinity between the life world of the reader and that of the text is emphasised when Don Ihde in “Text and the New Hermeneutics” observes that,

....the role of the reader in relation to the text is a relation between the lifeworld of the reader and the world of the text. Its framework is phenomenological, now modelled after, but dynamically creviced from, the Husserlian concept of an actional lifeworld situated between the historical and the imaginative within the movements of refiguration, configuration and prefiguration. (130)

And it is this approach, according to him, that makes Ricoeur most contemporary.

The discussion on the most prominent advocates of hermeneutics does not come to an end with Ricoeur. There are still different philosophers and systems of philosophy which definitely place themselves in the fruitful arena of interpretation theory. All major hermeneuticians referred above contributed considerably to bringing hermeneutics down from the ‘lofty’ realm of theological and biblical interpretation to what may be termed philosophical hermeneutics.

Theological/biblical hermeneutics was basically operating in the metaphysical and divine milieu transcending the historical and contextual understanding of reality.

Philosophical hermeneutics, on the other hand, employed methodological strategy leading to the philosophy of contextuality. In “Hermeneutics and the Ancient Philosophical Legacy: Hermēneia and Phronēsis,” Jussi Backman declares that philosophical hermeneutics:

regards meaning and understanding as irreducibly context-sensitive and historically and culturally situated and accepts no universal, ideal level of discourse that would precede its inscription into different material languages, maintaining that the thoughts, notions, and intentions one is capable of having are specific to one’s cultural-linguistic situation. (26)

However, a detailed analysis of the various hermeneutical systems does not come under the preview of this study as it is more a study on the theological and biblical hermeneutics at work in literary fiction. To sum up the present discussion it would be helpful to mention how Lawrence K. Schmidt, in his *Understanding Hermeneutics*, presents the hermeneutical trajectory at work after Gadamer.

- E. D. Hirsch represents the traditional position of literary interpretation and philology, which developed from Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. The traditional position argues that the meaning of a text is determined by the author's intention.
- Jürgen Habermas argues that philosophical hermeneutics is unable to criticize tradition since Gadamer underestimates the power of reflection. Gadamer's hermeneutics must be modified to include a critique of ideology.
- Paul Ricoeur contends that hermeneutics must include both a theory of understanding, along the lines of Gadamer's theory, and a theory of explanation in order to validate interpretation. Because philosophical hermeneutics lacks a theory of explanation, Gadamer's hermeneutics results in relativism.
- Jacques Derrida's brief debate with Gadamer represents the general criticism of deconstructionists that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics remains trapped within metaphysics and thus is not radical enough. (133-134)

One may identify a good number of philosophers and theorists in the long tradition of literary theory that may be termed hermeneutics. They vary in the content and methodology used in the formulations of their concept of interpretation.

However, in general, they may be classified as 'intentionalists' and 'anti-intentionalists'. The former category comprises those who argue that the main

objective of hermeneutics is the reconstruction of the intention of the author in an attempt to decipher the meaning of any text/utterance while the latter sees meaning as something which is inbuilt in the very nature of the text and it is the reader/audience who are placed in a relatively free position in the endeavor to recapture the meaning of the text/utterance. This seemingly contradictory debate gathers new allies on both sides thereby enriching the discussion over the real nature of hermeneutics. And these formulations and reformulations will go on till the end of humanity, because interpretation is a *sine qua non* as long as there is human communication and language.

Chapter 2

Interpreting the Bible

Attempts at understanding and analysis of any text involve theorization of the very process of interpretation. This becomes even more intense and inevitable as and when the text in question forms part of a literary category that can be termed as rewriting. The texts which are subjected to analysis in this research thesis are explicitly rewritings of the Bible, which is the scripture of Christianity as a religion and hence considered by the Christians to be of divine origin and consequently sacred as well as unalterable. This necessitates a search for the meaning of the biblical issues taken up by the selected authors in this study which in turn makes it incumbent on us to go into a detailed analysis of the hermeneutical processes involved in the study of the Bible. What is attempted here is not a thorough review of biblical scholarship as a whole; rather it is aimed at presenting the basic and relevant issues of biblical hermeneutics in relation to the topics of discussion in this study.

Any discussion on the nature of the Bible cannot ignore and neglect an analysis of its etymological significance. The literal meaning of the word Bible is ‘the book’ as one may learn from a perusal of any biblical dictionary available in the scholarly circles of biblical studies. Harper’s Bible Dictionary points to this derivation of meaning when referring to its etymological origin. “The English word ‘Bible’ is derived from the old French bible, which is in turn based on the Latin biblia and Greek biblia [“books”], plural of biblion, diminutive from biblos” (Melugin 110). This understanding of the Bible as a ‘book’ is of significance in the hermeneutical process as it entails a justification against the argument from some

conservative circles that the Bible is divine word and should not be treated as any other book (text) of secular nature. Therefore, it is not only possible but also necessary to subject the Bible to scrutiny in order to arrive at a clear understanding.

The content of the Bible is not exclusively Christian in the sense that it also contains and is comprised of books of Jewish religion. The New Testament and the Old Testament are the basic major divisions of the books in the Bible, a division which is a manifestation of the affirmation of Christian identity which is different from that of the Jewish tradition. The fundamental distinction between them is articulated in the introduction to the work *The Neighbor* by Žižek and others, “New Testament defines itself against what it sees as the narrow legalism of Pharisaic Judaism and initiates the dialectics of new versus old, universal versus particular, and love versus law that will inform ethical theory in modernity” (5). However, Christians consider both the Old Testament and New Testament as integral parts of the single collection of Bible, the ‘sacred’ scripture. Wilfrid Harrington observes that the very name New Testament,

...expresses the Christian conviction that the collection of twenty-seven writings which Christians acknowledge as inspired writings is not the full Christian scripture. The whole Bible, and nothing less, is Christian scripture. The common term “testament” is an acknowledgement that the specifically Christian part is not wholly distinct from the Hebrew Scriptures, the “Old Testament.” (86)

The Catholic Church teaches that the Old Testament and New Testament should, without any hesitation, be treated as the different ways of God’s revelation to

mankind. Both of them should be considered as ways in which God chose to speak to his people. The official position of the church in this regard is apparent in *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on the Divine Revelation, where the church brings about the major teachings about the scripture:

The economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so orientated that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ, redeemer of all men, and of the messianic kingdom, and should indicate it by means of different types. For in the context of the human situation before the era of salvation established by Christ, the books of the Old Testament provide an understanding of God and man and make clear to all men how a just and merciful God deals with mankind. These books, even though they contain matters imperfect and provisional, nevertheless show us authentic divine teaching.

(Flannery 685)

Such a division of the Bible into two testaments is not without some preferential claims for the New Testament. The Council, while taking God as the author of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, declares that the former is made manifest in the latter. Flannery observes: "For, although Christ founded the New Covenant in his blood, still the books of the Old Testament, all of them caught up into the Gospel message, attain and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament and, in their turn, shed light on it and explain it" (686).

The very original texts of both the Old Testament and the New Testament are not available today since they could not survive the test of the time. The Old

Testament books were written in the Hebrew language while the New Testament books were written in Greek. However, very old copies of these original texts are available to us and they are called 'Manuscripts' (MSS). They were originally hand-written copies and hence came to be designated as manuscripts. At the same time, we have plenty of translations of the Old Testament and the New Testament books. These are translations into other languages of the ancient Near East and are now known as 'versions' (VSS). The biblical scholars, employing various methods of textual criticism, have been successful in establishing the rather accurate, if not the same, texts of the Bible. These "authentic" versions and their translations into different modern languages are available in print today and are profusely used both for the purpose of research and for liturgical practices.

What attracts our attention in the analysis of the development of the Bible in its varied versions is the process of copying the manuscripts. Prior to the invention of printing by Johann Gutenberg of Strasbourg, who put the movable type to full use in his hand-operated press in 1436/1437 (Shillington 138), and who first printed the Bible in this press, the Bible had been transmitted from one generation to the next through the hands of copyists and scribes who tremendously engaged themselves in the laborious job of copying. What are of importance to our analysis of biblical formation are the various changes brought about to the scriptural texts due to the tedious act of copying. V. George Shillington, in his famous work *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies*, tries to find out the reasons for these drastic changes. According to him wording of a biblical text undergoes various changes mainly due to four possibilities likely to come up while the copying process

is in progress. The first reason is the weariness of the copyist which leads to inattention, from the part of the copyist, to the details of the text he is working with. Secondly, the copyist is limited by a psychological propensity which causes the problem of taking one word for another. He may either read a new word for a word in the source text or may overlook a word in the source text. A further issue arises when the copyist encounters a damaged or not so clear source text and tries to recreate illegible words from the original. The fourth issue is the situation where the meaning of a particular text becomes less clear or confusing and the copyist, in good faith and with the right intention, deliberately adds to the text materials so that the meaning may become clearer or more emphatic (140). This information is useful in our analysis of the subjective elements involved in the hermeneutics of the Bible to be carried out in the upcoming chapters of this dissertation.

The study of the Bible, primarily conceived to be used for religious purposes, was and is erroneously taken as a simple and innocent act of understanding the literal sense of the letters. However, one cannot deny the fact that it involves different methods in order to arrive at a thorough grasp of the texts in the Bible. Those diverse approaches, adopted in the interpretation of the Bible, together inform the student of the Bible regarding its meaning and this systematic procedure may be termed as biblical criticism. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, following the etymological origin of the term criticism from the Greek word 'krino' which means "to judge" or "to discern," defines biblical criticism as "the study and investigation of biblical writings that seeks to make discerning and discriminating judgments about these writings" (Holladay, "Biblical Criticism" 129). It involves the complex process of determining

the original text and then deciphering its meaning which is closer to the 'authentic' understanding. Daniel J. Harrington encapsulates the aim of criticism, both biblical and outside biblical research, when he declares that the goal of the techniques of biblical criticism is:

to enable the reader to know as much as possible about the meaning of the text in its original historical setting; that is, what the original author was trying to communicate to his original audience. Though there is a legitimate debate whether this goal can ever be fully attained, biblical critics seek to come as close to the goal as is humanly possible. (115)

At the same time, modern theories of interpretation have considerably informed and altered the goal and nature of biblical hermeneutics, as a result of which different critical positions have emerged. Biblical criticism is comprised of various types of critical investigations such as textual criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and canonical criticism. Without a preliminary knowledge of each, any analysis of biblical hermeneutics is impossible.

Textual criticism, as the term indicates, is concerned with the verification and study of the different texts of the Bible in its most original form. In *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies*, V. George Shillington declares:

The aim of textual criticism is to reconstruct as nearly as possible the text of the documents of the two testaments when they were first received in the communities of faith in their final form. The goal is

achieved by applying scientific methods with a good resource of informed insight to the study of the available manuscript evidence. (155).

As one peruses the long history of the formation of biblical texts, a good number of various manuscripts and translated versions appear. This places the biblical critic in a precarious situation as to judging which of them would be nearest to the original. A question which needs special attention would be about the criterion for the selection of a manuscript closest to the text available to the faith community. Analyzing the scholarly works of many textual critics, Shillington enumerates both external and internal evidences to determine the text which is more original. There are three external evidences that come from examining the manuscripts. 1. The age of the manuscript points to the number of copies made and used, before it came to the community. So, when the copy is older than others, in the order of copying it comes earlier and so will be less removed from the original. As a result, it is more likely to be free of the corruptions likely to occur through repeated copying. 2. The geographical origin of the manuscripts is given special consideration. The joint testimony of copies of a text coming from different localities of faith communities where they were copied independently must be preferred. 3. Text type, or family, must be preferred to merely the number of witnesses. All the manuscripts may be divided into different groups or categories of manuscripts with some similar traits and origin. These groups are called Text types or families of manuscripts. Many manuscripts may have one reading and all those manuscripts may be from the same source manuscript which, in turn, may have been corrupt to begin with. Therefore,

reading which has twenty similar manuscripts may not be more meritorious over reading with only two manuscripts coming from a better text type. Internal evidence is concerned with the human tendencies in scribal copying. Five guiding principles of discernment can be observed here. 1. The more difficult reading is preferred over a simple reading, primarily because a scribe would be more inclined to simplify than to make a reading more difficult. 2. The shorter reading is preferred, because a scribe would be more inclined to elaborate than to abbreviate. 3. A reading that is out of harmony with another passage is preferred over a reading that is harmonious, since a scribe usually tries to harmonize a text than to make it unrelated. 4. Unfamiliar and awkward wording is preferred over familiar and smooth wording. 5. Judgment is sometimes made on the wording of a specific text from the context or from the style of an author in the whole document (159-160).

The basic objective involved in textual criticism is the establishment of the text of the biblical document. Daniel J. Harrington justifies this search for the text that is nearer to the original manuscript when he declares: "We no longer have direct access to the manuscripts written by the biblical authors. Their works have been handed on by copyists through the centuries. With each copying, the possibility and the likelihood of errors or changes entering the manuscript tradition grows" (115-116). Hence it is inevitable to seek and establish the earlier of the various copies available. However, the hermeneutical principles raise the question as to the various processes attached to the formation and understanding of biblical texts where the context is significant. Marvin A. Sweeney, after analyzing the scholarly works of

many biblical critics, testifies to the importance of the various present versions of biblical texts which should be treated as equals to the 'original' texts:

The Gospels and Paul reread earlier biblical texts in relation to their understanding of the significance of Jesus as Christ. The hermeneutics by which biblical texts are reread and reapplied to new situations are especially evident in the textual versions, such as the Qumran texts, Septuagint, Targums, Peshitta, and Vulgate, each of which renders the earlier Hebrew text in relation to its own understanding of what it meant and means. Text criticism can no longer be preoccupied solely with the reconstruction of original texts; it must entail a reading of the versions as scripture in their own right. (48)

This observation is significant to the study of biblical texts to the extent it leaves room for hermeneutical diversities whereby one can decode and validate different meanings attributed to a single text. As a corollary, the possibility of multiple readings of the Bible derives justification as against the assertion of single signification by the church authorities who incessantly attempt to monopolize the hermeneutical sphere.

Another important area of biblical criticism is centered on the historical study of biblical writings, generally known as historical criticism. Carl R. Holladay in the entry "biblical criticism" in *Harper's Bible Dictionary* describes the main objectives of historical criticism: "The process through which one attempts to reconstruct the historical situation out of which writing arose and how it came to be written is one of the main tasks of historical criticism" (130). Any biblical text originates in a

particular historical setting. Moreover, it undergoes various changes as it is developed through different other historical settings. Hence Holladay observes: “Consequently, a biblical writing may be said to have a history of its own, which includes its time and place of composition, the circumstances in which it was produced or written, its author or authors (whether an actual author, editor, or group of editors), how it came to be written and the audience(s) to which it was addressed” (“biblical criticism” 130). Understanding of any biblical text, therefore, depends to a great extent on the understanding of its historical settings, a task carried out by what is called historical criticism.

The most important contribution of historical criticism is the determination of the date of composition of a text in an attempt to find out its history. In certain cases, the text itself may explicitly contain indications as to the date of its origin. “More often, the text contains no clear indication of its date and this must be determined indirectly, usually through the use of external sources, such as archaeological evidence or nonbiblical writings from the same period that provide reliable evidence for dating persons or events mentioned in the text” (Holladay, “biblical criticism” 130). Historical criticism is also concerned with the place of composition of the biblical writings. Biblical criticism relies on historical data of the date of composition with the assumption that the knowledge of the geographical region where a text is written may provide ample indications to its political, social and cultural milieu which would be of great help in understanding certain particular features of the text.

Analysis of the text in historical criticism involves enquiries as to the authorship of the text which engages two basic questions. The first question throws

up the problem of deciding on the identity of the author while the second question raises the issue of determining the method of composition employed by him. In an attempt to provide reasonable explanations to these questions, Holladay again comes out with valuable observations. According to him, it turns out to be a rather tedious task to decide upon the identity of the author since anonymous and pseudonymous authors can be found in the formation of a text. Some texts would be anonymous but they contain within them either explicit or implicit references to the author.

Pseudonymous texts can also be found where the text would be written by someone but authorship is attributed to some great personalities, usually belonging to some previous period in history, for giving the work more authenticity and popular colouring (“biblical criticism” 130). With regard to the composition of the texts, which is a more complicated issue than that of the author due to the involvement of many factors that are interwoven in the process of composition, Holladay provides the following observations:

Many biblical writings are composite works, either because various sayings or writings of a single author have been collected and edited into a single work (e.g., most of the shorter prophetic books perhaps; John, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Philippians) or because the works of several authors or editors have been edited together into a single work (e.g., the Pentateuch, Isaiah). To be sure, some writings were written by a single author in one particular time and place (e.g., Philemon). (“biblical criticism” 130)

Historical criticism with its emphasis on the origin of a text gives much importance to the question of the author. The question of the sources employed while composing a biblical text is as important as the question of authorship. This paves the way for the emergence of source criticism, a new and independent investigation into the various sources playing vital role in the making of biblical works. John S. Kloppenborg explains the purpose and nature of source criticism when he declares that,

source criticism has as its purpose the detection and, in some cases, reconstruction, of documentary sources which were used by various biblical authors in composing their works. When the profile of source documents can be established in some detail, it has been possible to date these documents and to analyze their literary genres, dominant ideologies, and provenances. (340-41)

Though it emerged as a sub-discipline to historical criticism, source criticism has achieved prominence and a position that is independent of its mother discipline.

It was in the eighteenth century that a systematic application of source criticism began to appear in the field of biblical studies. Though the use of the methods and tools of source criticism could be found in the study of both Old Testament and New Testament, it began to be accepted as a critical method of study in biblical scholarship when it was first applied in the analysis of Old Testament texts. The employment of source criticism in a more scientific way had its inspiration from the discovery of two major documentary sources in the formation of the Pentateuch (Pentateuch is the collective name for the first five books in the Bible

which consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). As a result of the scientific study of the Old Testament, scholars came to realize that:

the Pentateuch was based on at least two separate documentary sources (J and E), distinguishable by their consistent use of separate divine names, Yahweh (Jahveh in German) and Elohim. Further investigation eventually led to the detection of two additional sources, one reflecting a priestly outlook (P), the other a Deuteronomic outlook (D) [One of the supposed sources of the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy, and the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.]. (Holladay, “biblical criticism” 130)

This discovery of the possible sources of the Pentateuch, carried out thanks to the contributions of source criticism, had a tremendous influence on Old Testament biblical scholarship. For, Pentateuch was hitherto deemed to be authored by Moses, the great leader of Israel, or a Mosaic tradition. It was also believed that Joshua, the follower of Moses was responsible for the production of the first five books in the Bible. From the employment of source criticism “emerged the consensus view that the Pentateuch, rather than being of Mosaic authorship or even the work of a single individual, such as Joshua, was actually a composite work based on at least four separate literary sources” (Holladay, “biblical criticism” 130). This theory of the four sources led biblical scholars to make further investigations into the possible sources in the making of other Old Testament writings as well as New Testament writings in the Bible which, in turn, contributed greatly to biblical scholarship in the subsequent centuries.

The establishment of historical source criticism which began with the research into the writings of the Old Testament was later extended to those of the New Testament, especially the synoptic gospels (the synoptic problem will be discussed later in this chapter). Two source theories can be considered to be the finest example for source criticism. Out of the three gospels comprising those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it was the gospel of Mark that was traditionally considered to be less historical and least original in the sense that Mark had profusely depended on the accounts on the life and teachings of Jesus. John S. Kselman and Ronald D. Witherup testify in “Modern New Testament Criticism” to this tradition when they state: “Mark had long been the least examined of the four Gospels in the history of NT interpretation. Augustine had looked upon it as an abbreviation of Matt.” (1134). However, thanks to historico-critical methods, the relative priority of Mark became prominent in biblical scholarship. Various analyses revealed the fact that Mark was one of the chief sources used by both Matthew and Luke. At the same time, scholars began to notice many materials in Matthew and Luke which are not found in Mark. This led to the possibility of a new source of material other than Mark. Hence the New Testament scholars realised that:

it is necessary to posit a documentary source to which Matthew and Luke had access. This is normally called ‘Q’ (=Quelle, source). The hypothesis that asserts the priority of Mark, the independence of Matthew and Luke, and the existence of a second documentary source of sayings for Matthew and Luke is called the ‘Two Document (or Source) hypothesis’ (2DH). (Kloppenborg 343)

This way of source reconstruction and analysis that had great influence on the study of synoptic gospels was later extended to other books in the New Testament, though the results were not as effective as in the case of the gospels. The relevance and necessity of source criticism is emphasised when John S. Kloppenborg makes the statement:

To the extent that documentary sources are treated as works in their own right, with discrete genres, ideological proclivities, and social locations, they constitute both an enrichment of the resources available for comprehending the history of literature and theology in the Bible, and a challenge for incorporating pluriform and sometimes divergent ideologies and social formations. (343)

Source criticism also takes into consideration the question of who the audience of a work is. Understanding of the sources of a text includes, besides the author, those people or community for whom the entire text was composed. However, here the focus is not in finding out the identifying features of the addressees. Rather, source criticism encourages the scholars to examine and determine the complex process behind the formation of a text from the point of view of the audience. It involves the study of the conditions and the situations that existed between the audience and the author. This is with the assumption that those circumstances between the author and the audience are the real reasons behind the composition of the work.

Another major area of biblical criticism is literary criticism which is different from historical criticism on the basis of the concept of the text involved in the

analysis. While historical criticism is mainly oriented towards the determination of the historical context in which a particular biblical text is formed, literary criticism takes up the responsibility to examine the text as a finished product i.e. a finished piece of writing. The attention of the biblical scholar here is not how a text came into being and the external factors which contributed to its formation as a written text, rather he is more concerned with what is said in the text or the contents of the text. Daniel J. Harrington in “Biblical Criticism” declares that:

In addition to establishing the best text, biblical criticism also seeks to understand the content and style of the document by means of literary criticism. In its broad sense, literary criticism refers to the systematic analysis of a text with regard to its words and images, characters, progress of thought or structure, form, and meaning. (116)

Literary criticism involves a close analysis of the language of the text which is manifested through the individual words used and their meanings. Daniel J. Harrington provides a short description of the various aspects involved in the literary criticism employed in biblical scholarship:

With the help of lexicons, concordances, and encyclopedias, it is possible to chart the development of a biblical word (e.g., “love”) or motif (e.g., “covenant”), and situate a particular occurrence within such a framework, though caution must be exercised lest the whole history of the term be read into each instance. Words and motifs are used to describe characters involved in an action (narrative), or to

make an argument, or to share a message or an emotion. So it is usually possible to outline the literary structures of a biblical text in terms of the interactions between the major characters (either in the text or supposed by the discourse situation) and to chart the progress of the plot or argument. (“Biblical Criticism” 116)

Therefore, the language of the text becomes essential as far as literary criticism is concerned. Philology and lexicography are applied to find out the meaning expressed through the words. However, literary criticism cannot be limited to the level of individual words as the sources of meaning, and it has to take into consideration the various arrangements of words which include phrases, sentences, paragraphs, chapters etc.

To analyze these, it is often necessary to examine the grammar of a language, which includes the arrangement of words (syntax) and how their forms are changed (inflection or accidence). At this level of investigation, literary criticism is helpful in noting various patterns of sentence structure, such as parallelism (a b a' b') or chiasm(a b b' a'). (Holladay, “biblical criticism” 131).

The analysis of language, employed by literary criticism, necessitates the study of literary style. The vocabulary used in the text is important in determining the style of a particular author or community responsible for the production of a certain text in the Bible. The choice of the words along with the arrangement of these words as well as their effect in the process of conveying the meaning contribute greatly to the determination of the style of writing. The question about the style, whether it is

simple, complicated, ordinary, sophisticated, or argumentative, carries conclusive judgment regarding the meaning of a text in the hermeneutical process. Hence it becomes clear that literary criticism, knowingly and unknowingly, leads to what in recent years of biblical criticism has been termed as linguistic criticism. Stanley E. Porter, in his scholarly writing “Linguistic Criticism,” draws attention to the nature and effects of this new way of looking at the biblical writings:

In those few places where it has been applied, there have often been highly constructive results that have emerged. Some of these include the realization that the authors of the biblical texts have used a variety of linguistic means at their disposal to create, shape, and develop their writings, and that there are a variety of linguistically based means to analyze this usage. Rather than simply concentrating on individual words and phrases, linguistic criticism has drawn attention to a number of larger patterns of usage. (201)

This new way of biblical criticism emanating from the linguistic aspects of the Bible had many advantages over and against other usual ways of critical methods which according to Stanley E. Porter invited antagonism. “Some of the results have threatened to overturn tried and true conclusions reached by other means. Even though linguistic criticism can possibly provide new and substantial support for traditional interpretation, linguistic criticism has often been dismissed because it dares to challenge the traditional perspective” (201). Though not welcomed by the traditionalists and the more conservative circles in the field of biblical hermeneutics,

linguistic criticism is more holistic and integrative than the traditional methods of interpretation.

Literary criticism acknowledges that various literary forms, better known as genres, are constitutive of the large entity called the Bible. The different books in the Bible can be grouped under various literary genres like historical narratives, prophetic works, wisdom, poetry, letter, apocalypse etc. At the same time, smaller sections within these books can be observed to be smaller literary forms. Genealogies, myths related to creation, narratives about individuals, law, psalms, proverbs, testaments, parables, miracle stories, hymns etc. are some of those smaller literary forms. From a hermeneutical point of view, this division of biblical writings into different literary forms becomes important. Holladay enumerates three basic significances for this classification. First, the literary form is a pointer to the meaning of the text. Our prior judgment about the literary form of a particular text influences our interpretation of it. For example, one can interpret Genesis 1-3 depending on whether it is approached as creation myth, allegory, or scientific theory. Secondly, the literary form provides some clue to the text's life setting. When the text is in the form of hymns, it can be concluded that the text comes from a liturgical life setting. Thirdly, recognizing the literary form enables the reader to compare the text with similar literary forms in both biblical and non-biblical writings. These kinds of comparisons are helpful to the reader in recognizing various aspects of meaning in the text which would otherwise be missed ("biblical criticism" 131).

Literary criticism shares with historical criticism the concern over the unity and totality of the text. The text as a finished product attracts the attention of the

literary critic who gives special care to his/her treatment of its literary characteristics. The literary critic has to make proper judgment as to whether the text is a unified whole or the result of a composite work. It also comes under the purview of literary criticism to decide whether certain portions in the text are interpolated earlier or later, and whether they all are coming from the original author. The importance of literary criticism in biblical scholarship lies in the fact that it applies all the features used in the analysis of any literary text. Hence the questions regarding narrative, characters, plot, point of view etc. are raised in the interpretation of biblical texts.

What is noteworthy here is the fact that literary criticism treats biblical texts as any other literary text without attributing any mystical or divine aura which may hamper a spontaneous and less subjective interpretation. It is thanks to literary criticism that the biblical trajectory of hermeneutics freed itself from the clutches of conservative circles which distorted the genuine interpretations unaffected by the influence of tradition and authority.

Form criticism, which has affinities with literary criticism but is fundamentally different from it, was developed in the twentieth century when biblical scholarship had passed on from a pre-critical stage to critical hermeneutical practices. The pre-critical interpretation of the New Testament was centered on the depiction of the life of Jesus in a harmonious manner receiving data from the gospel accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. However, as Edgar V. McKnight opines, this traditional methodology was inadequate as far as the students of the Bible, who take it in a critical way, are concerned. In his scholarly investigation, *What is Form Criticism?* McKnight declares:

The gospels are not biographies of Jesus, written for historical purposes by the original disciples of Jesus; rather, they are religious writings produced a generation after the earthly Jesus to serve the life and faith of the early church. However, the Gospels are based on earlier oral and written sources, and methods have been developed for moving through the tradition of the Gospels to the earthly Jesus. (2)

This observation turns out to be of great significance in the analysis of the life of Jesus represented in the fictional works where the authors take freedom in interpreting the biblical accounts. This will be discussed in the coming chapters where we will take into consideration the selected authors in this project.

Kenton L. Sparks provides the basic concept of form criticism when he says that “Form criticism(FC) is an English rendering of the German term *Formgeschichte*, literally ‘history of the form,’ a critical research methodology that seeks to understand ancient texts especially the Bible – by giving careful attention to their ‘forms,’ i.e., typical genres of verbal discourse” (111). The origin of form criticism is usually traced back to Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel who made a critique of Wellhausen’s theory of Pentateuch having four sources such as JEDP and found that the four-source theory is only partially correct. He concluded that “Israel had originated as a primitive oral society, and it followed that any effort to recover the Pentateuch’s composition history would need to peer behind its literary sources to the smaller oral traditions from which the literature was eventually composed” (Sparks 112). This theory of the oral traditions or forms were later extended to the study of New Testament and the major figure in this area is Rudolf

Bultmann, although names like Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Martin Dibelius were also prominent. These scholars were concerned with the synoptic gospels and the materials that led to the formation of gospel accounts on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Bultmann subjected the gospel accounts to a particular method of analysis, which later became popular as the theory of biblical demythologization. Bultmann reveals the purpose of this new method as “discovering what the original units of the synoptics were, both sayings and stories, to try to establish what their historical setting was, whether they belonged to a primary or secondary tradition or whether they were the product of editorial activity” (History of the Synoptic Tradition 2-3). Hence form criticism was primarily concerned with singling out the initial form (oral or written) of the text in the synoptic tradition. “Form criticism,” says Edgar V. McKnight, “moves from the existing text of the Synoptic Gospels to an earlier stage which does not now exist” (17). These investigations into the initial forms of tradition in the making of the gospels were later extended to other books of the Bible.

Here the basic question is how to differentiate form criticism from its close ally, literary criticism. Form criticism, it can be said, makes use of literary criticism. While literary criticism focuses on the literary form of the entire book, form criticism delimits its area of inquiry into smaller literary units within a large writing. Form criticism may be labeled as synchronised form of historical criticism as well as literary criticism. It carries the burden of determining the literary form of textual reality and tries to foreground the *Sitzim Leben* (setting in life). Life situation of the community where the literary form takes its origin influences the understanding of

the meaning it entails with it. “The proper understanding of form-criticism rests upon the judgment that the literature...springs out of quite definite conditions and wants of life from which grows up a quite definite style and quite specific forms and categories” (Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* 4). Hence, we find that form criticism places more importance to the smaller units of biblical writing, with the result that less attention was paid to the individual authors or editors. Moreover, it insisted on greater emphasis on the community as a formative influence in the shaping and preservation of the material: “form critics are interested in discovering the various life settings which led to the development of short, stylized literary forms specifically designed to address those settings” (Watson 8).

A detailed analysis of the history of form criticism which is closely related to redaction criticism reveals its major emphases as given below:

- (1) The Gospels as we now have them are not single creations out of a whole cloth but consist of collections of material, the final selection and arrangement of which we owe to the evangelists themselves. Mark is here the primary influence; he created the literary form "Gospel" and Matthew and Luke both follow him and use his material.
- (2) The material now presented in the Gospels has a previous history of use in the church, largely a history of oral transmission. It circulated in the church in the form of individual units or small collections of related material and in this form it served definite functions in the life and worship of the church, in preaching and apologetic, in exhortation and instruction.

(3) The smallest units of tradition, the individual story, saying, dialogue, etc., have definite forms which can be defined and studied. Each of these forms served a definite function in a concrete situation in the life of the early church. This situation is what is referred to as the *Sitzim Leben* of the material. (Perrin 15-16)

Form criticism which was one of the prominent methods of biblical interpretation, both for Old Testament and New Testament, began to lose its hold as a result of the emergence of postmodern reader-response theory and redaction criticism. These two new ways of reading and interpretation concentrated on the textuality of the text rather than its oral stage of formation. Kenton L. Sparks compares and contrasts reader-response theory and redaction criticism with form criticism. Reader- response criticism engages in interpretation of the text's final form which evokes the responses in the readers. Here the critic shows no ostensible interest in the author of the text or the oral and literary sources employed by him. Redaction criticism developed as reaction to form criticism which failed, due to its predisposition for pre-literary traditions, to notice or give attention to how the traditions were finally combined by authors/editors to produce the final text. Redaction Criticism focuses attention on the important process of collecting, arranging, and organizing the text (113).

As mentioned above, the process of how different materials were combined together to form one document is what is meant by redaction criticism. V. George Shillington explains:

Whatever home the smaller discrete units of text (called *pericopae*) may have had prior to their incorporation into the biblical documents, their new place in a document serves the interests and intention of the redactor who brought them together. The study of the shape the sources and traditions take within a document of Scripture is called redaction criticism” (234-235).

So, redaction criticism aims at revealing the implications of the text in its finished form by an analysis of the complex process of editorial works. James R. Beasley, et.al. describe, in *An Introduction to the Bible*, redaction criticism as “an attempt to understand the theological viewpoint, the literary interests, and the life setting of the author, and how those might have shaped the author's presentation of the material” (42). At the same time, a redactor who actively involves in the process of the formation of a biblical text should not be confused with the author. However, redaction criticism is a process whereby new nuances are added to the text as may happen with the activity of its originator or author. V. George Shillington clarifies this idea by giving an explanation to the authorial function involved in the composition of the textual materials of biblical writings:

In the strict sense, though, a redactor is not an author. Authorship implies an original composition of a literary work. Redaction is more closely aligned with editorial activity and it is therefore more appropriately applied to documents dealing with traditional and historical material, such as the Pentateuch, the Historical Books of the Old Testament, the Gospels and Acts of the New Testament. (235)

The function of the redactor in redaction criticism becomes valuable and necessary to arrive at a correct perspective. The fundamental question is whether the activities performed by the redactor are similar to that of the editor and whether the redactor can be addressed as an editor. F. Gerald Downing's statements try to provide a satisfactory answer to this question and throw light into the very nature of redaction criticism itself. "In general usage," according to him, "a 'redactor' is another word for an editor, but in biblical and related studies the word has come to specify one who chooses, arranges, expands, curtails (any or all of these) older written or oral matter in detail or more extensively to express his or her own views and understanding." He adds that "Redaction criticism is then an endeavor to discern such a process and interpret its results. We may also attempt to discover and evaluate the older sources that the redactor seems to have used, and redaction criticism may help in that quest, but that is not its main aim" (310).

Redaction criticism progresses to different stages in its analysis of a redacted text material. "The redaction critic's task is to analyze the individual instances where the editor has redacted an earlier text or tradition, assess the overall significance of such changes, and interpret these in the light of the editor's literary and theological purpose" (Holladay, "biblical criticism" 133). In the Old Testament, this kind of redaction takes place in 1 and 2 Chronicles. Here materials from 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings have been appropriated and subjected to editing by the chronicler. Holladay gives instances of redaction in New Testament and particularly in the gospels, where it is evident that the gospel of Mark is the earliest and both Matthew and Luke redact from it. "The particular emphasis of the redaction critic is to isolate

the precise points at which the tradition or text has undergone changes at the hands of an editor or redactor, and from these to try to determine the theological motivations for the changes” (“biblical criticism” 133). If this is carried out for each gospel the major themes or preoccupations of the author can be deciphered. This leads to high appreciation for the author as having a theology or point of view of his own and reinstates the role of the author as distinct from the mere editors whose main work is to put together various materials available to them.

What is of great importance, as far as this study is concerned, is the fact that redaction criticism brings to light the various individual theological perspectives that influence in the transmission of the message of the Bible. Norman Perrin, in his scholarly work *What is Redaction Criticism?* brings out this concept saying “we wish to make it quite clear that we do understand “redaction criticism” as being a cipher rather than a description: it refers to the whole range of creative activities which we can detect in an evangelist, an author, a transmitter of tradition, and in which and by means of which we learn something of that author’s, evangelist’s, transmitter’s theology” (66). This aspect of redaction criticism provides hermeneutics with new insights into the concept of orthodox Christianity and the Catholic Church for whom the Bible is nothing less than the ‘word of God’ intended for universal human beings.

Unlike all types of biblical criticism discussed above, canonical criticism concentrates on the canonical text, the final and conclusive product in the process of the formation of biblical writings. It takes less interest in the stages of development leading up to the writing of the text and its various literary aspects. It seriously

analyzes the Bible as a collection of canonical writings used in Israel and the church, two communities of faith that regard it as sacred and normative. This approach challenged the historically oriented methodologies, as Marvin A. Sweeney points out in “Canonical Criticism: Childs’ Approach.” According to him:

Canonical criticism, an interpretative strategy that focuses on reading the final form of the biblical text in relation to its context in the biblical canon, constitutes one of the major critical methodologies that has challenged the predominance of historically based or diachronic biblical exegesis in the latter portion of the twentieth century. (46)

Canonical criticism raises the issue of canon formation, since canonical texts have been used by the interpretive communities or communities of faith for a long time. Though the canonical critics pay special attention to the authenticity and authority of the final text in consideration, one has to enquire how those books in the list of the canon acquired that esteemed position. V. George Shillington provides a rather theological explanation to the question in *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies*:

After many years of extensive use in the various communities of faith each of the books in its final form proved itself to be a faithful guide, along with others, for the life and thought of successive faith communities. The books having proved themselves thus were catalogued as authoritative Scripture, the Word of God. The list of books became an abiding guide for generation after generation of

Christian faith communities. The books on the list, in addition to their use as a guide for living faithfully, formed the basis for doctrine and church order. (111)

This explanation, seeming theologically justifiable, in effect, raises various other questions which I consider proper to discuss in the concluding part of this thesis.

Canonical criticism is less interested in evaluating the socio-political events and experiences that shaped the text and controlled its development to the final form. Referring to Brevard S. Childs' concept of canonical criticism, Mark G. Brett observes, "during the process of the literature's formation, the authors and editors have deliberately passed over social differences in order to make theological points" (151). However, he refutes this kind of an interpretation since it is difficult to prove that the authors were not influenced or unaffected by the external factors of social and political nature. Even the final editor cannot be entirely free of this situation. Moreover, one cannot guarantee that the text does not conceal some deeper motives behind the surface meaning (152).

Holladay summarizes the main effects of the application of canonical criticism to a biblical text. The biblical writings here are endowed with many dimensions which were absent at the time of its long process of composition, and which they have acquired. Though the original writing was without any intention or disposition for its becoming normative for the faith community, the fact that it has acquired such a position demands its reading from such a canonical perspective. The canonical status of a biblical writing implies that it has been elevated to the status of the universal application in the community of faith. The question here is not what the

text had spoken to the original audience, but what it does speak to the present living community. Moreover, canonical criticism demands that a particular text be treated not as an isolated piece of writing, but as part of other writings. It no longer takes existence as a single voice to be heard alone; rather it remains as part of other voices which cannot be heard exclusively of other voices. One biblical text must be read in synchronization with other texts of the Bible. Finally, the interpreter can no longer inquire the message of a single text but must investigate its message as part of the entire canonical message (“biblical criticism” 133).

As far as biblical hermeneutics is concerned, there are certain key factors or issues that need special attention so that a rather reliable, if not objective, interpretation of the Bible can be attained. All those basic questions in the long tradition of biblical scholarship do not require elaborate investigation in the present study. Hence what I intend to do here is to discuss those issues that are germane to the purpose of this dissertation and those topics related to the New Testament scholarship.

One of the fundamental questions, raised both by a believer in Christian faith and a critical analyzer of the books of the Bible, is regarding authorship. Who the author of the Bible is, is a significant problem that formulates the polemical situation faced by the early Christian community even from the initial stages in the use of biblical texts in their liturgical services. As far as the original Christians were concerned, the answer to this compelling question could never be someone other than God himself. Throughout the history of the church it could be observed that the authorship of both Old Testament and New Testament is attributed to divine power.

Patristic fathers and various church documents testify to the concept of the divine authorship of the biblical books (Flannery 683).

The divine origin of the scripture however, raised many questions for the early interpreters of the Bible. The first problem was to understand and explain how God could be the writer of the book. We do not find anywhere in the early writings on the Bible the idea of a physical authorship of the Bible attributed to God, a theory which of course would turn out to be absurd and impossible to hold on for a long time. Therefore, the church began to acknowledge and propagate that scripture is the end product of the human intervention in transmitting the word of God. Seen in this perspective, the role of identifiable individuals in writing the Bible began to be accepted. J.W. Rogerson testifies to this view in his *An Introduction to the Bible*:

The traditional view of the origin of the Bible is that it was written by identifiable individuals. Early Jewish and Christian tradition identified Moses as the author of the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy), Joshua as the author of Joshua, Samuel as the author of Judges and Ruth, David as the author of many of the Psalms, Solomon as the author of most of the book of Proverbs, as well as of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, and the prophets as the authors of the books named after them. For the New Testament, the Gospels were attributed respectively to Matthew (Levi) the tax collector and disciple of Jesus (Matthew 9.9), John Mark the erstwhile companion of Paul (Acts 15.37), Luke the physician (Colossians 4.14) and the apostle John. Paul was responsible for the majority of the letters, the others

being attributed to James, Peter and Jude, while Luke was responsible for Acts and the apostle John. (21)

Accepting and promoting this view of the individual writers as the originators of the biblical texts led to further problems that had to be tackled. How can one hold the view that God is the author of the Bible while adhering to recognize the role of the individuals in the formation of the Bible? This is the fundamental question in this regard, the answer to which led hermeneuticians to the formulation of another significant theme in the field of biblical theology, namely, inspiration.

The concept of inspiration stems from the debate over the nature of the authorship attributed to the Bible because biblical authorship is a question of perennial interest to the scholars, students, and members of Christian communities who try to answer the basic problem of the origin of various texts in the Bible. One may identify two fundamental solutions to the issue of the source from which the books of the Bible are produced. They are well formulated by V. George Shillington in his scholarly work *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies*: “At one end of the discussion are those who say that God speaks to the human condition through the texts of the Bible written at different times by various human writers in communities of faith. At the other end are those who believe that God wrote the words in the Bible quite apart from any human agency” (84). It was the latter position that the church was holding on for a long period in the history of the origin and development of Christian faith. The conservative circles in the church could in no way heed to the possibility of any human intervention in the transmission of the ‘word of God.’ They were afraid that doing so may deprive the Bible of its

divine authorship, authority, canonicity, and divine revelation. Hence, for them, inspiration implies total and perfect divine communication of the will of God in a direct and immediate manner without any possibilities of an agent or intermediary taking part in this process of transfer of divine message.

With the advancement in biblical scholarship and research new insights into the nature of divine communication through the scripture were put forward and the church began, though reluctantly in the beginning, to give up the former concept of inspiration. The concept of word-for-word divine inspiration as formulated both by the Catholic Church and the protestant churches began to wane in the light of advanced research in biblical theology. Camille Focant refers to this shift in the theory of inspiration that stormed western theological perspectives. “The customary, sometimes maximalist representations of the divine origins of Scripture, particularly when conceived in terms of an almost word-for-word dictation, were in fact badly shaken by the rediscovery of the role of human authors and of the culturally dated nature of their vision of the world” (720). This necessitated the acceptance of the human agency in the ‘word of God’ which could be handed down to man only through a human element/agent without which the entire divine communication is likely to fail. Luis Alonso Schökel and Jose Maria Bravo explain in *A Manual of Hermeneutics*, the nature of inspiration in the Bible: “A fundamental characteristic that we find in the Bible is that the sacred writers proffer a communication claiming to be a word, a message from God. Jews and Christians believe that these authors were inspired or assisted in a special way by a divine gift, since the message they transmit belongs, in the first place, to the sphere of God, who wants to communicate

with us” (22). Hence the church was compelled, from within herself, to postulate a theoretical position where a reconciliation of the divine and human elements working in the production of biblical texts could be realised. As Camille Focant argues,

Divine inspiration is split into three types: dramatic or pastoral inspiration, which animated the shepherds of the chosen race and thereby sacred history; oratorical inspiration, which accompanied and complemented the pastoral inspiration; and scriptural inspiration, which brought about the setting down in writing of the things done and said. This division makes it possible to reconcile with a theory of scriptural inspiration the fact that the biblical text is the outcome of a long and sometimes turbulent history, animated in its totality by the Holy Spirit. (721)

The paradigm shift in the theory of inspiration, as described above, is the ecclesiastical willingness to accommodate and accept the significance of the role of human authors in the making of scriptural texts. Nevertheless, the church is very obstinate in demanding priority for divine origin over the human and still calls the Bible ‘the word of God.’ *Dei Verbum*, the decree of the Second Vatican Council, which proffers the church’s reflections on the Bible, categorically declares God as the author of the Bible. Accordingly, the decree presents a church who “accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the ground that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself”(Flannery 683). Though the primary inspiration and authorship is attributed

to divine power, the council tolerates the presence of human agency in writing the books of the Bible. “To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their powers and faculties so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more” (Flannery 683). This recognition of the writers of the scripture as true authors who contributed to the communication of its message and incorporated their entire human qualities in its unfolding, proved to be revolutionary as it was a major shift from the previous positions of the church which could never conceive of the scripture which takes human beings as authors. This renewed concept of authorship with regard to the Bible, in spite of its revolutionary potential, was not promoted by the official/conservative circles in the church. As a result, though biblical theology and scriptural research took up and profusely made use of human authorship in scriptural interpretation, the church representatives could not approve of it due to its far-reaching influence in the life and ministry of Christian churches.

As a corollary to the theory of inspiration it becomes inevitable to analyze the inerrancy or infallibility of scriptural writings. The logic of inspiration necessarily invokes interest in ruminations and questions about inerrancy. The central question raised here is: How can one find anything wrong in the Bible while admitting the theory that it is divinely inspired or authored by God himself who is *Summum Bonum* or absolute goodness? This formally valid argument inspired the minds of various theologians and scholars of scripture who paved the way for serious intellectual

discussions in this regard. The bone of the contest was the question of divine/human authorship and the resulting indefectibility or incapability for going erroneous.

J. W. Rogerson places this ongoing debate on the authorship and infallibility of the Bible in the context of the rise of fundamental and rigid doctrinal positions in the churches, both catholic and protestant, with regard to the study of the Bible. In his scholarly work, *An Introduction to the Bible*, he observes:

Among the doctrinal position adopted was the view that the Bible was verbally inspired by God and that it was therefore infallible and free from error. By verbally inspired was meant that God, through the Holy Spirit, had been involved in the process of writing in such a way that God could be said to be the author of every word. If God was the author of every word, it followed that the Bible could contain no errors. (126)

As is clear in the above-mentioned passage, the real difficulty in reckoning the Bible as the result of human agency is the belief and insistence on the verbal inspiration and inerrancy ensuing from such an illogical and superfluous standpoint contrary to common sense.

However, the concept of the Bible as an infallible treasury of unchangeable truths was not claimed by the churches universally and for all times. Many churches, especially protestant churches, took a more liberal position in this regard and were not adamant on proclaiming the non-erroneous nature of the Bible. Roland Boer, in his work *Rescuing the Bible*, provides a brief account of how the change in the

theological position of those churches began to shift from a more flexible and liberal tone to adopt more conservative, rigid, and authoritarian reverberations:

In the 1960s and 1970s, mainstream churches were largely liberal in theology and their understanding of the Bible. As a human document, through which you may hear God speak to you, the Bible was thankfully flawed and certainly not inerrant. It is, after all, a collection of documents written by human beings and they, as we all know, are somewhat fallible. You could sit loosely with many of its stories, such as the virgin birth of Jesus, or the myth of creation, or even the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and you preferred Jesus the Teacher rather than an almighty saviour. (38)

At this phase, conservative circles in those churches were comparatively less influential and as a result remained minority groups. However, this situation began to undergo considerable change. According to Boer:

as the mainstream churches began losing members for a variety of reasons, such as demographic change and the inroads of secularization, the evangelicals came up with a convenient narrative: these churches were losing members because they had lost their focus on the Bible and its central truths. They had become side-tracked on social issues, they had lost their sense of the importance of the Bible. (38)

In the course of time, this theory gained prominence and the churches began to appear more and more rigid in their theological and biblical explications. Needless to

say, the concept of inerrancy of the Bible was reinstated with renowned emphasis and all other theoretical formulations against it were declared invalid and blasphemous.

The idea of inerrancy, followed *verbatim*, stranded the church in ongoing conflict with the secular/scientific unfolding of the knowledge about the world and human life. Thus, the church found it extremely difficult and confusing to accept modern scientific discoveries and theories. Theories like Darwinian evolutionary mode of universe shook the very foundations of the theological interpretations followed by the church and compelled it to come out with more convincing and realistic explanations to biblical accounts. The very concept of truth had to be redefined and reformulated. Hence the traditional terminology of inerrancy was replaced, in the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution of divine revelation (*Dei Verbum*) no.11, by the word truth, a more positive terminology to be used in the contemporary domains of knowledge where it is declared that since "all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scriptures, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures" (Flannery 683). Camille Focant tries to interpret the implications of this position, laid down and promoted by Second Vatican Council, in a more positive sense when he declares:

The intellectual conception of revelation is left behind—the need is no longer to defend truths or religious doctrines, but to promote the search for the truth that leads to salvation and that is revealed by words and actions in Scripture. There is no longer any question of materially limiting the truth of the Scriptures, but it is made clear that

the Bible expresses its truth from the particular formal standpoint of the order of salvation. (722)

Even in this seemingly progressive shift in the church's attitude to the truth in Bible, there is an element of conservatism in the sense that the church does not address the core issues where the secular understanding of truth and ecclesiastical notion of truth enter into conflict. The church, in reality, tries to evade the crucial problems regarding the truth/falsehood of the various controversial biblical accounts when it demarcates between the truth in the ordinary sense of the term and those spiritual truths essentially needed for the sake of salvation. This dilemma is explicit when the church tries to answer its critics by setting distinction between erroneous nature of details related to the individual reflections of the authors and the ultimate salvific message they impart. Richard P. McBrien, in his commendable work *Catholicism* affirms this when he declares that "The human authors were not necessarily without error. Many of their personal opinions and even convictions may have been wrong. But inerrancy means that these opinions and convictions did not affect the message itself" (61).

Any discussion on the fundamental concepts of the Bible cannot ignore the idea of canon or canonicity which is highly influential in the later development of biblical hermeneutics in the church. Etymological origin of the term canon may prove to be useful in this discussion since it throws light into the very nature of the concept. Raymond E. Brown and Raymond F. Collins refers to the term 'canon' as a transliteration of the Greek *kanōn* which in turn could be traced back to *qaneh* in Hebrew meaning 'reed'. According to them "Classically, *kanōn* was a straight rod or

bar- a tool used for measuring. A mason's or carpenter's measuring stick; kanōn metaphorically connoted a rule, norm, or standard (of excellence)" (1035). The idea of normativity is later attributed by some of the biblical books prevalent in the faith communities. James H. Charlesworth, in his work "Writings Ostensibly Outside the Canon" describes how this development took place in the case of the biblical books:

After the period for the composition of the apocryphal books, the word once known only in Hebrew finally denoted in Greek and many other languages a standard for judging what is in a definitive collection of Scripture... Eventually, scholars used the word canon for a selection of scrolls or books that were the standard collection of Scripture—the books in which the faithful could find God's Word. The word canon should have been, but was seldom used as the measuring standard by which to discern God's Word in other documents. (58)

Canon, perceived in the sense presented above, is the term which came to be used to refer to the books of the Bible acknowledged by the Christian authorities and hence is considered to be inherent parts of the official scripture. Roger T. Beckwith points out that "It was in the latter part of the fourth century AD that Christian writers began to refer to the collection or list of the scriptures as a 'canon'" (49). This list, of course, was not the result of any sudden happening. One could say that the process of canonical development of New Testament books was underway from the first century onwards which reached its culmination in the fourth century. Roger T. Beckwith continues his analysis of the formation of New Testament canon figuring out the

three criteria set by the Fathers of the church in the beginning centuries for determining canonical works. Those three criteria known to have applied to New Testament writings are origin in the apostolic circle, continued use, and orthodoxy. Based on these standards, by the end of the second century, there emerged a tacit agreement to accept as scripture the Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteen Epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John. However, seven books (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation) had not yet found their place in the canonical list. It was not until the fourth century that they were agreed upon as a result of very gradual and slow process of evolvement. It is of special interest to note that many books which remained in high esteem till that time were excluded to arrive at the final list (51).

Particular mention must be made regarding the driving force of the development of canon in the church. Canon formation is a complex process which cannot be limited to one or two contributing factors like the intervention of church authorities, influence of Fathers of the Church, liturgical use, faith and devotional practices of the community of the faithful, etc.; rather a close scrutiny reveals that the New Testament canon is a composite of all these factors. At the same time, it could be taken as an expression of the faith of early Christian communities, rather than a mere declaration by the church authorities. Thus, William J. Abraham argues that “the primary purpose in canonizing Scripture was to provide an authorised list of books for use in worship. The primary setting envisaged for the use of Scripture was not that of the science of theology, or that of the debates of scholars, but the spiritual

nourishment of the people of God” (140). This view is again confirmed by Jens Schröter when he says:

...the emergence of the New Testament in the form in which it ultimately gained general recognition was a long process in which the church ensured continuity with its beginnings and the mutual correspondence of its confession and its accepted writings. With this, demarcations from positions and writings that did not gain acceptance in the church were formulated at the same time. The emergence of the New Testament canon can only be adequately understood in this context of the emergence of the Christian confession and of Christian communities that made use of writings that brought this confession to expression. (250)

Hence, the formation of canon, as Jens Schröter claims, is the result of no intervention of the authorities like bishops or synods. If it is admitted, the criticism that the Bible is formulated according to the choice of the individuals in the church, will be invalidated. However, it does not defend the church from the allegation that the expression of the faith of the communities is limited to particular individual communities and their faith experiences are subjective. Hence, I would like to argue that the Bible and its canon can never claim universal validity both temporally and spatially. Moreover, the canonical texts become authentic, as per the nature of the hierarchical structure in the church, only when they are officially declared to be so by the authorities concerned. Therefore, the church cannot escape the allegation that the

Bible is the result of the authoritarian and absolutely self-protective choice by the church.

Canonical formation of the Bible naturally highlights the composition of a good number of books prior-existing and co-existing with those texts which were to be declared official versions later in the church. These books, once considered to be sacred and divinely inspired, were even used in the prayers and liturgical functions in early Christian communities. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, in his introduction to the book *New Testament Apocrypha* clarifies the content of the term Apocrypha. "Writings which were not accepted into the canon of the Old or New Testament, and thus do not rank as 'canonical,' but are in some way or other connected with Old or New Testament writings, are commonly described as Apocrypha" (13). The term Apocrypha etymologically refers to something secret or hidden and in this sense they are secret literature which is not part of the 'authentic' and official texts in the Bible. Eric Junod observes that this meaning is important since, in the ancient times, the name Apocrypha referred to those books accessible only to the initiated or the members of the community and, as a result, were not open to the use of the public. By the fourth century, when the canon of the Bible had been officially established, Apocrypha began to assume a negative meaning. Consequently, those non-canonical books believed to have been written or used by heretics later than the composition of the canonical texts, were termed Apocrypha. (Junod 69)

Many books, which had been hidden so far, have been discovered, thanks to modern historical and archeological investigations, leading to the formation of a lot of advanced theories with regard to the origin and development of scripture. Not all

of them are considered to be part of Apocryphal heritage, in the strict sense of the term, because many of the texts may be termed as pseudepigrapha. Though they are used, not without erroneous judgement, interchangeably there exists a considerable difference between them. "Strictly speaking, the Pseudepigrapha are religious books, most of which were written between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., which have authorship falsely attributed to another person, usually a well-known saint or patriarch. The Apocrypha refers to a body of hidden or esoteric work of questionable authenticity" (Lumpkin 6).

The significance of the Apocrypha in the life and culture of the church is assuming higher levels as means of better understanding of the canon itself. Though initially they were considered to be of lower status and not included in the list of inspired books, the fact that many of them were used in the primitive church communities for liturgical and other spiritual purposes, turned the interest of biblical scholars to the relevance of making research on them. Hence, W. O. E. Oesterley, in his scholarly analysis of the Apocryphal books, opines:

It is a welcome fact that in modern times the value of the Apocrypha is being increasingly recognized as a source for the understanding of the background of the New Testament in all circles, and that the modern view of inspiration, which does not hold that inspiration guarantees the historic and scientific accuracy of every statement, but that inspiration lay in the spiritual principles and message set forth, and that it worked through the personality of the writer, which could therefore dim the message- that this modern view of inspiration can

find much in the Apocrypha which is as truly inspired as much that is in the Old Testament. (130)

The Preface to the books of the Apocrypha in the Genevan Bible too manifests a positive approach with regard to the role of the Apocrypha in the life of the church and in the field of biblical research. “As books proceeding from godly men they are received to be read for the advancement and furtherance of the knowledge of history and for the instruction of godly manners; which books declare that at all times God had especial care of His Church, and left them not utterly destitute of teachers and means to confirm them in the hope of the promised Messiah” (Oesterley 129).

The contemporary Christian response to Apocryphal books seems to be rather negative and at times antagonistic. This may be due to ignorance or negative prejudice with regard to the origin and nature of those non-canonical works. The close affinity between the books of the Apocrypha and those of the closed canon, if analysed with an unprejudiced mind, may reveal how close and mutually explaining they are. J. K. Elliott justifiably argues that “the early non-canonical Christian literature commonly called New Testament Apocrypha makes use of the characters and events in the New Testament proper. The motive for much of the writing is to fill perceived gaps in the New Testament narratives, and to that extent the writings may be read as interpretative of Christianity’s foundational documents” (22). He goes on to prove this interdependent and enriching relationship between them referring to how several of the sayings of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* and in the synoptic gospels manifest similarities. “Differences in wording may sometimes be seen as interpretative theological changes, comparable to differences observed in a Gospel

Synopsis or to deliberate scribal variants in the New Testament manuscript tradition. All such change may signify the way in which the early church continually reinterpreted its store of dominical sayings, because they were seen and used as living texts” (Ibid). Thus, tradition of the apocryphal writings paves the way for new approaches in understanding the scripture. The existence of various books in the original decades of the church and later, selection of few of those texts as canon provides room for arguing against the absolutist claims of the church over the Bible as the sole source of spiritual nourishment and revelation. It is also to be noted that limiting the number of books in the list of the canon by the church again fails the natural unfolding of the divine and principles of Christianity. One may argue that the spontaneity and freedom involved in the spiritual, if not religious, life of the Christian community is torpedoed when the church decides to fix the books of the scripture and to offer a closed canon.

Any discussion on the Bible, particularly on the New Testament with a focus on the Christological themes, could be rendered incomplete if one fails to address similarities and differences found in the three gospels other than that of John. This leads the biblical scholars to a specific issue in dealing with the gospels, namely, the synoptic problem. Frans Neiryck formulates the problem: “The first three Gospels in the canon (called “synoptic”), Matt, Mark, and Luke, have much in common and are significantly different from John. Similarities and dissimilarities among the Synoptics gave rise to the question of interrelationship, the so called Synoptic problem” (587). The incongruences, found within the synoptic gospels with regard to the chronological order of events and other materials, were problematic both among

the scholars as well as the common readers/members of the community of faithful. In order to find an acceptable but theologically sound explanation to this issue, various theories were formulated by biblical scholars. George Frederic Seiler, in an attempt to offer an explanation, warns the readers against considering the evangelists “as authors who wrote, like learned annalists, according to exact chronological order. They, indeed, have regard, upon the whole, to the order of time; but they frequently adhere more closely to the order of things, as they desired to combine and collect into a short compass many of the sayings or actions of Jesus which mutually resembled each other” (485- 486). While accepting this theory which appears to be a direct and simple explanation to the problem faced, the question regarding the source/sources from where the evangelists collected and combined the gospel materials still remains unanswered.

The quest to arrive at a hypothetical source which stands as the ‘original’ source paved the way for various theories. Since a detailed analysis of those theories does not come under the purview of this study only the most prominent theory still in prevalence is mentioned here. The hypotheses regarding the order of composition as in the case of Augustinian theory which listed the synoptic gospels in the order of composition as Matthew, Mark, and Luke were later rejected (Neiryneck 587). Joseph B. Tyson explains how scholars arrived at new theories regarding the interrelationships existing between different gospels. According to him, most of the scholars consider, in contrast to St. Augustine’s hypothesis, Mark as the earliest gospel upon which both Matthew and Luke relied as a source and used it independently. This is assumed to be the reason for the similarities of Matthew and

Luke with Mark. This theory was insufficient to explain the similarities between Matthew and Luke in materials not found in Mark and needed further investigations. Hence scholars came out with the theory that both Matthew and Luke independently used a hypothetical source and named it as 'Q' source. This is called the Two-Source Hypothesis since it postulates two major sources, namely Mark and Q, employed in the composition of Matthew and Luke. The materials independently found in Matthew and Luke which were not derived from Q or Mark were designated with the symbols M and L respectively. Hence, this theory states that Mark was written first; Mark, Q, and M were sources for Matthew, and Mark, Q, and L were sources for Luke (1009). This theory which gained acclaim as a sensible and explanatory one is the two-source theory where Mark as well as another source called Q are considered to be the original sources used by the authors of synoptic gospels. "The 'two-source' theory offers a provisional solution to the synoptic problem. It explains the congruence of Matthew, Mark and Luke, as well as the correspondence of Luke and Matthew in opposition to Mark: Matthew and Luke use Mark as one source and Q as the other source" (Becker 132). The discovery of Q was a major development in biblical research. J.D. Crossan calls it even as Q gospel and remarks that it "is a hypothetical document whose existence is persuasively postulated to explain the amount of non-Markan material found with similar order and content in Matthew and Luke" (110). Wilfred L. Knox's arguments, in his introduction to volume 1 of *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels*, too must be considered in the discussion on the validity of the two-source theory. He testifies to and justifies the possibility of the independent existence of two sources in the formation of the gospels:

It may be regarded as reasonably certain that Matthew and Luke were acquainted with a source which included an account of the temptation of Jesus, a sermon on a mountain, the healing of the centurion's servant and the message of the Baptist; but whether this cycle was not originally compiled from earlier tracts remains to be investigated. The rest of their common material—and it must be remembered that 'Q' is simply a symbol of the material common to Matthew and Luke which is not found in Mark—may have been derived from the same document; but some at least of the difficulties of the Q hypothesis are more easily explained if it be supposed that both evangelists were drawing on collections of material which in some cases reached them in the same written form, but in others had an independent history behind them. (7)

However, there are scholars who openly dispute with proponents of Q source theory and question the existence of such a source. Scholars like Mark Goodacre argue that undue importance assigned to it could be the result of two major reasons. The first reason is that scholars have been frozen with old-fashioned source-critical questions and they do not want to reexamine issues that they regard as having been long solved. The second reason tries to emphasize the fact that scholars are unwilling to give up again such a popular and reasonable solution to a complicated issue. He argues:

But it is also clear that the apparent elevation in Q's status has itself generated a fresh rhetoric, a rhetoric that then reinforces the situation

that it is attempting to describe. For as soon as Q began to leave the arena of the Synoptic Problem and source criticism, the language of theory and hypothesis was quickly replaced with the language of “discovery.” Once an artifact of this importance has been “found,” scholars are naturally loath to lose it again. (5)

There are theories that date Matthew first, considering it as the source for Luke, and further treats Matthew and Luke as the sources for Mark. There are more complex theories which attribute oral traditions and revisions in the gospel texts as the reason for the similarities found in the synoptic gospels (Tyson 1009).

Nevertheless, the two-source theory still prevails among scholars of modern biblical research. What is of more significance to my research is not the ‘what’ of various speculations regarding the synoptic gospels but the ‘why’ of it. I am more interested in the question of the nuances of the existence of different traditions and sources for gospels. The conclusion that can be arrived at from this discussion is that the ecclesiastical claims to a unilateral interpretation of the Bible and the gospels fail to be convincing. The church can no more demand and offer singularity in the hermeneutical practices which in the final analysis justifies the existence of various fictional attempts from the part of the writers, analysed in this study, to offer interpretations on the life of Jesus as different from those insisted by the church.

Chapter 3

Interpreting Theology

Theology, being a discipline of discourse about divine beings and spiritual realities, is usually understood and conceived as metaphysical in its subject matter as well as methodological frame work. As a result, a tension between the terrestrial realities as well as the mysteries that pertain to the heavenly/divine arena occupies a significant feature of theological studies. The binaries of secular/religious, human/divine, this worldly/other worldly get special attention with regard to the perception of those realities, which form the subject matter of theology and its area of investigations. The events and realities of the world are tangible and can be grasped by the employment of physical or sensory faculties of knowledge while metaphysical concepts belong to the domain pertaining to the mode of knowledge surpassing sensory perception. Nevertheless, those extra-sensory and abstract realities, and the forms of knowledge related to them, demand an emphasis and reliance on means of comprehension and knowledge attainable only through humanly made means and methodologies of understanding, however limited and/or limiting they may be.

Religion, which considers itself the sole custodian and disseminator of divine-spiritual experiences and realities, takes up the responsibility of inculcating those religious phenomena in the minds of the people in general and in the minds of its followers in particular. It is this religious function that paved the way for the emergence of various theological teachings and dogmas. No religion is an exception to this. Christianity, one of the major world religions, has developed a wide spectrum of such varied and therefore complex systems of thought. Any attempt to depict the

major tenets in the theological teachings of Christianity, being a broad area of investigation, will be a herculean task. Therefore, the present analysis of Christian theology is restricted primarily to those concepts which are relevant to the topic of study undertaken in this thesis. Though what forms the crux of the analysis pertains to the premises of the Christological frame work, one cannot avoid taking a glimpse of the related issues and precepts, only within the framework of which the discussion on Christ can be carried out fruitfully. Hence different theological concepts such as God, Trinity, creation, Evil, and Satan come under the purview of this analysis, together with various dogmatic issues connected with the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The discussion on the Christian/catholic theological discourses invariably brings in an understanding of the very nature of theology with its various formulations in history. The very term theology has undergone significant alterations, with people theorizing it over the centuries and in different geographical locations all over the world. This necessitates a preliminary knowledge about the notions and characteristic features of theology so that the present analysis of Christian theology can be situated in its right context.

The etymological understanding of the term theology provides a rather limited sense of the concept as it extends to the study of the divine alone. Deriving from two Greek words, 'theos' meaning God and 'logos' suggesting science or study, theology originally came to mean the science (study) of God and attaining knowledge about topics pertaining to the divine realm (Hill 1011). However, this initial meaning which is limited to the discourses about God alone, in the strict sense of the term, began to undergo various changes. Alister E. McGrath explains this shift in the

meaning, in his foundational work, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, where he states that the term ‘theology’ initially presumed to mean “the doctrine of God,” acquired a subtle new meaning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the development of the University of Paris. The systematic study of the Christian faith at the university level had to be designated with a specific name and as a result, the Latin word *theologia* came to mean “the discipline of sacred learning”, which incorporated the entire body of Christian doctrine, and not merely the doctrine of God. He further explains the shift in the meaning with the advent of the recent developments in the academia where the focus of attention falls largely on the study of religions as a human phenomenon. In this phase, theology is concerned with the study of religion from a committed perspective, where secular religious studies denote a critical or neutral perspective. This position is corroborated by some of the scholars who argue that the gap between the secular and religious perspectives should be maintained for the sake of safeguarding the ‘purity’ of each approach. This is true in the case of any study of religion or of theological studies as a scientific and rational mode of approach. The gap between the secular mode and religious mode of investigations into the pronouncements of theology becomes apparent in the words of Donald Wiebe who declares in his work:

If the academic study of religion wishes to be taken seriously as a contributor to knowledge about our world, it will have to concede the boundaries set by the ideal of scientific knowledge that characterizes the university.... A study of religion directed toward spiritual liberation of the individual or of the human race as a whole, toward

the moral welfare of the human race, or toward any ulterior end than that of knowledge itself, should not find a home in the university; for if allowed in, its sectarian concerns will only contaminate the quest for a scientific knowledge of religions and eventually undermine the very institution from which it originally sought legitimation. (xiii.)

However, it seems that this kind of a distinction between the secular and Christian concepts is nothing but an elusive strategy adopted by the conservative circles in the religious field in order to explain away the incongruities and contradictions arising out of the explanations given to various topics theology engages in. It can also be argued that it is these incongruities that persuade people like Wiebe to maintain that theology cannot be included in university curricula because it would compromise the integrity of scientific disciplines. I would like to reserve this issue for further consideration and discussion in the concluding section in this thesis.

Another major aspect of theology is the question why theology must be treated as an academic subject. The crux of the question is rooted in the layman attitude to articles of faith where the common man (believer) is more interested in pursuing the faith and to practice what they believe in. Their argument is: 'I believe in and practice the various elements of faith and this is enough to fulfill the religious duties.' They associate faith with feeling and practice and as a result keep thinking at a distance. The symbiotic relationship between believing and rational thinking is discarded at the expense of 'feeling faith.' As Donald Luck rightly points out, theological investigations into the mysteries of faith is necessitated by the fact that

"even though theology is 'believing thinking' as much as it is 'thinking about believing,' it still remains thinking. It is an academic subject even when pursued by the church for the sake of the church" (40). Further, this seemingly logical and convincing issue actually proceeds from a basic misunderstanding with regard to the very origin of theology or theological discourses in the church. Going back to the historical development of the institutional church, it could undoubtedly be confirmed that the church was polemical from its very inception. It had to confront the then contemporary culture and philosophical ideas which were, naturally, in opposition to the new faith and philosophy of Christianity. This necessitated the exposition of the faith and its epistemological nuances first to the believers and then to those who attacked the faith and practices of the church. As a result, the church began to engage in polemical exposition of the biblical message and to defend the various liturgical and ethical practices in the congregation. As the church developed and began to expand, newer cultures and philosophical systems had to be faced and addressed in the light of the existing doxa and praxis in the church. This paved the way for the origin and development of different theological ideas and systems in the church. It is this contextual nature of theological systems that Tyron Inbody encapsulates in his work *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology*:

Paul had to preach a Jewish messiah to a gentile world; the apologists Justin and Origen had to explain the gospel in a culture of Greek language and learning; Augustine had to counter the loss of the meaning of history with the imminent collapse of the Roman Empire; Thomas Aquinas had to make a radical shift in his intellectual framework when Aristotle replaced Plato as the new philosophy of the educated; Luther had to reinterpret the gospel when the medieval Roman Catholic synthesis began to shatter; Friedrich Schleiermacher had to ask what faith is and what it can affirm when Enlightenment modernity challenged most traditional Christian assumptions; Karl Barth had to resist some of the horrible consequences of modernity and affirm that the gospel stood against all human wisdom and culture; Latin American, African-American, and feminist theologians have had to deideologize Christian theology with a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' and offer a postmodern reconstruction of Christian faith. The thought of every theologian reflects at least as much personal context as it does the gospel. No theology fully transcends a context; all theology is contextual. (21)

Contextuality empowers theology to come out of the metaphysical and abstract image traditionally attached to it. It also emancipates theology from the clutches of the authoritarian and conservative Christian churches and empowers it to assume a respectable position as an academic discipline.

Once theology is taken to be an academic discipline what comes as a corollary is the discussion on the scientific nature of it, though it may provoke doubts regarding what is the nature of science itself. Science which is based primarily on the empirical method in analyzing available data, denies anything unintelligible. Theology, with its emphasis on metaphysical realities and rootedness in faith, apparently engages in discursive practices not pertaining to the empirical or the mundane. There is always an attempt on the part of theological circles to retain the gap between science and theology claiming that both of them are dealing with concepts that are mutually exclusive. However, a responsible analysis of history would uncover the dangers of holding such a position in the sense that theology/religion without a tint of the rational and scientific approach would end up in superstitions and inhuman actions. Any talk on God and related issues must be carried out responsibly and in a reasonable way so that theology becomes acceptable and cognizable to the people. .

If we define theology as 'speaking responsibly about God' then 'responsibly' also means scientifically responsible. In this sense, theology aims at giving a scientific account of faith. For this reason, theology should not run away from attempting to be scientific, in the sense of: speaking in a scientifically responsible way. For the intellectual integrity of faith is what is at stake here. (Brink 155)

Scientific interpretations and theological/religious interpretations often enter into mutual conflict on the issue of validity of explanation provided by them. However, the most important solution is one of dialogue and not of conflict. This is

what Peter Byrne proposes in his scholarly work “Theology and Scientific Understanding” where he writes: “Dialogue between the sciences and those disciplines, such as theology, concerned with human meaning is, all things considered, inevitable” (439).

Theology which employs philosophical concepts to explain its major ideological propositions too must be discussed in the event of analyzing the scientific nature of theology. This way of doing theology within the context of philosophical discourses is termed as ‘philosophical theology’. Thomas V. Morris brings out, in his work *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, a rather comprehensive view regarding the nature of this seemingly contradictory approach to theology: “The aim of *philosophical theology* is to employ the best of philosophical methods and techniques for the purpose of gaining as much clarity as possible concerning the content of the major concepts, presuppositions, and tenets of theological commitment, as well as the many connections that exist among them” (16). He continues to say that some of the basic questions asked in philosophical theology are: How can we generate a logically coherent conception of God? What constitutes the source of our concept of God? How can we understand the nature of God’s knowledge? How is God related to time? etc. Though the realm of philosophy is characterised by the use of logic and reasoning to arrive at concepts and theories, it has a long history of coexistence and collaboration with theology which asserts the primacy of faith and revelation in attaining truths which pertain to the metaphysical realms of human existence. This affinity between philosophical investigations and theological inquiries may be traced back to the Middle Ages as proposed by Albert

Henrichs who states that, “The maxim that philosophy should serve as the handmaiden of theology was frequently proclaimed by scholastic theologians in the Middle Ages. They expressed it in these terms: *Philosophia theologiae ancilla*” (437). The Latin phrase quoted above places philosophy at the service of theology, a position accepted and popularised by the medieval theologians who were guided by their prejudice against the function of philosophy. Malcolm De Mowbray argues that even philosophers like Emmanuel Kant were proponents of the theory that the primary purpose of philosophy was to function as a torchbearer to illuminate the path for a better progress of theological pursuits. A close analysis of this philosophy-theology nexus leads us to the politics of conservative religious people who had to ward off philosophy with its emphasis on rationality as the true epistemological tool, because of which, quite naturally, it was unassailable and unwelcome to theology. However, I would argue that theology cannot do away with philosophy and the rational ways employed by the philosophical process as it is necessary for theology to take into account the instruments of philosophy in its search for the meaning of life, to be relevant to the contemporary world. This unavoidability of philosophical methods in theological ruminations is asserted by Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions in its entry “Theology”:

Even though the extent varies from religion to religion, theology claims in some degree a normative element—arising out of the authority of a divine teacher, personal revelation, or some other kind of spiritual encounter that elicits commitment. It is the precedent of authority that most clearly distinguishes theology from philosophy,

the tenets of which are generally based on timeless evidence apprehensible by autonomous reason. Nevertheless, theology does employ reason in addressing many of the same concerns as philosophy. (Frassetto 1089)

However, it could be argued that there may be differences of opinion with regard to the relevance and possibilities of philosophical theology as a special academic discipline. For, the emergence of philosophy of religion as a new discipline accelerated the waning of influence previously exerted by philosophical theology. This predicament of Philosophical theology is scrutinised when Ingolf U. Dalferth, in “Philosophical Theology”, writes;

It begins to decline with the philosophical critiques of Hume and Kant, and the rise of philosophy of religion and the onto-theological alternatives of Hegel and Schelling. Notwithstanding its continuation and even revival in the analytic theism of the second half of the twentieth century, it appears to many to be religiously barren and not a viable account of religious life and practice. (307)

This does not imply that theology is a discipline which does not and cannot take recourse to philosophical methods and logical reasoning. While philosophy of religion attempts to analyze the rationality behind the very institution of religion and its various modes of existence in different cultural milieu, the philosophical theology is an attempt to analyze the religious experience on the basis of reasonable explanations.

Though theology seems to provide the impression that it is an expression of one's faith in God and mysteries related to the divine realities, what constitutes the core of theological discourses is its emphasis on critical reflections. This criticality is asserted when theology is defined as "the Christian faith subjected to critical thought" by Tyron Inbody who explains that "To think critically about Christian faith is to be able to make judgments about one belief or another in the light of the arguments given for or against the meaning and adequacy of a belief. Sometimes, to be sure, critical reflection means rejection. Sometimes it leads to affirmation. More frequently, it means reinterpretation of a symbol or doctrine" (14-15). The insistence on the critical nature of theological engagements may not be easily acceptable to the church authorities who usually demand some kind of unquestionable allegiance from the part of the believers. However, no discussion can be termed theological unless and until it assumes logical and critical exposition of decrees of faith. It becomes clear when the method of theology as proposed by David Tracy and Paul Tillich is taken into consideration. For the latter, the method of theology is what is popularly known as 'method of correlation', where the correlation which any theological investigation tries to establish is between the Christian message expressed in and through various agencies like scripture, creeds, doctrines etc, and the human situation. For him, the method of correlation consists in making "an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions" (70). This method focuses on the establishment of relationship between two foundational realities in any theological discourse: the human situation and the Christian message. David Tracy, on the other hand, moves further and tries to improve the correlation

principle already established by Tillich. He tries to warn against repeating or accepting at face value these two realities. What is needed is a critical interpretation of both the human situation and the Christian message revealed through the Christ event. In his significant work *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, Tracy proposes that this interpretative strategy establishes a method of “mutually critical correlations between interpretations of situation and event as each reality influences (controls, correlates, informs, transforms) the understanding of the other” (406).

What needs special attention here is an understanding of the method of theology since it is considered to be a ‘science’ of God and divine realities. But the scientific nature of theology is different from that of the natural sciences and hence it needs a philosophical rather than empirical method to explain the mysteries of God and other realities. Hence, Lawrence Feingold suggests that “a method combining faith and philosophical reason is necessary to penetrate into God’s Revelation. For, theology is a science based on faith in God’s Revelation, but it must also use reason in order to think about what God has revealed” (147). From this statement what can be deduced is the privileged position theology provides to reasoning or rational activities in the church, especially in the theologizing process. There is an apparent significance accorded to reason in theological discourses the theologians engage in, both within the church and outside it as part of the missionary programmes where explanations to the various doctrines held by the church become a necessity. However, the prime position demanded by reason in theology is not an absolute one in the sense that the theologians are controlled by the church and its fundamental

sources of faith: “The work of the theologian has a proper freedom of inquiry dictated by the demands of the truth. However, the academic freedom of the Catholic theologian must be understood in accordance with the sources of theology: Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium” (Feingold 174). What we observe here is the serious attempt on the part of the church to retain its power and authority over theologians lest they go contrary to the teachings of the church. This tactic can very well be observed in the attitude of the church towards other disciplines of science. The First Vatican Council undoubtedly declares its apprehensions when speaking about the relationship between faith and reason. The council announces:

Nor does the Church in any way forbid that these sciences, each in its own domain, should make use of their own principles and of the method proper to them. While, however, acknowledging this just freedom, she seriously warns lest they fall into error by going contrary to the divine doctrine or, stepping beyond their own limits, enter into the sphere of faith and create confusion. (Dupuis 49)

This spirit of suspicion of the rational sciences and an attitude delimiting the freedom of theologians maintained by the First Vatican Council continued to wield influence in the church, though not very explicitly, even after the seemingly progressive Second Vatican Council.

The power of the church over theologians leads to the need for discussing the role of Magisterium in theology. The term magisterium is derived from the classical Latin term ‘magister’ which literally means ‘master’, a term that entails the role and authority of one who was a master in the various applications of the term. Francis A.

Sullivan tries to provide a rather comprehensive definition when he states: “in modern Catholic usage the term “Magisterium” has come to be associated almost exclusively with the teaching role and authority of the hierarchy” (617). The task of this ecclesial authority is to safeguard the purity of the divine mysteries handed down to the church from Jesus, its supreme head. “Dealing with the doctrinal decisions of the Church, the magisterium assumed jointly by the bishops and the pope performs a particular role as an authority that bears witness” (Walter 450). According to the teachings of the church, the Magisterium is obliged to protect the members of the church from being contaminated with the false precepts and perverted teachings of those who are against the spirit of Christ. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly delineates the nature and function of this teaching office of the church: “It is this Magisterium’s task to preserve God’s people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the people of God abide in the truth that liberates” (para. 890). What is important in this regard is the position of the Magisterium as the final word in matters of faith and morals in the church. The role of theologians is to a great extent subservient to that of the Magisterium so much so that the propositions made by the theologian are considered to be the result of his individual reflections and reasoning. His ideas and concepts assume the status of official teaching only when they are ratified by the teaching authority of the church. This leads to the conclusion that the relative freedom which the church claims to bestow upon the theological circles is limited and subject to the scrutiny of the official and conservative circle of the church.

The meaning of Magisterium as the teaching authority of the church later underwent changes in its nature. Francis A. Sullivan, referring to this change, states: “An even more recent development is that the term ‘magisterium’ is often used to refer not to the teaching office as such, but to the body of men who exercise this office in the church; namely, the pope and bishops” (617). This points to a considerable shift in the very nature of Magisterium which has specific ramifications in the understanding of the theological positioning in the church. For, what happens here is the change from the functional nature to the individualistic nature of Magisterium. The operation of power at the level of a function is now transferred to the hands of the individuals who can wield the power in the way they like. Hence, this transfer of power is to be considered as a deliberate attempt from the part of the custodians of fundamentalist ideologies within the church. The problems associated with this conceptual shift in the magisterial power get aggravated further when the church attributes infallibility, in matters of faith and morals, to the Magisterium. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts that the pope and bishops partake in this special power which the church calls a charisma:

The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful- who confirms his brethren in the faith- he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals...The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise

the supreme Magisterium, above all in an Ecumenical Council. (para. 891)

The concept of infallibility again can reasonably be conceived as a strategy of the church in order to prop up its own power and authority in an unquestionable manner. This is because, without this notion of infallibility, which naturally ensues from the idea that the Church is the representative of Christ/God on earth, that its Head and officers are divinely ordained, the Church cannot exist. In abdicating infallibility and along with it the divinely ordained nature of the Church, it will be equal to effectively subverting itself and compromising the very rationale of its existence. With regard to the role of theologians in the church, what one finds is an ambiguous stand which may not be so naïve and innocent. The church adopts a strategy of ambivalence in the sense that while the theologians are called upon to interpret and explain the decrees of faith in the church, they are not allowed to go freely with their reasoned arguments if they do not submit their programme of theology to the magisterial teaching. Referring to this special relationship of the theologian with the church, David Tracy states: “That relationship usually takes the form of internalized sense of responsibility to the church, indeed a sense of real loyalty to the church community and its traditions and an internalizing of the plausibility structures and the ethical and religious imperatives of the tradition” (25). This internalization of the magisterial teaching is an impediment to free and active theologizing when it is attempted from a more secular ambience. This is the real crisis of theology in the postmodern condition and it will be discussed in the coming pages where postmodern theology is analysed.

Apart from Magisterium, two other foundational concepts that require special consideration in analyzing theology are doctrine and dogma. The various mysteries of faith upheld by the church which receives the status of doctrine and dogma constitutes the subject matter of theology: “the principal function of systematics is the understanding of the mysteries of faith, whether these mysteries have been explicitly affirmed in dogmatic pronouncements or not. Really, then, the issue is one of mystery, and of how mystery is preserved in systematic theology” (Doran 20). Doctrines and theology in the church are correlated in the sense that the doctrines may be seen as the outcome of a selective process employed by the church. The various statements of the faith of the Christian community are the result of some theological reflections on the mysteries of God and the Christ event. But some of them are attributed special significance due to various needs of the church in particular instances. Richard P. McBrien testifies to this when he states that “ In the face of perceived threats to the purity and integrity of the faith or to the unity of the faith-community, the pastoral leadership of the Church on occasion chooses among competing theologies to formulate normative rules that might guide the Church’s preaching, catechesis, and formal teaching” (20). The term, ‘doctrine’ comprises all those normative rules officially declared by the church for its faithful to follow in their religious life. The literal meaning of the term doctrine is teaching. Though the origin of doctrines is contextual and spatio-temporal, there is a basic doctrine called Kerygma which is to be found in the scripture, and upon which the Christian faith is founded from the first generation of believers. The Kerygma as proclaimed in the scripture is that “ Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the

scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4) and that “ God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (1 Cor 2:36). All doctrines that originated consequent to this basic principle of faith are the results of various attempts on the part of the church to safeguard the ‘purity’ of this fundamental teaching of the church. Kerygma constitutes the very basis of the Christian belief and demands adherence to it from all the members of the church. The doctrines too are to be taken seriously into account by the community of the faithful, though they are teachings which do not have the status of inalterability or universality. The papal encyclicals, pastoral letters etc form the doctrinal teaching of the church.

Those doctrines which are to be accepted without questioning their validity or reasonableness because of their truthful nature in matters of faith are dogmas. Nancy C. Ring gives a clear understanding of how dogma emerges in the church:

....since the Christian community is the locus not only of the Holy Spirit but also of historical development as well as ideologies resulting from various biases, there have been instances throughout history when the teaching office of the community has responded to particular crises of Christian self-understanding by defining what is understood to be authentic and true. The pronouncements of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) are examples of such teaching, which because of its importance to Christian self-understanding is characterized as dogmatic teaching. Dogmatic teaching refers to those doctrines

understood to be certainly revealed and which mark the parameters of orthodox faith. (“Doctrine” 292)

Dogmas are binding to the faithful so much so that they are believed to proceed from the divine power of teaching bestowed on the Magisterium. The term dogma “refers to the church’s belief that in scripture and tradition God’s intention for humankind has been revealed to the ecclesial community and that the community’s leadership can authoritatively interpret and promulgate this truth” (Ring, “Dogma” 293). A dogma assumes singularity and absolutism while there can be various doctrines which try to understand and explain the dogmatic truth. As Rabbi Wayne Dosick points out, this divergence in the understanding of articles of faith is obvious in the case of biblical truths which fail to answer conflicting ideas on God and other mysteries. The church here comes out with its doctrinal and at times dogmatic proclamations with regard to them and closes the possibility for a multidimensional approach. This is where again theology enters into some sort of difficulty in its free pursuit of ‘truth’. The various doctrinal positions proposed by different theologians have to encounter stumbling blocks in front of the dogmatic declarations of the church authorities. The reluctance of the church to review and reinterpret the dogmatic positions causes difficulty to the theologian’s attempts to make Christian principles credible and intelligible. What is needed is openness from the part of the church authorities to subject the doctrines to scrutiny in its process of exposition of dogmatic articles of faith. What is recommended in this regard is the method adopted by Pannenberg who exhorts to scrutinize the doctrines in question in order for exposition, rather than assuming their truth a priori. Systematic theology needs to

explore the relevance of religious traditions using doctrines as hypotheses and not conclusive truths. These hypotheses may be affirmed, altered or given up in the process. He further encourages Christians to face the risk involved in this method. According to him, the church should have such confidence in the truth of its depository of faith that it can let its divine truth shine forth from the content without any need for preceding guarantees (Pannenberg 52). Even after the promulgation of some dogmas in the church it becomes the diligent duty of the theologian to make necessary interpretations and exposition of its meaning in particular contexts, a fact which again may invoke the suspicious and prejudiced attitude of the authorities.

After a very short analysis of a few fundamental concepts in theology as done above and before going into the detailed analysis of specific themes frequently appearing in theological discussions and especially in the key texts adopted in this study, what needs special attention is the nature of theology in the present day. A very common (mis)understanding about theology is that it is a static discipline unlike other disciplines of science and secular academic fields of knowledge which develop at a high rate:

theology is a dynamic enterprise, interacting with circumstance and changing through time. Even those theologies which claim to be maintaining fixed positions of traditional doctrine, and to be resistant to passing philosophical and cultural fashions, are able to do so only by developing new forms of argument to counter new criticisms of their position. (Clements 272)

For example, Christianity, in the traditional stream of theology, was designated as the only religion that could guarantee salvation to the entire humanity. However, Theology was compelled to drop on the way such unwarranted claims of superiority attributed to Christianity in relation to other religions of the world. In *An Introduction to Theology*, Victoria LaPorte points to the perils of such claims of pre-eminence over other religions and faiths:

Therefore, the assertion that Christianity manifests in any sense the absolute or `superior' truth in comparison to other religions seems to pose a threat to the benefits of equality and tolerance evinced in a secular society. Moreover, the belief in the uniqueness of Christianity and the associated claim that Christianity is the only means to salvation seems to be more reminiscent of centuries gone by when Christians had the upper hand and both suppressed and oppressed members of other faiths. (73)

This points to one of the traditional approaches maintained by theological discussions which may be characterised as exclusivism. This is an orientation Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular followed throughout centuries. Here the task of theology is to establish claims and find out reasons to establish the dominion of the Christian church over other religious traditions in the world. In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin declares that a Christian who believes in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, considers it as a universal truth, that is, a truth which is applicable to the whole of human race. He claims that this position is not arrogance but faith in the uniqueness of Jesus. He

further exhorts Christians to remain confident in the truth of the Gospel despite the damaging effects of biblical criticism.

An approach in theology which goes in contrast to this position is the inclusivist approach. Victoria La'Porte points out that this is a theological stance where we should recognize the salvific role of other religions too. This does not mean that a Christian has to surrender the essentials of his or her faith, such as the doctrines of the incarnation (God made man) and the doctrine of atonement (that Jesus made possible the salvation of all humankind). Here Christianity retains its uniqueness as the self-revelation through Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, and the salvific power contained in the other religions is to be understood through Christ. Religions before Christianity and outside Christianity thus become legitimate vehicles for salvation (85). Karl Rahner is one of the famous theologians who advocated such inclusivism. According to him, God desires the salvation of the whole of humanity: "But God desires the salvation of everyone. And this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ, the salvation of supernatural grace which divinizes man, the salvation of the beatific vision" (122). However, it seems this is a limited inclusivism, since there is no indication of an acceptance of other faiths that could still be seen and interpreted through the Christian doctrine.

Both exclusivism and inclusivism are found defective since they are founded upon the authoritarian and monopolizing attitude towards other faiths, directly or indirectly. Inclusivist approach gives the impression that it accepts other religious traditions but, in reality, it is nothing but a proclamation of the superior attitude of the Christian church and a method of appropriation. This paved the way for a new

approach which could be more feasible and acceptable. And as a result, there emerged the pluralist approach which considers faith as nothing but culture-bound. All religions emerge in and through a specific culture. As a result, the theological speculations could never claim any advantage/specialty for a particular religious tradition. John Hick, one of the representative proponents of the pluralist approach criticizes the traditional affirmation of Christianity's central position as all religions are interpretations of God/real. So, he claims that "the world traditions seem to be more or less on a par with each other. None can be singled out as manifestly superior" (30).

The Pluralist approach was the outcome of various changes that took place in the secular world of knowledge. Theology which remained monolithic and absolute with its traditional methods of wielding power over the believers and even the secular world began to face challenges with the advent of postmodernism. Since the texts which are selected for the present study come under the broad category of postmodern fiction or can be argued to be so, what is appropriate here is to make some relevant observations with regard to what can be termed as postmodern theology. Theology, as in the case of any other secular academic discipline, was shaken with the advent of postmodernism. Initially, theology got struck and dumbfounded in the presence of a series of strange and sweeping ideas and theories brought in by the postmodern thinkers and movements. It is expressed in the "introduction" given by Graham Ward to the work *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*:

What postmodernism suggests is that a certain social sea-change is occurring; new emphases and sensibilities are making themselves felt and older ways of looking at and explaining the significance of the world are becoming otiose or no longer credible. If I were asked what was the substance of those emphases and sensibilities, then, very broadly, I would say (and this returns us to the theological) that the death of God had brought about the prospect of the reification and commodification (theologically termed idolatry), not only of all objects, but of all values (moral, aesthetic, and spiritual). (xiv)

From the point of view of deconstructive postmodernists, says David Ray Griffin in his introduction to *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, constructive postmodernism offers not a new way of looking at the old realities in the sense that it does not manifest enough courage to deny positive meaning to the notions of the human self, historical meaning, and truth as correspondence, which were central to modernity. Moreover, it caters to premodern notions of a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature. However, it is questionable because, though there is a reference to many premodern concepts and discursive modalities, a substantive reality or meaning is somewhat foreign to postmodern theorizations. At the same time, Griffin argues that this is something to be positively acknowledged because this new revisionary, constructive postmodernism does not simply carry the premises of modernity through to their logical conclusions, but criticizes and revises those premises. Through its return to organicism and its acceptance of non-sensory perception, it opens itself to the recovery of truths and

values from various forms of premodern thought and practice that had been dogmatically rejected by modernity. This constructive, revisionary postmodernism involves a creative synthesis of modern and premodern truths and values. John W. Riggs too makes a clear statement with regard to the nature of postmodernism:

In postmodernism we find appeals to particular individual and group experience, rather than appeals to standards of reason; appeals to particular contexts with their politics, rather than appeals to universal truths; appeals to language and how it functions to shape and express human experiences, rather than appeals to systems of thought and their transcendental arguments; and appeals to creative novelty that blurs accepted boundaries (“hybridity”), rather than appeals to traditional categories and organization. In short, postmodernism makes appeal to context-bound situations and voices skepticism over claims about reality itself. (5)

Postmodernism brought about considerable change in the way in which modernism tried to do away with God and theological concepts. While modernism attempted to analyse and undermine theological categories with the use of reason and to retain individual freedom from the clutches of authority, postmodernism set forth the denial of rationality as the basic criterion for any epistemological enterprise including theology. “Theology continues to be that against which postmodernism defines its freedom: the freedom to create one's own values set against submission to an absolute truth, the autonomy of human beings set against obedience to a transcendent God, and the free play of interpretation set against belief in any final,

authoritative meaning” (Ingraffia 6). The traditional understanding of the major concepts and strategies of theology underwent thorough reconsiderations leading to new ways of doing theology and formulating critical tools to engage with the arena of theological investigations. The very nature and purpose of theology were redefined. Postmodern theology, argues Mieke Bal, need not labour itself over the idea of God’s existence or which God occupies primacy over other Gods in the new multiple society. “Instead”, he proposes theology’s postmodern mission as, “ staying rigorously on the side of the human subjects who make up and are shaped by that culture, such an atheological theology can break open the confining limitations imposed by authoritarian religion and open up possibilities of different forms of relationality that are insensitive to old, ill-conceived taboos” (21).

Thanks to the influence of these drastic changes both in the theological as well as secular fields of academic discipline, and as a reaction to the aesthetic and critical contributions of postmodernism and the complex cultural logics of postmodernity, a variety of theological responses were prompted leading to plural ways of doing theology which finally negates any absolute and objective understanding of religious realities. Hence, it seems appropriate and necessary to delve into the various types of theology which emerged in response to postmodern thinking which crept into the ecclesiastical institutions of academic disciplines. Some of these new approaches were polemic in nature while the others tried hard to find some areas of convergence with the secular trends. It is quite difficult a task to define postmodernism because it is more a condition, as Jean-François Lyotard proposes in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, than a philosophical system.

The response of the theologians to this new condition that emerged in the secular field and later began to assert its power over matters of faith, paved the way for the rise of postmodern theology/ies. A consequent observation, therefore, which may be made about the nature of this new mode of theology (postmodern theology), is that it many a time defies any specific definition. At the most, one can say that these are theological responses against the modern theologians' attempt to delimit theology to the rational and scientific explanations, though not without its weaknesses as we observe today in the postmodern thinking process.

As against modernism's insistence on the scientifically proven, coherent, authoritative, homogenous, and rationally confirmed systems of knowledge, the characteristic feature of postmodernism was a merging/withering away of borders between disciplines. "The mixing of tradition and appropriation of ideas from different art forms and disciplines was a return to an era when the boundaries that existed between disciplines were vague and porous, allowing idea to move easily between them" (Drolet 11). This phenomenon of interchanging ideas and areas of interest influenced theology as an academic discipline and it began to draw considerably from those secular arenas of knowledge in the pursuit of meaning to religious mysteries. As a result, theology began to undergo certain transformations in its content as well as methodology. Areas of interest that were important in earlier periods in the history of the church underwent considerable change. Some of the teachings of the church lost significance and were wiped aside from the main stream. Systematic Theology, the traditional and orthodox branch of theology lost its flamboyance and flair in the pursuit of a more secular way of theologizing and

interpreting divine mysteries compatible with the ethos of the society. So postmodernism marks the end of a single, dominating, hegemonic theological enterprise only to present a rich variety of postmodern theologies. This liberation brought about by postmodern thinking is referred to by Kevin J. Vanhoozer using beautiful biblical images in his preface to *The Cambridge to Postmodern Theology*:

Postmodern thinkers have overturned the tables of the knowledge-changers in the university, the temple of modernity, and have driven out the foundationalists. Or, to take an even older image: postmodern prophets have marched, Moses-like, into Egypt and demanded “Let my people go.” Postmoderns have resisted their harsh modern taskmasters together with their requirement to make epistemological bricks out of the straw of logical propositions and the mud of universal human experience. Postmodernity is perhaps best construed as an “exodus” from the constraints of modernity, as a plea to release the other, as a demand to let particulars be themselves rather than having to conform to the structures and strictures of the prevailing ideological or political system. (XIII-XIV)

This new found liberation is thoroughly internal since drastic changes took place within the church and in the theological investigations and methodologies. This revolution from within actually paved the way for the origin and development of various approaches in theology, thus laying the foundations of a good number of postmodern theologies which declared their freedom from the monopolizing power of the traditional systematic theology.

The emergence of postmodern theologies is of great importance to the present study since the analysis of the key texts of the study involves different methodologies that can be qualified as postmodern. The postmodern theological investigations took diverse directions as against the unilinear, objective, teleological, metaphysical and ecclesial dimensions of the traditional ways of doing theology. The trodden paths of the theological tradition were abandoned. This experience brought by postmodernism is expressed by James K.A. Smith when he says that “our experience of cultural shifts and changes can be traced to the advent of postmodernity and the trickle-down effect of postmodernism on our popular culture. The transition calls into question almost all our previously held sureties and rattles a faith that has been too easily equated with such Cartesian ‘certainties’” (17). As a result, theology began to spread its wings to cross borders hitherto forbidden and transformed itself into different forms. Hence, instead of ‘the theology’ we have ‘theologies’ like Deconstructive theology, Postliberal theology, Postmetaphysical theology, Reconstructive theology, Liberation theology, Feminist theology, and Radical orthodoxy. Though the analysis of these theological approaches is not attempted here due to fear of expansion, what is to be noted is their relevance in bringing out novel and enriching ways of interpreting Christian doctrinal positions. Plurality in hermeneutical enterprises has vindicated itself over the traditional theological methods. This naturally gave freedom to those writers who interpreted theological themes through their fictional endeavours. But before going into the hermeneutics employed by those authors we should have a glimpse of the theological doctrines and concepts of church which authors of fiction try to reconstruct through their rewritings of biblical realities.

Religion always takes some basic teachings to be transmitted to its members and demands their allegiance to those doctrines. These could have originated at the time of the inception of the religion or may be the result of later additions. Those foundational precepts are generally termed as the creed. The entire spectrum of the faith of any religion rests on the power and stability of its specific creed. Every religion upholds them as dogmatic in the sense that they are inviolable by and incumbent on its members and followers. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the creed formulated during the First Nicean Universal Council (325 AD) is considered as the germ of its faith. The proclamations of the Nicean creed provide the church with the foundational principles of its faith and life. The Nicean creed proclaims the following as the propositions of faith which should be accepted by the Christian faithful:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten generated from the father, that is, from the being (ousia) of the father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being (homoousios) with the Father, through whom all things were made, those in heaven and those on earth. For us human beings and for our salvation he came down, and rose again on the third day. He ascended to the heavens and shall come again to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit. (Dupuis 6)

The Nicene creed summarizes the quintessential Trinitarian faith of the church which touches upon different articles of faith and concepts like God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The church fathers focused, as W. Raeper and L. Smith argues, on two major concepts of faith:

1. The Oneness of God: how can one make sense of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit and still preserve the oneness of God? This issue revolved around the concept of the Trinity.
2. The Person of Christ: what do we mean when we talk about Jesus as both divine and human? How are these natures reconciled in one person? (112)

However, its basic orientation remains Christological in the sense that it lays emphasis on Christ. This excessive importance to the ideas related to Jesus Christ was due to the contextual necessity to defend the faith against the contemporary intellectual threats against 'true faith'. For example, what was in the minds of the council Fathers while promulgating the Nicene creed was the condemnation of the 'heretic' teaching called Arianism. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, denied the equality of the Son with the Father. The Son was understood to have been created in time by the Father and to have been used by him as his instrument for the creation of the world. "According to Arius, Jesus was a creature who was, as is common to all creatures, dependent solely on the Creator. Jesus was created by God and thus there is no link in essence (ontological link) between God and Jesus. Jesus was created by God as an act of will" (La'Porte 39). The council pronounced 'anathema' on such precepts.

As for those who say: 'There was a time when he was not' and 'Before being begotten he was not', and who declare that he was made from nothing (ex ouk outon), or that the Son of God is from a different substance (hupostasis) or being (ousia), that is, created (Ktistos) or subject to change and alteration, - [Such Persons] the Catholic Church condemns. (Dupuis 6)

It becomes clear, from the above-mentioned reference, that almost all the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church originated from various threats to its faith, primarily 'wrong' accusations against it. The church was not ready to make any adulteration in its teachings, mainly those teachings centered on Jesus, the very foundation of the church. Therefore, the church pronounced curse on those threats to its faith and formulated its own doctrinal concepts with regard to Christian way of life centered on the person of Jesus, whose life and teachings form the essence of the Bible. It is in this background that we are going to analyze the main themes in the Christian theology which is an enlarged exposition of the article of faith established within the creed of the church.

The Christian conception of God is entirely different from that of other religions due to its belief that God is Trinity. Catechism of the Catholic Church expresses the doctrine of trinity stating that "there is only one God, the almighty Father, his only Son and the Holy Spirit: the Most Holy Trinity" (para. 233). God is one but at the same time there are three persons in one Godhead. The Catholic Church, under no circumstances, is prepared to make any compromise in its dogmatic formula of Trinitarian existence of the divine, because, the church holds it as the

most fundamental and essential teaching. Catechism of the Catholic Church testifies to this when it declares that “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them” (para. 234).

Trinity was and is the most controversial and widely discussed precept of Christianity. The difficulty arises when one tries to understand how God can be conceived as one and at the same time as three, even though the church tries to explain that there are no three Gods but only three ‘persons’ in one God. This inability to understand the mystery in a rational analysis has paved the way for some Christological heresies in the ancient church. Vladimir Lossky refers to two of such heretical tendencies: Unitarianism and Tritheism. According to the former there is only one person in God, that of the father, whose son and spirit are only emanations or forces. This theory reaches its intense form in the Modalism of Sabellius where there is no notion of personhood and God is conceived to be an impersonal essence. The three persons are then considered as three successive modes of action, three appearances to the world of the same monad always simple in itself. On the contrary, Tritheism is the belief that there are three Gods in Christianity and that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three separate Gods. Ignoring the unity of three persons in one Godhead, this theory affirms the diversity of God. It is the ramifications of this theory that can be observed in the theory of Subordinationism in Christian theology. Accordingly, Father is the supreme reality in whose divine nature the Son participates. The Logos is therefore only an instrument

of the One and the Holy Spirit in its turn serves as the instrument of the Son with which the function of sanctification is effected on behalf of the Father (36,37).

However, the church explains the different persons in God as the result of the unity of essence. Hence, we find that God in Christianity can be viewed as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Richard P. McBrien clarifies the Trinitarian nature when he says that “Although there are three persons, there is only one divine nature or essence. Because of the unity of essence, there is a mutual indwelling of the persons i.e., of one in the other” (276).

Any analysis on the Christological dogmas and theological investigations regarding the scriptural accounts on Jesus inevitably implies reference to the concept of trinity. Christology without trinitarian theology, according to the Catholic Church becomes incomplete and inadequate to explain its belief in the divine. This interdependence and complementarity between Christology and trinity is recognised by McBrien when he declares:

The Christian confession of the Lordship of Jesus is inextricably linked with the Christian belief in the Trinity, for Jesus’ place in saving history makes sense only in so far as he has been sent by the Father and, together with the Father, sends the Holy Spirit to heal, to renew, and to reconcile all that has been wounded by sin. The Christian understanding of God, in other words, can not be expressed fully, let alone explained apart from the doctrine of the Trinity and the person and the work of Jesus Christ. (276)

Therefore, before going into a detailed analysis of Christological themes in the present investigation, we may look at the teachings of the church regarding its idea of God the father and the Holy Spirit.

Any understanding of the idea of God in all religions and outside them necessarily takes into consideration two possible modes of existence. God could be recognised either as a transcendental being or as an immanent being. “God is at once a wholly transcendent reality, infinitely beyond our comprehension, and the most intimate reality in our lives, closer than our own hands and feet” (Inbody 81). These two seemingly contrary ideas of God could be found in Christian faith. The transcendence of God is more to be found in the Old Testament theology which of course is derived, in a narrower sense, from Jewish consciousness rather than directly Christian. All pre-Christian religions shared this attribute of God as an omnipotent and omniscient being who presents a gigantic figure of some authoritarian dictators. The implications of the idea of transcendence of God are explained by Tyron Inbody as follows: “Transcendence is the theological word for the ‘otherness’ of God. God is the source or origin of the world, not simply one more being in the world. God is beyond the world. No one has ever seen God; no one can imagine the ultimate reality” (82). However, this idea of a God who is keeping aloof from individual human beings is not tenable to the Christian concept of God as love, as proclaimed by Jesus. And this necessitates a different understanding of God as immanent. So, the concept of God in Christian theology tries to do justice to both transcendence and immanence. This is clearly expressed when Langdon Gilkey says that the fundamental problem in formulating a doctrine of God is to reconcile the

absoluteness of God as the unconditioned source of our being with the dynamic relatedness and reciprocal activity of God as the ground, guide, dialogical partner, and redeemer of our freedom.

A very important concept of God which Christian theology tries to uphold is that of a personalist God, as against the metaphysical idea of God as a transcendental being. The essential interaction of God in human history and life led to the formulation of the theory of a personal God: “Refusing either to give up metaphysics altogether or to subscribe to an all-embracing and visionary metaphysics, it concentrates its resources on constructing a realist and personalist concept of God” (Ward, Keith 364). To call God a person is to realize that God is “A person without a body who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe” (Swinburne 1). Alister E. McGrath clarifies that to refer to God as a person is not to equate God with ordinary human beings or to imply that God is limited to a particular place. To say that God is like a person does not imply that God is human, or located at a specific point in the universe. Rather it is an anthropomorphic attempt to affirm the divine ability and willingness to relate to others.

What follows from the personalist concept of God is the representation of God as a father figure. Many religions put forward the picture of a father or paternal characteristics to speak about the identity of God. This idea is more emphatically popularised by Christian theology. The precept that God is the father is considered by the Christian churches as one of the most important revelations of Jesus about God. According to Christian faith, it is Jesus who has revealed God in His totality. “No

one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1: 18). And Jesus revealed him as the Father. This revelation was something embarrassing to his disciples as well as the large community of people who were following him. For, till then they could not even imagine someone addressing God as Father.

According to Christian faith, Jesus' concept of God as father emerged from his own intimate rapport with God. As far as Jesus is concerned, God was not a transcendental reality, but the very cause of his own existence. Many a time he announced that they both are one. This consciousness of Jesus led him to address God as 'Abba' a term that exhibits intimate filial emotions. This teaching about God reflects "Jesus' own profound religious experience manifested in his consistent address of God as 'Abba!' (Mk 14: 36), a heretofore unheard-of way of speaking to God, for, the word means not only 'father,' but expresses a degree of intimate familiarity that no one previously had ventured to presume" (Wright 428).

This idea of god's fatherhood inevitably leads to the concept of a loving God. Compared to many other religions and even to the Old Testament, Jesus spoke of god as love. The god of Jesus is a compassionate one. His providence creates and sustains everything. He is ready to forget and forgive everything. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk: 15: 11-32) testifies to the unfathomable forgiveness and compassion of a fatherly God towards his creatures. Therefore, we find Jesus proclaiming of a loving God in the Old Testament.

The idea of a loving and compassionate divine being is but an inevitable corollary of the precept of the goodness of God. The God of Christianity is a good

God who is taken to be the source of all good things in the world. At the same time there are a lot of biblical references which point to a God who turns out to be the embodiment of cruelty and jealousy. Some of those instances where the other side of the benevolent God is manifested could be found in the following passage:

Time and again God is represented by the biblical authors as instructing his chosen people to massacre indigenous tribes in order to conquer and control a land he has promised them. And this happens, of course, after God has plagued the Egyptians and taken the lives of all their first-born children. God demands worship and announces himself to be a jealous God (Ex 20:5; Deut 5:9). He is pictured as allowing Job to be tortured psychologically, his family killed, just to prove a point. On at least one occasion, he is reported to have engaged in a deception (1 Kings 22:23). (Morris 49)

These alternative accounts in the Bible speak against a concept of God which was projected by the conservative circles in the church, a fact which will be discussed towards the concluding part of this thesis

Christianity believes in God who is omnipotent and omnipresent. God has power over everything and controls and guides the universe to its absolute destiny. He is extremely good and the perfection of goodness. Nothing evil comes out of the divine realm. So, everything positively conceived emanates from God. However, human experience postulates the possibility of some negative forces that oppose whatever is good. These forces are always at work to thwart the divine plan about the universe. These powers are opposed to Christ and his Church. All these evil forces

are focused in the one called Satan. The Hebrew word Satan means ‘adversary’. So, he is an adversary and a foil to God. However, he is not equal, in power, to God. He is considered the prince of the angels who fell away from God before the creation of the world and who was expelled from heaven. In the NT he is described variously as the evil one (Mt 13: 19), the enemy (Lk 10: 19), the ruler of the world (Jn 12: 31), the father of lies (Jn 8: 44) and the evil force behind the Passion of Jesus (Lk 22: 3) (McBrien 1125).

Hence good and evil are basically opposing realities. They cannot go together. Whatever is good is attributed to God and Satan represents everything that is evil and vice. The Church officially recognizes the presence of evil in the world and teaches that God is always at war against it. The faithful are exhorted to participate with God in this fight against evil which appears adopting various forms.

Christianity is a religion that centers on and rests upon a single person called Jesus. It is the life, death, resurrection and various teachings of Jesus that form the founding factors of Christianity as an expression of faith and a religion. As a result, it becomes difficult to understand Christianity apart from the analysis of biblical and theological ruminations on him. So what is attempted here is but a perusal of various issues connected with this central figure of Christianity.

It is the unique teaching of the Church that Jesus is true God and true man. “The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man.” (Catechism of the

Catholic Church, para. 464). So, from the initial centuries themselves, the Church began to proclaim the divinity Jesus.

Jesus' divinity inevitably leads to the idea of his pre-existence. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn 1:1). For the Christian believers, who accept Jesus as the second person of the 'Holy Trinity', there is no difficulty in admitting his pre-existence. He pre-existed every created thing as the Son of God. The New Testament expresses this idea in a number of ways. Leopold Sabourin clarifies this idea in his famous work *Christology: Basic Texts in Focus*

...he is the First- Born of all creation; his unique divine sonship sets him before and above all created beings; as the Logos he appears co-eternal with the Father in John's prologue: as the one sent he is represented as having existed before the incarnation. The same conclusion can be drawn from Jesus' own elthon, "I came" sayings. The manner of this pre-existence remains mysterious. It appears difficult to accept the view that Jesus pre-existed both as a human being and as a divine person. (69)

As explained in this passage the church teaches that the pre-existent reality is not to be misunderstood as the humanity of Jesus. Rather, it is his divinity which was eternally existing with God, that descended into the world for the salvation of humanity. By the capacity of being the Logos, the divine Christ was there with God from the very inception.

It is this eternal Logos, as St. John expresses it, that became flesh (Jn.1:14) and assumed human nature in the historical Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that, the son of God assumed human nature for accomplishing the salvation of entire humanity is called 'Incarnation'. To an extent, we may say that the concept of Incarnation tries to emphasize the divinity of Christ rather than his humanity. It asserts that the incarnated flesh is nothing but God himself. This idea is brought out in St. Paul's exhortation to the Philippian community:

Have this in mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:5-8).

Related to this, theology discusses the title Son of God attributed to Jesus. This is a term linked very much to the idea of pre-existence and divine nature of Jesus. The expression 'Son of God' occurs at various places in the Holy Scripture. However, it is difficult to find homogeneity as far as the meaning of this expression is concerned. A variety of divergent meanings are conveyed when this expression is used at different instances both within and outside the scripture.

Catechism of the Catholic Church expounds the meaning and relevance of this title attributed to Jesus, with the help of various references to the 'Son of God sayings': In the Old Testament, 'Son of God' is a title given to the angels, the chosen people, the children of Israel, and their kings. In the Hebrew Scriptures it reveals the

self-understanding of Israel of its divine election as a people. It could also be found that in the Old Testament it points to the divinely designated and specially commissioned individuals like kings and prophets. 'Son of God', in this context, connotes nothing but an adoptive sonship that builds up a relationship of particular intimacy between God and his creatures. When the term is applied to the promised Messiah, it does not necessarily imply that he was more than human, according to the literal meaning of these texts. Those who called Jesus "Son of God", as the Messiah of Israel, perhaps meant nothing more than this. However, this does not confirm the negation of real sonship of Jesus. The incident in the Bible where Peter declares the sonship of Jesus is a confirmation of this fact.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Mat. 16:13-16). When Simon Peter confessed Jesus as Son of the living God, what he confessed was the transcendental character of the Christ's divine sonship. Moreover, there are two significant moments, where the voice of the Father designates Jesus his "beloved Son". They are the Baptism and the transfiguration of Christ. Jesus calls himself the "only Son of God". By this title he means his eternal pre-existence. The centurion's exclamation "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15: 39) is in the real sense of the term. With the crucifixion and resurrection people began to realize the real divinity and his pre-existent sonship (Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 441-445). It is this 'Son of God', according

to the Christian doctrinal position on the virginal conception of Jesus, who ‘became flesh’ and was born of Virgin Mary. From the very beginning of the formulation of its faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Virgin Mary. Despite various arguments and accusations about the impossibility and puerility of a doctrine like this Christian faith has never, in its tradition, given it up.

The quintessence of the dogma is the belief that Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, a young virgin, without the intervention of a human father. The Church, from its early history, was eagerly holding up this particular dogma in order to substantiate the veneration of Mary which procured wide popularity at a particular point in the tradition of the church. However, the historicity of the virginal conception has not always been unquestioned by the theologians in and outside the church. There are arguments pro and contra. There are two basic arguments claiming its truthfulness. 1) One searches in vain for exact parallels in non-Jewish religions, societies and mythologies which might explain how early Christians happened upon the idea of a virginal conception without even a male deity to impregnate Mary. 2) There were rumours abroad that Jesus was conceived illegitimately. In Jewish polemics against the new Christian faith, there was always the accusation that Jesus was born out of an adulterous union since he was clearly not the son of Joseph (McBrien 541). Though these are various factors contributing to the non-historicity of the event, the official teaching of the church proclaims that Mary gave birth to Jesus not as result of any physical/sexual union with a male.

It is this idea of virginal conception which led the Church to believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary. So, the Church teaches that even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God who became man, she remained a virgin. Jesus is presented as if he is Mary's only son. However, her spiritual motherhood extends to the whole humanity.

Jesus' sufferings and death, together with the resurrection, constitutes the reality that is known as paschal mystery. They sum up the very centre of the Christian concept of God as distinct from all other religious and secular concepts of God. The main streams of thought emanating from these central events in Christianity are to be briefly dealt with.

From an early stage itself the disciples of Jesus began to proclaim the doctrine of a God who is crucified. On the day of Pentecost, St. Peter proclaimed, for the first time, the salvific role of the death and resurrection of Jesus:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know -this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death. (Acts 2:22-24)

This proclamation which began in the very first sermon by St. Peter continued to be the central thematic concern of the church tradition in the early periods of the origin and development of Christianity. Sobrino testifies to the redeeming role

assigned to the paschal mystery of Jesus in bringing about the emancipation of the humanity.

At the very center of Christian faith lies the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, died on the cross. This is a central dictum of the Christian faith, and right from the start it marked off difference between the new faith in Christ and the various religious conceptions current in the world of the time. Paul was fully aware of the fact that the proclamation of a crucified Messiah continued to be foolishness to enlightened Greeks and a scandal for orthodox Jews (1 Cor.1: 23). From the very start the cross of Jesus drew a dividing line between Christian existence and every other type of religion, even though the latter might profess some sort of belief in a dying and rising God (Sobrino 179) .

Christian theology views the crucifixion of Christ as his sacrifice on the cross. This is for the expiation of sins and the salvation of humanity which is corrupted by the taints of sin. “No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* para. 616). Hence the suffering and death of Jesus is a vicarious one which brought about salvation of mankind as its ultimate goal. Sin estranged man from God and only someone capable of mediating between God and man could make reparations for it. Jesus being the Son of God incarnated could easily accomplish this effect.

Christian theology views Jesus' crucifixion as an enactment of the will of God. Jesus, the obedient Son of God, submitted his will to that of the Father and accepted death on the cross which God chose to redeem mankind from the clutches of sin. This explanation, however, demands a reasonable answer for God abandoning Jesus on the cross. "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama Sabach-thani ?' that is 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" (Mtt 27: 46). This desperate cry of Jesus is the scandal of the cross, which Sobrino explains as follows:

The difficulty lies in accepting the notion of God's absence on the cross, which then prompts people to elaborate theological schemes that will avoid the scandal. There are two aspects to the scandal. One is the fact that Jesus, who was the Son, died in disaster. The other aspect is even harder to take even if one is willing to accept the first point. It is that the Father was passive to Jesus' cross. Since God is normally conceived in terms of power, even Christian theology finds it almost impossible to ponder his passivity in the face of Jesus' cross. (Sobrino 192)

Christian theologians try to answer this problem asserting that God himself is crucified on the cross of Jesus. "The Father suffers the death of the Son and takes upon himself all the pain and suffering of history. In this ultimate solidarity with humanity he reveals himself as the God of love, who opens up a hope and a future through the most negative side of history" (Sobrino 192). Thus, the church teaches

that the cross, considered to be a sign of shame and contempt, turns out to be the symbol of salvation and hope.

The theological reflection on the death of Jesus was derived from the epoch-making event of his resurrection. The early Christians looked on the life and passion of Jesus based on the fact of resurrection. It is an event the historicity of which is still disputed and has given rise to various interpretations. Though eyewitnesses are lacking, the empty tomb, the post resurrection appearances, the tremendous shift in the attitude of the disciples etc. throw light on the fact of resurrection. Early preaching of the disciples bear witness to the resurrection. “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” (Act 13:32-33).

The faith in the resurrection is so overwhelming that the Church condemns all theories which reject its historicity. The Decree *Lamentabile* issued by the Holy office condemns the position that “The resurrection of the savior is not properly a fact of the historical order, which is not and cannot be demonstrated, a fact which the Christian consciousness derived gradually from other sources” (Dupuis 232).

Another topic of argument theological discourses engage in is whether Jesus possessed unlimited knowledge with regard to his own destiny as well as the mystery of every other reality in the world. This is an ambivalent issue. We find a clear distinction between the understanding of the New Testament and the traditional teaching of the Church in this regard.

A short perusal of the NT reveals a good number of instances to argue pro absolute knowledge and self-consciousness in Jesus.

With regard to Jesus' own self-understanding, several texts show that he saw his mission as fulfilling that of the servant of God, his destiny as best expressed in the Danielic son of man figure, as of a son to his Father. He claimed to have divine authority both to forgive sins, to reveal God's will, and to perform by his own power miracles and exorcisms, which were signs of the advent of God's Kingdom.

(Sobrino 179)

At the same time, many a reference can be upheld to prove that Jesus' knowledge is not perfect. In Luke 2: 52 Jesus is presented as having "increased in wisdom". He does not know who touched his garment (Mk 5: 30-33). He cites an OT text which apparently does not exist at all (Jn 7: 38). Even if he was not without error in his knowledge, Jesus was a man with high intellectual strength and vision of life.

Coming to the traditional teaching of the Church, there is no ambiguity with regard to this issue. It attributes unlimited and perfect knowledge to Jesus. The traditional precepts acknowledge both divine knowledge and three kinds of human knowledge- the kind of knowledge acquired normally, infused knowledge, and the beatific vision. The Gospels do not give any reason to allow for infused knowledge and the beatific vision. Then why is such knowledge attributed to Jesus? The answer is to be found in the conception of what 'person' is. If Jesus is a person, he possesses a perfect human nature. Then he must possess perfect knowledge. If Jesus is perfect, then we must attribute to him everything that is presumed to go along with human

perfection. If it is a matter of knowledge, for example, then he must possess all possible sorts of human knowledge. The perfect knowledge includes normally acquired knowledge, infused knowledge, and the knowledge that human beings enjoy in the beatific vision (Sobrino 74). Therefore, the official magisterium of the Church envisages perfection in Jesus' knowledge and allows no room for error and ignorance.

Another topic the traditional Christian theology discusses is the theme of Impeccability and sinlessness of Jesus. Belief in the sinlessness of Jesus stems from the belief in the hypostatic union. It is the belief that the human nature of Jesus Christ is perfectly united with the Second Person of the Trinity. So, the question of sinlessness is something arising out of a discussion that is related to the idea of Jesus' humanity.

Both the sacred scriptures as well as the official teaching of the Church affirm the sinlessness of Jesus. The NT places the weight of its argument on Hebrew 4: 15 which says: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning." The Gospels, however, do not speak anything about the impeccability of Jesus, a belief and teaching that Jesus is not able to sin. But coming to the teaching of the Church, we find an affirmation not only of the sinlessness but also of the impeccability of Jesus. It is reasonable to think that the church is forced to adopt such a position because of its emphasis on the divine nature of Jesus.

In the ultimate analysis, one may come to the conclusion that "...it is the clear and constant belief and teaching of the Church that Jesus Christ was perfect in his

humanity, that he was so completely in union with the Father that he was in fact absolutely without sin. It is not that Jesus Christ was absolutely incapable of sin, but rather that he was able not to sin and, in fact, did not sin” (McBrien, 547).

It is in this connection that the temptations of Jesus become relevant. The scripture presents Jesus who triumphantly overcomes the tempting promises of Satan in the wilderness. It was the instance which proved, beyond doubt, Jesus’ faithfulness to the will of God and to his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God. We do find Jesus swaying in between not even for a moment. This adds strength to the argument that Jesus is sinless all throughout his life.

The concept of the sexuality of Jesus was yet another debated issue in theological circles. The church teaches, without any sign of doubt that Jesus is like all other human beings in all things except sin. This position of the church leads to various theological questions about his sexuality -- whether he had sexual drives and desires like all other human beings, or whether he was he an asexual being.

The New Testament keeps mum as to the sexuality of Jesus, though many other emotions like anger, hunger etc. are depicted. The official Church too is silent on the matter as is the New Testament. Hence, we find it difficult to assert authoritatively that Jesus had sexuality. However, modern theologians try to explain the issue from the viewpoint of modern psychology and physiology. McBrien provides an acceptable stand when he interprets this seemingly controversial question:

It seems entirely consistent with Christian faith in the humanity of Jesus Christ that Jesus should have known sexual temptation.

Temptation itself is no sin; therefore, it would not violate the previous principle that Jesus was indeed sinless. Moreover, the New Testament does explicitly acknowledge that Jesus was tempted by Satan in the areas of power and worldly acclaim. To accept a Jesus who is at once fully human and yet immune from sexual desires is to stretch not only one's imagination but also one's theological convictions about the incarnation and the fundamental goodness of creation, the human body, and human sexuality. (562)

However, there is no evidence that Jesus had engaged in any sort of sexual acts leading to sexual union. It is concluded that Jesus sublimated his sexual drives.

After analyzing Christological doctrines of the church in their orthodox mode, one has to look into recent ways of understanding and expressing the Christ event in the postmodern/posthumanist background. The uniqueness of Christ, for example, is not in the fact that he is the divine agent behind creation. Brent Waters, in his work *From Human to Posthuman*, brings in a new way of looking at doctrines which were kept sacrosanct and unchangeable. According to him, Jesus is not to be venerated as the prime divine agent of creation. He is a mediator who actually brings the divine meaning of creation to humanity. The fundamental distinction which marks Jesus from the rest of human beings is not the assumption of his divine essence/nature. He recognizes the personal relationship which Jesus maintained with God whom he addressed 'father', as the uniqueness in Jesus (84). In this connection A.R. Peacocke

argues that Jesus embodies a “new departure point in the creative process, a new beginning in human life, allowing new potentialities to be anticipated and actualized in those who are willing to share in *his human* open response to God” (232). Waters continues to argue how various Christological concepts can be interpreted in this new perspective:

Consequently, what Christian theology calls the ‘incarnation’ does not involve any kenotic descent from God, but refers to Jesus’ openness to God. Jesus exhibits the possibility of a highly evolved creature’s relationship with God, a possibility that any other human being might achieve. In turn, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, however it might be interpreted, is a sign of new possibilities that in itself has no redemptive significance. Jesus’ openness to God offers a model of possible fulfillment, but not perfection given the incomplete and open-ended character of an evolving creation. (Waters 84)

This method of approach to theology is an enriching endeavor from the part of the theologians as well as those creative writers who take the life of Jesus as the thematic concern for their fictional writings, which we will be discussed in the coming chapters. However, before moving to the analysis part, there remain some more theological themes, necessarily related to the Christological precepts, to be pointed out.

Any serious discussion on the theological precepts of the church brings us to a very important but consistently neglected topic; the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian faith of the church leads the attention of theologians to the concept of the Spirit, which had not been given due importance for centuries in the long history of the

church. The polemic situation of the early church necessitated the development of Christological doctrines to the extent that the major concern of the fathers of the church and other theologians was concentrated on Christ rather than the third person in the trinity.

Holy Spirit is referred to in various places both in Old and New Testaments where we find the Holy Spirit as the spirit of God which of course could be interpreted in different ways. “Holy Spirit is the Father’s gift through the Son. It is through the Spirit that the Father is communicated to us with immediacy, and it is through the Spirit that we are able to accept the self-communication of the Father” (McBrien 318-319). The relationship between the three persons of the trinity is made clear here. The idea of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son, however, should not be misunderstood to mean that this procession is equal to begetting which leads to the impression that there are two Sons. McBrien further states that:

the Spirit originates from the Father and the Son and has a distinct relationship to the Father and the Son which accounts for the Spirit’s distinct hypostatic existence within the inner life of God and the Spirit’s distinct salvific mission in history (without prejudice to the principle of the mutual indwelling of the three Persons, each one in the others). (319)

The Holy Spirit is taken to be that principle which helps a Christian to partake in the reality of the divine and the world, which is a different aspect of the theology of the Spirit. What is of significance here is the postmodern turn in pneumatology

which abandons, at least as a starting point, the transcendental abstractions and enters into more fruitful discussions on the subjective, individual experience of God in and through the Spirit. Analyzing Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological positions, David F. Ford states that "The first key concept is therefore that of the Holy Spirit as the gift of the possibility of participation simultaneously in the reality of God and in the reality of the world in ways which 'perform' the continuing realization of the world as sustained, accepted, and reconciled through being united with God in Christ" (276).

Ecclesiology, being that branch of theology which deals with the Catholic Church, has preoccupied itself with critical analysis of the various aspects of its origin and relevance in the world. Theology does not provide any specific occasion where Jesus founds the church. Though one cannot establish the divine origin of the church as constituted directly by Jesus, there are, as catholic theologians argue, many clues in the Bible which point to the divine origin of the ecclesial institution. 1) Jesus always gathered a group of people who became his disciples from among whom he selected twelve people to be the 'apostles'. 2) Many teachings of Jesus point to his foreknowledge of an interim period between his death and Parousia (second coming). 3) The community of disciples stayed together even after the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish community (McBrien 579). However, it would be wrong to say that Jesus founded the church at a particular moment and with any specific act.

Traditionally, the church considers itself to be a divine institution as a sacrament of Jesus and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The church considers

itself as characterised by certain marks of identification which are enumerated by Alister E. McGrath as follows:

1. The Church is one.
2. The Church is holy
3. The Church is catholic
4. The Church is apostolic

These features of the church can be noticed as more theoretical in nature and as ideals. The reality is different in the sense that the issues of authority, papacy, and infallibility are more important for the church. Some of these questions deserve special consideration while dealing with the final stage of this research study.

Though different models of the church could be found in the history of the church, none of them could be really exhaustive of the various biblical and theological understandings on the church. Theologians of different ages could incorporate the ideologies of the time into the theological reflections on the mysteries of the church. What is needed is the formulation of a new model for the church, which could cater to the needs of the present postmodern age.

One of the most crucial hallmarks of the postmodern situation is what might be termed the “turn to relationships.” In contrast to what appears to have been the reigning mind-set of late modernity, there is widespread acknowledgment today that humans are fundamentally social creatures and therefore that the emptiness individuals sense can

never be filled by the abundance of possessions but only in relationship with others. Viewed from a Christian perspective, the contemporary focus on relationships is not misguided. Even though the human quest for wholeness can ultimately be fulfilled only through relationship with God, belonging to God is closely linked to participation in community or, more specifically, to membership in the fellowship of Christ's disciples, the church. (Grenz, 252-253)

To sum up, we can say that the topics discussed above form only a small share of the entire Christian theological formulae. Those topics are not treated in their totality due to fear of expansion. Only those areas and contents of the theological doctrines which may be helpful for a meaningful encounter with the literary texts of the present study are considered. But they are the essential precepts of the Church considered to be established by Jesus Christ, who himself forms the pivotal topic for thought and analysis in the coming chapters.

Chapter 4

Interpreting Saramago's Jesus

Theological discourses could be recognised in a good number of fictional works in the contemporary age, though the intention and methodology of the individual authors seem to be diverse in orientation and intensity. Of these path-breaking endeavours to look at and evaluate the various theological and therefore unquestioningly accepted religious precepts, the fictional oeuvre of José Saramago occupies an enviable position. Notwithstanding his late entry into the field of creative writing around the age of sixty three, he has grabbed the attention and acclaim of the reading community. Being a prolific writer, Saramago is widely read not only in Portugal, but all over the world. In an age of totalitarianism and dehumanizing practices of all kinds, in and through political regimes as well as cultural practices, the relevance of the philosophy of life manifested in the writings of Saramago offers and validates new ways of life. A strong criticism of all sorts of institutionalizations and their drastic consequences in human life forms the quintessence of his fictional writings. As Mary L. Daniel, while discussing one of the novels by Saramago, observes: "To the degree that the institutional powers-that-be and the *status quo* are subverted by the latent powers of nature, the horizon is cleared for a simpler, more instinctive and humanitarian impulse to surge forth" (541; emphasis original). This analysis can equally be applied, along with the novel *The Stone Raft* referred to by Mary L. Daniel, to all the works by Saramago.

While the works of Saramago without exception point to the necessity of looking at life with a critical mind, one novel remains the most widely acknowledged

of this category. It is *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, published in 1991, which became the most controversial work by Saramago. Though it was greatly appreciated and earned him the Grande Premio de Novela da Associadao Portuguesa de Escritores, it elicited severe responses from the church and the state. Consequently, in 1992, this same novel underwent censoring and was banned, and the Portuguese government denied it permission for being considered for the Premio Literario Europeu. However, the novel had a great role in the Nobel Prize for Literature presented to Saramago in 1998. The Nobel Prize in Literature 1998 was awarded to José Saramago “who with parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony continually enables us once again to apprehend an elusory reality” (*Nobel Prize*).

The outcry against the novel is not surprising when one considers the content of the text which revolves around Jesus, whom the Christian churches venerate as God or at least keep in high esteem as the founder of Christianity as a religion. What Saramago does is to revisit the Christian ideas about its founder only to dismantle the grand edifice of Christian theology which forms the crux of Christianity as a religion. This provocative novel, in essence, is a subversion of the Christian understanding of realities like the doctrine of trinity, the concept of God, the life and person of Jesus Christ, the Church and so on. This chapter proposes to identify the various ways in which Saramago exploits the interpretative possibility in Christian theology and belief. However, before proceeding to unravel the thematic concerns, a brief discussion on the genre and nature of the text is necessary.

Saramago exhibits a linguistic style which at the first glance makes reading a slower process due to the breaking away from the traditionally accepted and

rigorously stipulated language rules. He does not cater to such grammar rules like the punctuation marks, paragraphing etc. A single sentence may extend to many pages even without a comma or semicolon. This narrative style, typical of Saramagoan writing, can be analysed in the background of postmodern writing strategies which always set themselves in contrast to the more conservative modes of linguistic expressions. The linear narrative styles are given up by them in an attempt to give life to new ways of expressing a different sensibility acquired by modern readership. Saramago too follows this new approach whereby a new type of writing which profusely negates the old and regenerates the new is brought out. Moreover, his prose style is more like a musical composition where the flow of language matters more than sheer arrangement of phrases as per the rules of language. He is strong in his belief that any additional punctuation marks would inevitably hinder his experiments with resonance. So, he limits himself, in this regard, to the employment of commas and full stops.

The novel further provides ample examples to reveal its metafictional character which is one of the narrative techniques adopted by Saramago. At the very beginning of the text itself, it is clearly stated that the scene is nothing but a picture. The novel begins and ends with the presentation of crucifixion and the entire story is developed within this frame work. The very first sentence gives the impression that what is described is a picture. "THE SUN APPEARS IN ONE OF THE UPPER CORNERS OF THE rectangle, on the left of anyone looking at the picture" (1). The use of capital letters for the first line in the initial sentence (this is a practice he generally adopts in all the chapters in the text) again points to the specific use of

language which adds strength to the metafictional character of the text. This concept is further developed where Saramago says: “The gaping mouth sends up a cry we shall never hear, for none of these things is real, what we are contemplating is mere paper and ink, and nothing more” (1). At regular intervals the novelist tries to remind the readers that it is not real but a mere fictional account. The various interventions of the omniscient narrator of the novel at different stages in the development of the story throw light into the metafictional nuances. This is clear where Saramago writes about the narrative techniques to be adopted in the context of describing various incidents taking place in the life of Jesus:

When critics discuss the rules of effective narration, they insist that important encounters, in fiction as in life, be interspersed with others of no importance, so that the hero of the story does not find himself transformed into an exceptional being to whom nothing ordinary ever happens. They argue that this narrative approach best serves the ever desirable effect of verisimilitude, for if the episode imagined and described is not, and is not likely to become or supplant, factual reality, there must at least be some similitude, not as in the present narrative, where the reader's credence has clearly been put to the test, Jesus having taken himself to Bethlehem only to come face-to-face as soon as he arrives, with Salome, who assisted at his birth, as if that other encounter, with the woman carrying a child in her arms, whom we deliberately planted there to fill in the story, had not been license enough. (182-183)

Saramago exemplifies the features of postmodern fiction in this novel so much so that it employs many new styles of writing. His writings are postmodern in the sense that he tries to present his ideas using new and different ways distinct from the trodden path of narratives. He constantly makes experiments with the use of language in all his works. Use of language constitutes the basic realm of narrative and the writers depend on a variety of linguistic elements in the delineation of the various verbal pictures and themes inherent in their works. Language, in postmodern fictional practices, has lost its 'pristine purity' and absolutism of signification so much so that the text could provide infinite number of relative meanings and connotations. Graham Ward in his article "Deconstructive Theology" points to this subversive power of language when he states:

Language pointed to itself, not to any realms or personages, revelations or hierarchies above, beyond or outside the secular world it constructed. Furthermore, this semiotic account of language pointed up the metaphoricity of all acts of communication. The movement of signs, the translation of a sign from one context into another, the very iteration that signs needed to be conventionally accepted as signifying – disrupted and rendered ultimately ambivalent all semantic or referential intention. (77, 78)

It is within the fabric of the above analysed metafictional and postmodern frame of the novel that the hermeneutic analysis of Christian theology is carried out. *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* can be viewed as a fictional account of the life and death of Jesus who is the central figure both in the biblical and theological

understanding of Christian faith. The very epigraph of the novel reminds the reader of a true account of the life of Jesus as given in the synoptic gospels. Saramago quotes:

FOR AS MUCH AS MANY HAVE TAKEN IN HAND TO SET FORTH IN ORDER a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightiest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. (Luke 1.1–4)

This epigraph offers a gospel similar to the other accounts on the life of Jesus, and therefore, it may be considered as a parody of the gospel narratives. This could be observed both in the title and the style of writing which reminds the reader of the other gospels. However, unlike in parody, there is no element of ridicule, but a seemingly earnest attempt to imitate them, which ultimately serves to subvert their ethos, true to the spirit of postmodern fictional aspect. Apart from the aspect of parody, it is nothing but a subversive narrative that tries to rewrite many of the traditional normative belief systems of Christian faith. What Saramago aims at, in this controversial novel, is an iconoclasm of the absolutist dogmas of the church. A close reading of the novel reveals the method of deconstruction as a strategy profusely employed by the author. Many Christian theological principles are effectively inverted by Saramago. This enables him to present a new perspective with

regard to the life of Christ and other Christian beliefs. An analysis of the various methodological techniques will, naturally, uncover the thematic concerns of the author leading to a fresh and critical reading of the Christian principles applied in the novel.

Saramago, in his attempt to recreate the life of Jesus as the other evangelists do, reinterprets the 'gospel truths' in a new light. He rewrites the scriptural and theological principles prevalent in Christian religion. It is through the subversion of the main precepts of Christianity that he accomplishes his objective. What follows is an analysis of those theological/Christological decrees of faith.

Saramago does away with the core concept of a Triune God held by catholic dogmatic positions. For, the novel speaks, nowhere, about the presence of the Holy Spirit. The basic faith of the church regarding the virginal conception of Jesus attributes the cause for Mary's pregnancy on the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells upon her. As a clarification to Mary's doubts regarding her holy pregnancy, the angel Gabriel replies to her; "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:35). However, the novel keeps silence with regard to the intervention of the Holy Spirit at the time of the conception and even in the later incidents happening in Jesus' life. On the contrary, it is Satan, disguised as the beggar as well as the pastor, who is presented as controlling Jesus' life at various stages in his birth and growth.

This could be observed in the description of Jesus' relationship with God, who in the catholic theology is one, in essence, with God. As explained in chapter 3,

the Christian concept of God is a Trinitarian one where God is explained as a single God with three persons, equal in their nature and hierarchy, in the Godhead. When Saramago tries to present God, he rejects this Trinitarian concept of 'three in one'. The equality of Jesus with the father is not found anywhere in the novel. He is made the son of God, but not God as the 'logos' in the scriptures. Saramago presents the relationship between God and Jesus as a legal, and not a filial one. God enters into a covenant with Jesus wherein it is agreed upon to adopt Jesus as God's son. God tells Jesus: "don't forget, from *now on* (my emphasis) you are tied to Me in flesh and blood" (222). The expression 'now on' points to the fact that Jesus' sonship is for a limited period of time and not eternal. It is only a contract which makes Jesus to be the son of God, a fact sufficient enough to reject, *prima facie*, the existence of Trinity in the original sense of the term. This again effectively annuls Jesus's Godhood. Moreover, the idea of God as love is also to be analysed in this regard. Theologians usually explain trinity in terms of love wherein God as love is the foundation for the coming into being of trinity: "God begets the Son from this Love, God breathes forth the spirit from this Love, God creates everything to exist eternally from this Love" (LaCugna 303). However, Saramago does not consider this love dimension in God's nature and therefore the argument based on the loving relationship between the three persons in Godhead to explain the theory of trinity may not be acceptable to Saramago. In the final analysis, one comes to realize that in the novel the father alone is recognised as the divine, eliminating all possibilities of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Apart from the Trinitarian concept, most of the other ideas of Christianity with regard to the divine being are also reconstructed by Saramago. Christianity believes in absolute monotheism. It gives no room for the existence of other gods than the deity it believes to be the genuine one. The prophecy of Zechariah is a pointer to the Jewish idea of a God who is the single Supreme Being in the world. “And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one” (Zech.14:9). Noah Horwitz sees the passage as an emphasis on the future fulfillment of a concept of God which renders a single God over the whole world.

This prophetic passage signals the hope for a time when differing names for God will be recognized as referring to one thing exempt from the world. At that time, God will be one through recognition by all that there is the one unique God. But this is placed in the future, since it is something that occurs only through universal recognition. (325).

This emphasis on the existence of a unique and single God is thoroughly uprooted and shattered when Saramago refers to the possibility of the existence of other gods. God wants to dominate over other gods and to become God of more people than being God of the Jews alone. When asked whether he is satisfied with being the God of the Jews, God tells Jesus:

I would be were it not for this restless heart of Mine, which is forever telling Me, Well now, a fine destiny you've arranged after four thousand years of trial and tribulation that no amount of sacrifice on

altars will ever be able to repay, for You continue to be the God of a tiny population that occupies a minute part of this world You created with everything that's on it. (311)

The problem in front of God is that he has dominion only over a tiny section of world population, while other gods are venerated by different peoples. When he seeks Jesus's help, Jesus asks him why he can't himself, being omnipotent, capture other lands and people from the hands of those gods. God's answer points to the idea of other gods existing and competing with each other:

Alas, I cannot, it is forbidden by the binding agreement between the gods ever to interfere directly, can you imagine Me in a public square, surrounded by Gentiles and pagans, trying to persuade them that their god is false while I am their real God, this is not something one god does to another, besides, no god likes another god to come and do in his house what the latter forbids in his own. (313)

Saramago further expresses his theory of plurality of gods through the words of the Pastor during a heated theological argument with Jesus in the desert. When Jesus emphatically declares that "The Lord alone is God" (192) Pastor makes a proclamation: "Certainly, if God exists, He must be only one, but it would be better if He were two, then there would be a god for the wolf and one for the sheep, a god for the victim and one for the assassin, a god for the condemned man and one for the executioner" (192-193). This wish expressed by the Pastor is of course a rebellion against the rigid monotheist tradition of the Christian religion. The question that may be raised here is that since Pastor and Satan are the same, how we can take his words

at their face value. It is natural that he will speak against God, religion and church. But the fact that Saramago's sympathy goes to Satan and sometimes Satan represents the authorial voice in the novel, justifies this argument. The words of the Pastor can also be taken as one which probably also exposes a paradox that is present in religion that it is the same God for the wolf and the sheep.

Moreover, the Christian concept of God is that of an omnipotent and omniscient one who is represented in the theological discourses and the scripture as the summation of all power and glory. Nothing escapes his eyes and goes unnoticed by him. But Saramago's God is one who is a limited being who is prone to shortcomings and commits mistakes. For example, Joseph contemplates on God's power and reflects "There can be no doubt that God's upright handwriting bears no resemblance to the crooked lines of men" (113). Immediately Saramago comes out with arguments that refute this thought and reflects that Jesus, if he progresses in life as he is doing now, "will be able to say to Joseph, Father, you mustn't take all the blame, and deep down, who knows, he might dare to ask, When, O Lord, will You come before mankind to acknowledge Your own mistakes" (113). God continues to make mistakes even in his work of creation. Discussing whether the angel visited Mary in the form of a beggar and later as shepherd, the author refers to the imperfections in God's creation. "Between angels of light and angels of darkness there are differences not just of form but also of essence, substance, and content, and while it is true that whoever created the former also created the latter, He subsequently attempted to correct His mistakes"(99). The words of Pastor in the novel testifies to the fundamental limitation of the divine being: "...Because the Lord

cannot undo what He has willed. Slowly nodding his head, Pastor said, In other words, your God is the only warden of a prison where the only prisoner is your God” (197). This idea of God as prisoner to himself is unacceptable to Jesus who questions Pastor. However, later God himself accepts his limitations saying it is not the blame of devil that people cannot reach God. “No, he's not to blame, I'm to blame, because I cannot reach out to those who seek Me, words uttered by God with an unexpected, poignant melancholy, as if He had suddenly found a limitation to His power” (326). This is the self-realization of God regarding his helplessness, though he is God himself. This limitation reaches its zenith when the author attributes some limitations to the power of God who is deemed to be the omniscient being. Saramago’s sarcasm reaches its heights where he describes the sexual union between Joseph and Mary and declares: “For in truth, there are things God Himself does not understand, even though He created them” (13).

Saramago’s God is a cruel one as against the image of a loving and compassionate father in Christian scriptures and in Christian tradition. He is not presented as one who gets easily moved in the face of human sufferings. That is why he allowed the massacre of babies in Bethlehem and felt no remorse unlike Joseph who spent the whole of his life tormented in conscience by the pardonable mistake of not saving the life of the children. The slaughtering of doves and sheep in the temple also is presented by the novelist as a question against the concept of God as a merciful father. Saramago writes: “Any one witnessing this scene would have to be a saint to understand how God can approve of such appalling carnage if He is, as He claims, the father of all men and beasts” (73). This cruelty, from God’s part, is not

limited to the animals and birds but extended even to men. Travelling to Bethlehem, Joseph reflects that “...all God cares about are humans, and not all humans, because some of them live like donkeys or worse, and God makes no effort to help them” (53). Saramago expresses his wonder at God who is cruel even to his own people. He refers to an incident wherein King David, in the Old Testament, had to undergo God’s wrath for his sin and his country was punished with three days of plague. What is surprising now is the fact that the God who without any loss of time made David pay back for his mistake, does not seem to realize the atrocities his own people are inflicted with under the strict rule of the foreign rulers, the Romans. (108-109). This lack of compassion for and indifference to his people are qualities of God that contrasts with the Christian understanding of God. Concerning the martyrs in Sepphoris it is stated that the tree trunks on which they were crucified later began to take roots and to sprout leaves. Some attributed this phenomenon to the blood of the martyrs while some other skeptics thought of rain as the cause for it. Saramago adds:

That it had been willed by God was something no one dared suggest, not only because His will, whatever that may be, is inscrutable, but also because no one could think of any good reason why the crucified of Sepphoris should be the beneficiaries of this peculiar manifestation of divine grace, which was really more in keeping with the style of pagan gods. (140-141)

This become also relevant in the context of the discussion on the pagan influence on Christianity, especially in the context of schools of thought that consider Christianity to include several pagan aspects, especially the cross, which the Church

is usually at pains to hide and suppress. It seems that Saramago is exposing, through a very succinct statement, certain pagan “roots and leaves” that lie hidden in the Christian cross.

The cruel and demanding God manifests himself more heavily when he wants Jesus as a martyr for his domination over other gods. As Jesus goes to the desert in search of the lost sheep, God appears in front of him in a column of cloud. From their conversation he learns that God has brought him there for making a covenant whereby he is promised glory and power. However, the cruelty in God’s nature gets revealed when God announces that it is the life of Jesus that God demands in exchange of his promise of power and glory (220-221). God appears to be more of a despot in the scene where there is a meeting between God and Jesus in the presence of Satan. The meeting takes place on a boat at the centre of the lake covered by thick frost. It is here that God reveals his intention to adopt Jesus as his son in order that his death on the cross will be the means through which God can attain more power and dominion over more people. Jesus rejects the idea and wants to escape from God rowing his boat away from him. However, he happens to come back to the very place from where he tries to flee away. It is the fate of human beings that they are mere playthings to gods. God’s words to Jesus express the fact that ultimately man is helpless before the demanding will of God who makes use of man for his own selfish ends. “....man is a piece of wood that can be used for anything, from the moment he is born to the moment he dies, he's always ready to obey, send him and he goes, tell him to stop and he stops, tell him to withdraw and he withdraws, whether in peace or

in war, man generally speaking is the best thing that ever happened to the Gods” (313) .

The relationship between God and the faithful is considered to be one of father-son intimacy where love and concern play the dominant role. Saramago tries to subvert it and to reveal a more servile relationship when he says that “....man is a mere toy in the hands of God and forever subject to His will, whether he imagines himself to be obeying or disobeying Him” (181).

Another significant deviation from the common religious, especially Christian, concept of the divine being is that Saramago’s God is a power monger. He appears to be an authoritarian figure always trying to establish his power over other gods as well as people from all parts of the world. He demands allegiance from all his subjects.

Now, we all know that God does not like anyone usurping His authority, especially when it comes to His chosen people, whom He will never allow to be ruled by any other lord or master, least of all by Rome, who bows to false gods and men, first because false gods do not really exist and secondly because of the sheer vanity of that pagan cult. (108)

All humans are required to give offerings to God to show their allegiance and submission to God. Witnessing the river of blood from the altar of animal sacrifice, Jesus wonders why God is not ready to accept any other offering except the living animals or birds. “Jesus pressed his lamb to his breast, unable to fathom why God

could not be appeased with a cup of milk poured over His altar, that sap of life which passes from one being to another, or with a handful of wheat, the basic substance of immortal bread” (208). It is the insatiable thirst for power that makes God choose Jesus as his son to be sacrificed on the cross as a scapegoat. And it is also this idea of God as a frightening reality that made Mary Magdalene turn to prostitution. The revelation of the nature of God as horrible led to a response different from the acceptance of God’s plan. One day Mary Magdalene had a dream during which a boy appeared to her, told her that God is horrible, and with those words disappeared. She did not know who the boy was. But with that dream, she turned to prostitution (260).

All theological discussions in the church are centered on the most important branch of theology, namely Christology, which specifically discusses issues related to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the central figure around whom the faith and life of the Christian faithful are woven. One of the most important precepts of Christian religion revolves around the question whether Jesus is divine or human, a point which had aroused a lot of controversies in the early church (examined, in detail, in the second chapter). An analysis of the church history reveals that the Christian churches look upon Jesus Christ from two perspectives; Jesus of history and Jesus of faith. However, history testifies to the fact that in the church the concept of the Christ of faith gained momentum over and above that of the historical Jesus. Jesus is elevated to the heights of the divine realm. He is placed on an equal footing with the almighty. The idea of Jesus as a man of history is given only a marginal space in theological discussions and ecclesial proclamations. What Saramago revolts against in his novel is this deliberate denigration of the historicity and humanity of

Jesus at the hands of the conservative church authorities. It is undoubtedly stated in the novel that Jesus was elevated to the position of a divine figure by God. To Jesus' question why God wanted a son, he answers:

I didn't have a son in heaven, so I had to arrange for one on earth, which is not all that original, even in religions with Gods and goddesses, who can easily give one another children, we have seen some of them descend to earth, probably for a change of scenery, and at the same time they benefit mankind with the creation of heroes and other wonders. (308)

This reply is a sarcastic analysis of the old stories in religion regarding divine interventions in human life. Moreover God, in the novel, bestows upon Jesus the power to perform miracles as a sign of his divinity. God says: "So all my miracles are Yours. All you have worked and will work, and even if you persist in opposing My will, and go out into the world and deny you are the son of God, I will cause so many miracles to occur wherever you pass that you will be obliged to accept the gratitude of those thanking you and thereby thanking Me" (315) . This divinity, though apparently a choice accepted by Jesus in return for the promise of power and glory, is an imposed one where ultimately Jesus had to submit his will to that of God. "Then there is no way out. None whatever, and don't play the lamb taken to be sacrificed, who struggles and bleats pitifully, for your fate is sealed, the sword awaits. Am I that lamb. You are the lamb of God, My son, which God himself will carry to the altar we are preparing here" (315).

Christian theology uses two terms to refer to Jesus: son of God and son of man in order to signify that he is both God and man at the same time. Saramago, it seems, produces references pointing to the possibility of a hypostatic union so much so that one can interpret the text to have an ambiguous stand. He is the son of God and son of man at the same time. The one who appeared as the angel to Mary declared that the Lord mixed his seed with that of Joseph. “Know, Mary, that the Lord mixed His seed with that of Joseph on the morning you conceived for the first time, and it was the Lord's seed rather than that of your husband, however legitimate, that sired your son Jesus” (262). However, the conversation that follows reveals a subtle uncertainty with regard to the divine parenthood of Jesus. Saramago seems to emphasize Jesus’ humanity by making him the product of a natural sexual union between Mary and Joseph. The sarcastic statement with regard to the role of God at the time of their lovemaking may be taken as a pointer to his argument in favour of Jesus’ humanity. “God, who is omnipresent, was there but, pure spirit that He is, was unable to see how Joseph's flesh touched Mary's, how his flesh penetrated her flesh as had been ordained, and perhaps He was not even there when the holy seed of Joseph poured into the holy womb of Mary, both holy, being the fountain and chalice of life” (3). Hence it is clear that the concept of Christ as son of God is successfully rewritten and Jesus is presented as the son of Joseph. There is a more subtle subversion of Christian faith in this statement. The equation of holiness with humanity, and a return to the icons of fountain and chalice, which even as they are Christian (Holy Grail and so on) are also deeply pagan, and to do with a culture of Nature religions. At the same time, there is a very strong strand of humanism in it, which places the human at the pinnacle of life. It is certainly not postmodern, but a

hark back to a Renaissance idea of the human. Further, there is an unabashed celebration of the sexual act itself, totally contrary to Christian morality, and almost reminiscent of fertility cults and animistic religions.

This idea of Jesus as the son of Joseph inevitably leads to a final solution to the problem of virginal conception, a concept deeply debated in Mariology (a branch of theology which deals with issues related to Mary, mother of Jesus). The dogmatic belief of the Catholic Church asserts that Mary was a virgin before, in, and after giving birth to Jesus. The concept of the virginity of Mary is also not taken for granted in the novel. As a corollary to the concept of the humanity of Jesus, Saramago tries to revise the theological ideas of Marian virginity. Jesus is born out of the marital/sexual union between Joseph and Mary. Moreover, there are innumerable references in the novel stating that Mary had many other children. As per the narration in the novel, there are seven sons (including Jesus) and two daughters whose names are mentioned. The author tells that there were many other children too. But all of them perished without any trace (101, 102). It is obvious that it is not the spiritual children who are mentioned, as the church sometimes tries to argue in order to defend the doctrine of the eternal virginity of Mary. So the very idea of Mary as a perpetual virgin is countered in the novel.

Another important concept with regard to Mary is the belief that she is pure and holy from the very beginning of her life. The Greek title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) attributed to Mary by the early church fathers is the primary reason for such a belief. The Immaculate Conception, a Mariological dogma in the church, had its origin in the logic that the mother of Jesus who is God must be pure/holy not only

throughout her life but even at the time of her birth. Hence, this dogma postulates that Mary was born without original sin which, in the doctrine of the church, all human beings are affected with. Since, for Saramago, Jesus is basically a man, there is no discrepancy in considering/representing Mary as an ordinary woman without any special powers or purity of life. Saramago frequently makes references to convince the reader that Mary is an ordinary woman like any other woman in the world. Referring to her moments of happiness over the thought about the child within her womb, Saramago says: “Only Mary lay with her eyes open, shining in the shadows, still shining after the last flame had died away. No cause for wonder, for this happens to all mothers, and the wife of the carpenter Joseph was no exception, after the angel appeared to her disguised as a beggar” (41). Her ordinariness is again indicated when Joseph’s thoughts about his wife are presented. “Simeon's strange words still filled his ears, but he found it hard to believe that any woman could wield so much power, especially this unassuming wife of his, who had never shown any sign of being different from other women” (43). What is more interesting in this regard is the depiction of Mary as not a good wife, contrary to the honour she is usually conferred upon in the scriptures as well as the traditions of the church. Speaking about Mary’s silence and lack of consoling words to her husband suffering from the nightmare, the novelist declares: “A good wife would have said to her husband, Don't fret, what's done is done, and besides, your first duty was to rescue your own child. But Mary has changed and is no longer what one would normally refer to as a good wife” (97).

Coming back to Christological themes proper, another concept Saramago contradicts with Christian thinking is the question of Jesus' knowledge. In the place of an absolute knowledge, expected to be manifested in a divine figure, the novel presents Jesus as an individual with only limited range in the understanding of what is happening in his own life. Jesus is lacking in prior knowledge attributed to him in Christian tradition, because we find him declaring that "I only know what I was taught" (173). Jesus too had the schooling as is expected of any ordinary Jewish child. Saramago says:

On reaching the age of five, Joseph's son started going to school. Each morning his mother took him to the synagogue and left him in the charge of the steward who taught beginners, and it was there in the synagogue-and-classroom that Jesus and the other little boys of Nazareth under the age of ten observed the wise man's precept, The child must be instructed in the Torah just as the ox is bred in the corral. (103)

The entire credit to the flashes of knowledge and wisdom exhibited by Jesus from the very younger age is given to his higher education, and not to any mysterious and supernatural capacity inbuilt in the 'divine' Jesus. His ability for logical arguments and rhetoric is the result of the early education he had been provided. "In addition to his study of the Torah, the written law, he is already being initiated in the oral law, which is much more difficult and complicated. This explains why at such an early age he was able to conduct a serious conversation with his father, using words properly and debating with reflection and logic" (113). Saramago proceeds further to

show the limitations of the education he has received saying that he could procure instructions only on religious matters.

One might argue that a boy of thirteen could not have had sufficient knowledge of science and philosophy, or even sufficient experience of life, for such thoughts, and that this boy in particular, notwithstanding his religious studies in the synagogue and his natural talent for debate, was not capable of the words and deeds attributed to him. (161)

Jesus does not know everything about his parents and is unaware of Joseph's feeling of guilt over unknowingly giving way for the massacre of babies to happen in Bethlehem. He does not possess any intuition as the son of God. Only when God reveals that he is to be the son of God, he realizes God's plans for him and accepts it. Even that is not a happy acceptance; rather he submits to the entire drama of God's design only very reluctantly after realizing that there is no other way out. That is why he wishes to die as king of Jews and not son of God (374-375)

One may further argue that if Jesus possesses full knowledge, there cannot be doubts and hesitations in his mind with regard to any of his actions and decisions. But this is not what is depicted in the novel. One finds Jesus doubting many a time. When he saves an adulterous woman from the clutches of the brutal and the partial laws of the society, it is stated, "in his heart he had serious doubts" (296). Moreover, Jesus does not have a definite and final idea as to what he is supposed to do as God's son, until it is revealed to him. He could not give a firm answer to the disciples' question whether he is the son of God. When Simon asks about his future plans he

replies: “The only thing I can do, wait for my hour to come” (302). This ignorance of mission from his part is a clear sign of his limited being.

The traditional theological argument of the church on the divinity of Jesus assumes and advocates no possibility of a mistake from the part of Jesus. He must be able to perform everything perfectly. But this is not the case with Saramago’s Jesus who is presented at different places as if he is prone to committing mistakes. One fine specimen of the sudden and therefore irrational and thoughtless action of Christ is the incident known as ‘cursing of the fig tree’. As Jesus was walking along a countryside he began to feel hungry. Looking around, he identified a fig tree at a long distance and approached it with the hope to find fruit on it. He came closer to it only to find nothing but leaves, because, it was not the season for figs. “Whereupon Jesus said to the tree, No more fruit will grow on your branches, and at that very moment the fig tree dried up. Mary Magdalene, who was with him, said, You must give to those in need but ask nothing of those with nothing to give. Filled with remorse, Jesus tried to revive the fig tree, but it was quite dead.” (304). A reversal of the roles too can be observed here as Magdalene becomes the teacher to Jesus who is the ‘great teacher’ of Christianity.

The impeccability of Jesus is yet another hard nut to crack among the hard and fast official teachings of the churches. This precept revolves around the question whether Jesus is capable of committing sin. The traditional Christian belief is that Jesus is absolutely pure without being contaminated by any act of sin. However, the Saramagoan Jesus is not more than an ordinary man and hence is not without the blemishes of human predicament. One finds Jesus telling a lie to the old man who

handed over a lamb to be sacrificed in the temple. When asked with regard to his whereabouts, Jesus falsely tells him “I came to work as a shepherd in Judaea, a deceitful way of telling the truth, or putting the truth at the service of a lie” (206).

The question of impeccability logically leads to another major issue in Christological teaching on the issue of Jesus’ sexuality. While the traditional faith keeps mum in this regard, Saramago makes his Jesus indulge in sexual pleasures. He is not above the sexual drives of an ordinary man. Sitting on the riverside, Jesus imagines a woman taking bath in the river and he comes to an erection with an intense urge to satisfy himself, though he does not succumb to the inclination. Overcoming this temptation was not the meritorious victory of Jesus over the flesh. For, Jesus ruminated over God’s promise and its consequences and came to the conclusion that there is nothing wrong in following the natural and spontaneous corporeal needs.

These and similar reflections should have encouraged Jesus to follow his natural inclinations and find a quiet spot to satisfy his urge, but instead they distracted him and confused him so much that he soon lost the desire to yield to wicked temptation. Resigned to his own virtue, Jesus lifted the pack to his shoulder, took up his staff, and went on his way. (226)

Hence, the assumption of faith which attributes purity to Jesus not only in his actions but also in his thoughts and feelings is unsettled by this account given by Saramago. There are many other instances where Jesus actually falls into temptations. “Before falling asleep, he thought about Mary Magdalene and

everything they had done together, which stirred him to such a pitch that he had to get up twice and walk in the yard to cool his blood” (250). His physical union with Mary Magdalene which Saramago describes as an important incident, a turning point in Jesus’ life, is a clear example of the distinction between the Christ of faith proclaimed by the church and the Jesus of history as brought about by Saramago. What is to be noted here as in the various places in the novel where Jesus is presented as engaging in sexual actions, is the fact that sexuality is depicted as a celebration. Accordingly there is a culture of seeing sex as natural and human, and not to be ridden with feelings of guilt. This gravely affects the Christian notions of morality which is confined to the negation of body and its pleasures. Saramago seems to make a critique of the narrow concept of humanity.

Soteriology encapsulates crucifixion as the sublime act of Jesus’ free submission to the will of God whereby the human beings were saved from the clutches of sin. But this idea undergoes considerable alteration as far as the narration in the novel is concerned. The biblical account and precepts of the church on crucifixion upholds that the death on the cross is an act of absolute submission of the will of Jesus to that of God, a fact which makes the crucifixion meaningful in the entire faith of the church. Jesus’ prayer at garden of *Gethsemane* is a clear indication of this. “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Mt.26:39). But in Saramago’s account Jesus accepts death on the cross only out of compulsion from God’s part. Moreover, Jesus is lured into the sufferings and death on the cross by God that he will be given power and glory. The final words of Jesus on the cross manifest the extreme despair. Saramago writes:

Jesus is dying slowly, life ebbing from him, ebbing, when suddenly the heavens overhead open wide and God appears in the same attire he wore in the boat, and His words resound throughout the earth, This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Jesus realized then that he had been tricked, as the lamb led to sacrifice is tricked, and that his life had been planned for death from the very beginning.

Remembering the river of blood and suffering that would flow from his side and flood the globe, he called out to the open sky, where God could be seen smiling, Men, forgive Him, for He knows not what He has done. Then he began expiring in the midst of a dream. (377)

This reveals the ultimate futility of Jesus' death on the cross as against the Christian concept of salvation through crucifixion.

In short, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* presents more of Jesus than of Christ. Jesus is entirely presented as an ordinary man. He shares all the emotions and weaknesses of any man in the street. He does not rise to the level of a divine being. The image of a divine Christ is not taken into serious concerns by the author, the reason for which will be discussed in the final chapter.

The role of Satan in Jesus' life according to the gospels is as a negative force who is always trying to take him away from his divine mission of bringing the kingdom of God down into the world. Any discussion on the various Christological themes would naturally attract the attention to demonology which deals with the evil forces. Satan or devil is traditionally believed to be an evil force, sometimes considered as a person. Satan plays a vital part in the advancement of the novel. His

role is very crucial in the life of the main characters of the work. A perusal of the various instances where Satan appears in the course of the novel will help in the analysis of how Saramago tries to present him different from the Christian tradition.

The devil makes his appearance in the novel for the first time to announce to Mary that she is pregnant. This is an event which is similar to the annunciation by an angel in the biblical versions. He appears in the form of a beggar and hands over to Mary the glittering bowl which appears at different stages in the life of Jesus. Assuming different forms he confronts Jesus. He manifests himself on the way to Bethlehem and in the cave where Jesus is born. When Jesus is born, he comes to visit him under the guise of a shepherd. He follows Jesus wherever he happens to be. Mary and Joseph realised that he is Satan. He comes in Mary's dreams too. Even the Pastor who trains Jesus in the desert turns out to be Satan.

Saramago agrees with the traditional belief that the devil is a fallen angel. In a conversation devil remembers the fact that he was one of the angels of God and was called Lucifer. With the ambition to become equal to God he rebelled and got punished (331). However, Saramago presents Satan appearing in the form of an angel. This throws light on his deconstructive strategy which enables him to portray the Christian theological frameworks in a new and liberating manner. In Christian thinking, angel and devil who remain in contradictory realms of existence, cannot be yoked together. Therefore, it turns out to be shocking to the Christian mind when the same form and appearance of an angel is conferred on Satan also. Moreover, during the conversation between God, Jesus, and the devil, the affinity between God and Satan becomes very much visible. When God says that:

lust and fear are weapons the demon uses to torment wretched mankind” Jesus turns to the devil for an explanation and the devil tells him “I simply took what God didn't want, the flesh with all its joys and sorrows, youth and senility, bloom and decay, but it isn't true that fear is one of my weapons, I don't recall having invented sin and punishment or the terror they inspire. (325-326)

The whole demonology of Christian theology crumbles when Satan is presented not as an embodiment of evil. He manifests rays/sparks of goodness in him, which is unthinkable in the conservative view point. Pastor tells God: “No one knows better than You that the devil too has a heart.” (330). This good heart manifests itself in his attitude to Jesus. It is the devil who appears in different forms to Jesus and helps him in all possible ways. Pastor trains Jesus to become an expert in shepherding. Jesus learns all the techniques to become a good shepherd. Pastor entrusts his entire flock to the care of Jesus. It is the pastor who urges Jesus to seek out for the lost sheep (217).

Satan is presented as one who easily grasps Jesus' precarious condition before the inscrutable will of God and feels sympathy for him. All through the conversation between God and Jesus in the midst of the lake, Satan, though silent, has a sympathetic leaning to Jesus. It is clear in his declaration that “One has to be God to countenance so much blood” (330). Satan even tries to set aside the necessity of crucifixion. Satan's proposal reveals his goodness of heart. He even goes to the extent that he proposes reconciliation with God. He repents over the rebellion in heaven which actually led him to be punished by God and requests God to take him

back as one of the angels. He is ready to submit himself to the authority of God. He enumerates the benefits of such benevolence from the part of God.

Because if You grant me that same pardon You will one day promise left and right, then evil will cease, Your son will not have to die, and Your kingdom will extend beyond the land of the Hebrews to embrace the whole globe, good will prevail everywhere, and I shall stand among the lowliest of the angels who have remained faithful, more faithful than all of them now that I have repented, and I shall sing Your praises, everything will end as if it had never been, everything will become what it should always have been. (331)

All these conditions are revelatory of the goodness of heart manifested in Satan. This strategy did not get actualised only because of God's obstinacy due to the fear that if the devil does not exist, his own existence would be in peril. It is a binary, but at the same time not one. Satan is necessary for God to exist, in other words evil is more a necessity for God than Satan himself. And, in this, the difference between Satan and God is complicated. They come to resemble each other, or in other words, the one is inscribed in the other. This is the real deconstructive move made by Saramago.

By presenting a benevolent devil Saramago rewrites the popular Christian perspectives to give new dimensions to the hermeneutic possibilities of the scripture. We find a somewhat good tempered understanding of the evil figure. Saramago is against a total condemnation of Satan as completely evil. This figure of the devil is definitely a counterpart to the understanding of Christianity. Moreover, it is not

merely a question of a benevolent devil, it is the erasure of the God/devil dichotomy, or the establishment of the idea that God and Satan resemble each other more than is let on. And this is also where the postmodern aspect of the novel comes through at a very fundamental level.

Ecclesiology is yet another branch of theology closely connected to the Christological themes. The Christian Church appears in the novel as a future reality yet to be realised. God reveals the clear picture of the church which is to come with the death of Jesus on the cross. This church is something which exists in history. Here too Saramago subverts all the theological concepts about the church.

Christianity considers the Church as the flowering of Jesus' ministry on earth. It is through the church that God's salvific mission is to be carried out till the end of the ages. The divine nature of the church is emphasised in ecclesiological discourses. Accordingly, though the church is controlled and led by human elements, it cannot go wrong ultimately. Because, it is, according to the faith and teachings of the church, the Holy Spirit who is controlling and directing the church towards its goal.

In the novel, Saramago envisions the church as a temptation God presents before Jesus. It is nothing more than a bait cast in front of him by god:

God said, There will be a church, a religious society founded by you or in your name, which comes to the same thing, and this church will spread throughout the world and be called Catholic, because universal, although sadly this will not prevent discord and misunderstanding

among those who see you, rather than Me, as their spiritual leader,
which will last no more than several thousand years. (318-319)

But the irony is that this magnificent edifice of the church is established on human suffering. God says, “the church I mentioned will be established, but its foundation, in order to be truly solid, will be dug in flesh, its walls made from the cement of renunciation, tears, agony, anguish, every conceivable form of death.” (320). God gave a long litany of the martyrs in the church, beginning with Peter, who are going to be tortured and killed in different ways. However, Jesus was reluctant to receive this reward. But God insisted on Crucifixion. Hence the church, in the novel is not something Jesus institutes willingly. It is a reward thrust upon him which demands a lot of renunciation and suffering.

Saramago presents the church in a satirical and disparaging vein. The various incidents in the history of the church yet to take place were enumerated by God. He described the sufferings of various types the members of the church will have to undergo including the life of renunciation and fasting in various monasteries and convents. God speaks of the wars, massacres, and crusades to be fought in what is later named the holy land. Saramago’s satire reaches its zenith where God mentions Inquisition:

Also known as the Tribunal of the Holy Office, the Inquisition is a necessary evil, we will use this cruel instrument to combat the disease that persistently attacks the body of your church in the form of wicked heresies and their harmful consequences along with a number of physical and moral perversions, which, lumped together without

regard for order of importance, will include Lutherans and Calvinists, Molinists and Judaizers, sodomites and sorcerers, some of these plagues belong to the future, others can be found in every age. (329)

The ironical presentation of what the church had done throughout the century is alien to and in opposition with the theological perspectives advocated by the church.

Hence Saramago leads the reader to the possibility of looking at ecclesiology with an interpretative strategy counter to that of the official church positions.

Saramagoan hermeneutics of the biblical accounts of Jesus' life and related themes could be explained more clearly analyzing the technique he uses in the novel. Using a deconstructive strategy, he subverts what is generally thought to be binary realities in the religious/christian traditions. Every binary opposition presupposes a hierarchy of values in which there will be a primary term and a secondary term considered positive and negative respectively. In the subversive method these hierarchies are unsettled to form a new perspective. Saramago makes use of this technique profusely and some of the prominent binaries are analysed here.

The whole story of the novel is the predicament of man trapped between two dual forces of God and Satan/devil. Here the term God is primary to which is added the secondary term devil. God is the superior being who is always opposed to the other force that is evil. It is this primacy of God that is strongly subverted in the novel. The primary strategy is to show that God is in need of the devil for his existence. This is what God declares when Satan seeks reconciliation with him. "No, I neither accept nor pardon you, I much prefer you as you are, and were it possible, I'd have you be even worse. But why. Because the good I represent cannot exist

without the evil you represent, if you were to end, so would I, unless the devil is the devil, God cannot be God” (331). This precarious predicament of God in which God is at the mercy of the devil even for his existence negates claims of superiority attributed to God in the traditional theological thinking.

Saramago points out various instances where the devil is equal to God. “Jesus looked from one to the other and saw that without God's beard they could have passed for twins, although the devil was younger and less wrinkled” (310). Pastor who likes to provoke Jesus often with his outrageous remarks told him; “Slaves exist to serve us, perhaps we should open them up to see if they carry slaves inside, or open up a monarch to see if he has another monarch in his belly, I'll bet if we met the devil and he allowed us to open him up, we might be surprised to find God jumping out” (201). So, the novelist seems to justify the theory that puts God and Satan on equal footing, contrary to the official version of the church.

Sometimes Saramago makes severe conclusions giving Satan priority over God. This is what Jesus opines about the devil. “The devil too was here in the boat and heard everything, he seems to know as much about me as God does, sometimes I think he knows even more than God” (333). The devil's knowledge is a problem which Saramago does not clearly solve. However, one thing is certain that for him both God and devil complement each other. So, God says, “everything that concerns God also concerns the devil” (310). So through a powerful subversion of the God–devil binary, Saramago attacks the Christian concept of rendering supremacy to the divine, neglecting the devil as a negative and hence insignificant reality.

The question of good and evil is a corollary to the binary opposition between God and the devil. In the same line, the good and evil binary presupposes the elevated position of good in the hierarchy. It is this precedence ascribed to good which is subverted in the novel. Evil and sin are considered to be negative realities in the sense that they are never rendered existence of their own. Rather they are the result of the privation of good. Saramago's God reveals this when he says that both sin and evil are one and the same thing, that is, God's absence. Here it seems to suggest a confirmation of the traditional hierarchy of values. However, in many other places Saramago raises arguments that suggest the contrary. He seems to assert that good is the privation of evil. He criticises Jesus' giving precedence to the good thief on the cross. He speaks of Jesus as "this is he who causes the sun and moon to weep and who only a moment ago praised the Good Thief and despised the Bad Thief, failing to understand that there is no difference between them, or, if there is a difference, it lies in something else, for good and evil do not exist in themselves, each being merely the absence of the other" (6).

Moreover, in Saramago's novel, it is the evil that ultimately takes precedence. The innocent is always at the losing end. Jesus suffers not because of his sin but due to Joseph's guilt. "A father's guilt falls on the heads of his children, and the shadow of Joseph's guilt already darkens his son's brow" (88). So, innocence is at the mercy of wickedness. Further, Joseph is arrested and crucified not because of any explicit crime, but only because he tried to help his friend Ananias and a boy. This act of mercy had a negative consequence which reveals that in this world reversal of good and evil takes place.

The binary of truth and lie is something which goes along with it. What one deems good or true can be overturned in due time. Saramago gives an instance where Mary tells a lie. When Jesus decided to leave home and left for Jerusalem, one of the passersby asked Mary where her son was leaving for. To this question she replied: “He's found work in Jerusalem and he'll be staying there for a while, a barefaced lie as we know, but this matter of telling the truth or lying is complicated, better to make no hasty moral judgments, because if one waits long enough, the truth becomes a lie and a lie becomes the truth” (157). This proves how effectively Saramago subverts the good and evil binary.

Religions in general and Christianity in particular manifests traits of patriarchal subjugation of women where the man-woman dichotomy becomes an important binary to be considered. Since Christianity is a continuation of Judaism, it has inherited the Jewish patriarchal tradition where women were always treated as inferior to men both inside the family and in the society outside family. The religious prayers and other rituals too did not give due importance to them. Being a patriarchal religion, Christianity has always tried to maintain the hierarchical order between men and women which enables the male-dominated society to keep women under its clutches.

Though not explicitly, Saramago tries to deconstruct this binary opposition. It is through the clever use of irony and satire that the novelist achieves his goal. At the outset Joseph is presented as a chauvinist male. He keeps his dignity and seriousness as the head of the family. Mary waits for Joseph to finish his supper before having her own (16). However, it is Mary, unlike Joseph, the head of the family, who

receives revelations from God. It is to her that the beggar comes to announce the fate of her son. So, one has to say that the novelist is interested in showing the key role of women in the salvation's history, which is otherwise dominated by men alone.

The inferior position ascribed to women at the biblical time is presented with the tone of sarcasm and subtle humour, during many conversations within the novel. Such is the case when Simon accuses women for inventing the first sin from which all the rest came (43). Women are considered the source of evil. However, Saramago questions this idea by the very word of Simon himself. He speaks of duality in man's nature, the divine and demoniac, which is transmitted by woman. "I was talking about women, who generate beings such as ourselves and who may be responsible, perhaps unknowingly, for this duality in our nature, which is base and yet so noble, virtuous and yet so wicked, tranquil and yet so troubled, meek and yet so rebellious" (43). If man receives both good and bad natures from woman, how can one consider her as evil? This is how Saramago deconstructs the male dominance of the patriarchal religion.

Apart from the theoretical arguments against the equality of women, Saramago satirizes the religious rules which belittle women even in the daily occurrences of life. The prayer reserved for men is an example: "I thank You, Almighty God, King of the Universe, for not having made me a woman" (13). Further, it is said that new clothes are reserved for her husband while Mary wears soiled and torn clothes (15) and about going to attend the prayers it is said:

When she attends the synagogue, she enters by the side door, as the law requires of women, and even if she finds thirty other women

there, or all the women of Nazareth, or even the entire female population of Galilee, they must wait until at least ten men arrive for the service, in which the women will participate only passively. Unlike Joseph her husband, Mary is neither upright nor pious, but she is not to blame for this, the blame lies with the language she speaks if not with the men who invented it, because that language has no feminine form for the words upright and pious. (15, 16)

It is in the backdrop of this blatant inequality inherited and carried through centuries by the church that the scope for a feminist theology becomes relevant. Jesus' intimate relationship with Mary Magdalene is significant in this context. It is she who confided in Jesus and believed for the first time, even when his own mother doubted, when Jesus revealed that he had seen God in the desert (259). So she is to be taken as the first disciple of Jesus. In fact, Jesus himself, according to Saramago, selected her to be the first among his disciples (335). It is also said that Jesus explained many things to Mary alone in private (341). The fact that Jesus confides in Mary Magdalene and reveals her everything too is a fact which stands in favour of predominance of women over men.

Another important interpretative strategy Saramago employs in his novel is what can be termed as grafting or interpolation. He makes use of analysis of grafts in the text in order to show how these grafts become more important than the central narrative. They are shown as inevitable and indispensable part of the main text. Saramago makes use of this strategy all throughout his novel. A few examples may be mentioned here to show how rewritings operate in fictional narratives.

The most important interpolation takes place in what may be called Joseph's episode. The novel, in the ultimate analysis, can be considered the story of Jesus. As the title reveals, the whole story revolves around the life of Jesus. He is presented as a typical human being from birth to death. It is to this long story of Jesus that the story of Joseph is grafted.

If the novel can be divided into two parts, the first part, no doubt, is the 'Gospel according to Joseph'. It is through him that the life of Jesus is presented. His life and actions are successfully blended to that of Jesus. The best example is the account of the supposed guilt of Joseph. While working as a carpenter in the palace of Herod, Joseph comes to know about the impending massacre of babies, ordered by Herod, in Bethlehem. Without any delay, he runs to the cave where Mary and Jesus are and saves them. Later he feels the remorse that he could have saved the twenty five children brutally killed by Herod's soldiers. This remorse haunts him in dreams. He tells Jesus:

you are aware of your duties and obligations, perform them and you will be worthy in the eyes of God, but examine your conscience and ask yourself if there are not other duties and obligations waiting to be performed. Is this what you dream, Father. No, the fear that I might have neglected some duty, or worse, that is the cause of my dreams. What do you mean by worse. I didn't think, and the dream itself, the dream is the thought that wasn't thought when it should have been, and now it haunts me night after night and I can't forget it. (112)

This dream and guilt of an innocent man form a vital part in the progression of the story. The guilt is transmitted to Jesus. He too begins to be tormented in the night with dreams. So, it is clear that though apparently a secondary narrative, it becomes primary in its ability to affect the main course of the story. That is the effect of grafting which Saramago employs in his novel.

This idea become clear when one observes the ending of the novel. Joseph is still there in Jesus' mind as a vital force, even at the time of his death. Saramago writes: "As they hammer in the first nail, piercing the flesh of his wrist between two bones, a sudden dizziness sends him back in time, he feels the pain as his father felt it before him, sees himself as he saw him on the cross at Sepphoris" and "Then he began expiring in the midst of a dream. He found himself back in Nazareth and saw his father shrugging his shoulders and smiling as he told him, Just as I cannot ask you all the questions, neither can you give me all the answers."(377). So, the seemingly irrelevant part of Joseph's story is presented by Saramago as the crucial part controlling the whole story.

The introduction of the beggar in the novel is another interpretative strategy employed by Saramago in the line of interpolation. A beggar in common life is supposed to be an insignificant figure. He is thrown into the outskirts of all social life and is a marginalised figure set aside from all important social activities. However, in the novel, such a figure becomes one of the most important figures who weaves the destiny of other characters.

The beggar who appears to Mary and meaningfully intervenes later in the life of Jesus is revealed gradually to be Satan. Though Mary and Jesus take him as an

ordinary beggar at first, they come to realize his real identity without much delay. It is he who plays more roles in the life of Jesus rather than God. He appears at different important moments in Jesus' life and even helps him. The importance attached to him is so great that he becomes equal to God in many instances. He seems to be doing the work which God ought to perform. Even Jesus' stay with the pastor is, it can be deduced from the conversation between God, Jesus, and the devil on a boat in the midst of the lake, an obligation God entrusted on Satan. "Jesus said, I know very well who he is, I lived with him for four years when he was known as Pastor, and God replied, You had to live with someone, it couldn't be with Me, and you didn't wish to be with your family, so that left only the devil" (310). This solution was the result of an agreement between god and the devil.

Hence it is clear that the beggar who appears in different forms in the novel is a vital character. It is his intervention that helps the narration to flow in a natural and spontaneous way leading to the end of the narrative course of action. One cannot but notice this powerful graft incorporated in the novel by Saramago.

The Hebrew people, suffering under the yoke of slavery and oppression of imperial Rome, had attempted several sporadic riots for freedom. Though brutally suppressed, these insurrections had always enkindled their craving for freedom. These blood spilling revolutions were historically acknowledged facts. Saramago efficiently makes this phenomenon as a powerful interpolation in the novel.

The novel portrays the guerrilla force of Judas the Galilean. Ananias, a neighbour of Joseph joins the group during the war and is wounded. Joseph goes to the city of Sepphoris in search of him. It is here that Joseph is arrested by the Roman

soldiers. Even though they know that he is innocent, they decide to crucify him so that the number of criminals to be crucified will be a round figure of forty. “The officer paused for a moment, giving Joseph just enough time to cry out, I'm innocent, but instead Joseph chose to remain silent. The officer looked up and probably decided that the symmetry would be destroyed if the last cross was not raised, and that forty made a nice round figure, so he gave the signal” (131). So the apparently insignificant incident becomes very important in the overall structure of the novel.

One can find many parallels and contradictions with reference to the death of Jesus and Joseph. Both are crucified even though they are personally innocent. However, Saramago tactfully presents this episode to give the impression that Joseph's crucifixion is greater in value than that of Jesus' crucifixion. One finds total despair at the death of Jesus. He realizes he is trapped and dies with disappointment and cursing God. But Joseph does not end his life in such discouraging circumstances. Though he cries due to pain, there is no cursing. He cries out: “Dear God, this is the man You created, blessed be Your holy name, since it is forbidden to curse You.” (131). Moreover, one finds that later the cross, on which Joseph happened to die, is transformed into a living tree. This makes Joseph's death hopeful, leaving Jesus' death in the shadow of despondency.

Hence Saramago makes use of little facts and incorporates them into his narrations. This subverts the primacy attributed to the main narrative. The secondary narrative is proved to have more importance in the overall setting of the story.

Another interpretative strategy used by Saramago to reinterpret the Christian concepts is the use of various powerful symbols. There are many important ones in

Saramago's 'Gospel'. A few of them which attract our immediate attention are discussed here.

A strong symbol that makes its appearance all throughout the novel is the bowl. The story of the bowl begins with the first appearance of the devil in the form of a beggar, to Mary. Mary gave him food in an earthen bowl. He licked it clean and gave back. Thereupon it began to spread rays of light. Frightened by this phenomenon Joseph consulted the elders in the synagogue who ended the issue by digging it down the earth. But the story of bowl did not end there. Many a time Jesus receives bowls from Mary. But the one who really gives him the bowl is Satan himself. At last when Jesus dies on the cross his blood is collected in this bowl. "But what Jesus did not see, on the ground, was the black bowl into which his blood was dripping" (377). Here actually this bowl belongs to the devil, but Jesus' blood is collected in it. This is the real irony; the chalice which contains Jesus' blood is the bowl of Satan. So the Christian belief in the precious chalice of Christ is unknowingly deconstructed by Saramago.

Yet another symbol which draws attraction is the term 'the Lamb of God'. It is a Christian symbol that denotes Jesus. The lamb which Jesus refuses to sacrifice in the temple is noteworthy here. Jesus affectionately takes it away from the temple. He wants to save it. He thinks "if I save this lamb, it's so that someone may save me" (211). But when confronted with God in the wilderness, he cannot but accept his command to kill it. Finally, with all reluctance he manages to kill it. This lamb becomes an image of Jesus himself who is forced to accept God's demanding will. When Jesus tries to enquire about any way out of the drastic fate which God is

preparing for him, God says to Jesus: “None whatever, and don't play the lamb taken to be sacrificed, who struggles and bleats pitifully, for your fate is sealed, the sword awaits. Am I that lamb. You are the lamb of God, My son, which God himself will carry to the altar we are preparing here” (315). The ironical state is that though Jesus tries to save a lamb hoping that someone would save his life, there is no one to save him. The Christian symbolism of the lamb is thoroughly reinterpreted. For, in Christian understanding the death of the lamb brings about human salvation. In the novel, however, it only helps to promote the selfish motives of a jealous and cruel God who is in pursuit of expanding his dominion over more people.

Summing up the above discussion, one can say that Saramago is a master of retelling the already established and deep rooted Christian theological themes. His ‘Gospel’ is an excellent example for the hermeneutical process in which he revisits and reconstructs most of the Christological theories in Christian scriptures and tradition. However, this revisiting is not a new phenomenon exclusive to Saramagoan writing. There were many who had ventured thus before him, who of course, had other approaches and intentions. One of those important writers who elaborately discussed Christological themes through fictional practices is Nikos Kazantzakis. The next chapter is an analysis of the hermeneutical possibilities in the fictional world as depicted by Kazantzakis

Chapter 5

Interpreting Kazantzakis's Christ

After a critical analysis of the Christological themes in Saramago's novel one would definitely be prompted to look at other fictional works of the same genre. This would instantly lead to the fictional world of the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis. Any theological discourse in fiction that revolves around the life of Jesus, the founder of Christianity- of Christian spirituality, if not Christian religion as such- cannot ignore the compelling presence of his controversial novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, published in 1960, which may be considered to be a forerunner of a lot of later works on the life and precepts of Jesus. The work had been censored and banned for some time, and it remains a subject of animated debate. The novel criticizes the representation of Jesus as a pious figure who fits into the institutional framework of the church. Before going into the details of the novel and its hermeneutical reading, the philosophical influences that inspired Kazantzakis to write it need to be given proper attention.

Kazantzakis who hails from Crete in Greece, though most of the time he lived in foreign countries, was definitely familiar with the philosophical legacy of his mother country. The dualistic philosophy of Plato must have been a great influence in developing his philosophy of life, which always considered human life to be an arena of conflict between mutually opposing realities, a concept which can very well be observed in most of his works. According to C.D. Gounelas, It is this duality as recognised by Kazantzakis' that "provides a background against which to read materiality and the metaphysical void as in imperative balance and harmony. Only

through this harmony, the human potential can attain freedom and simultaneously subjugate itself to the divine will” (103). However, unlike Plato, he tries to arrive at a point where synchronization of those conflicting realities happens. Joseph C. Flay argues that this affinity with the classical philosophical traditions makes his writings different from most of modern western literature. “His novels and poetry, speaking to the contemporary situation of contemporary man, yet rooted in a soil and soul relatively foreign to that of modern western literature, bring us not hope, but a love of life and struggle which works to supplant the morbidity of our sinking civilization”(293).

Nietzsche exerted tremendous influence on the creative faculties of Kazantzakis from the beginning of his writing career. Peter Bien points to the personal identification Kazantzakis could achieve with Nietzsche, which enabled him look at the latter as a human prototype in whose life he could see glorification of his own struggles in life. More than that, Peter Bien states that,

Nietzsche’s chief usefulness to Kazantzakis was as a destroyer of the old. For the basic structure of a new, positive world-view Kazantzakis turned elsewhere, primarily to Bergson. Nietzsche was a negative force, an ally in Kazantzakis’ conviction that the old order must be evaluated, challenged and overturned in the interests of developing a new and more viable civilization. (249)

It is undoubtedly the influence of the philosophy of Bergson, as stated above, which gives positivity to the vision of life manifested by Kazantzakis. Andreas K. Poulakidas observes that it is the calm and cheerful philosophical vision exuded by

Bergson which enabled Kazantzakis to come out of a tragic vision of life which goes in tune with the concept of the perennial struggle between opposing elements in human life. From Bergson's idea of the vitality of life, Kazantzakis acquired a changing and creative pulse of life ("Kazantzakis and Bergson: Metaphysic Aestheticians" 267). He goes on to argue that it is the influence of Bergson which is behind the idea of the two opposing and harmonizing forces of life emanating from the depth of what Kazantzakis calls the primordial essence of life ("Kazantzakis' Spiritual Exercises and Buddhism" 209).

Apart from the above mentioned influences, Kazantzakis was indebted to many other thinkers and movements for providing him with a new and creative vision of human life. He has drawn impetus from Buddha, Christ, and Lenin for developing a unique philosophy of life. What is to be noted here is the fact that in spite of his being moulded by the thought patterns of these great mentors, he never allowed his philosophy to be dominated by their thought. At the same time, he kept for himself those aspects of their philosophy which is appealing to his personal vision of life (Savvas 284). The artistic/poetic sensibility Kazantzakis is blessed with is the result of his continuous encounter with various philosophical systems. The secret of his rich ideas and creativity lies in his journey through the great minds and appropriation of the great ideas. Pandelis Prevelakis observes:

In order to fill the void, Kazantzakis wished first for the resurrection of the Christ of the Gospels, untouched by the dogmas of the Church. Later, he sought for an acceptable metaphysic and ethic in Buddhism. Finally, disheartened by the impossibility of achieving the rebirth for

which he aspired, he flirted with Marxism and planned to enlist in the revolutionary movement. This last failure was to bring him- or, I should say; bring him back- to poetic creation. (61)

Of all the great men who have animated and laid the foundations of his fictional as well as nonfictional practices, Jesus occupies a prominent position. Almost all of his works, especially those such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Saint Francis*, *The Greek Passion*, and *The Fratricides* deal with themes either directly or indirectly connected to the person of Jesus Christ and his teachings. Any fictional attempt to delineate the life of religious figures may bring in all sorts of criticism leading to different controversies. This is equally true of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a novel which naturally evoked strong opposition from the part of various Christian churches and finally led to a ban on the work both by the church and the state. This is a novel which tries to provide a more or less chronological account of the life and teachings of Jesus. Like Saramago's novel, it also can be considered as a rewriting of the gospel accounts regarding Jesus. Kazantzakis does it by a process of subversion of the various themes traditionally associated with and attributed to Jesus Christ and his church. He too revisits the biblical and theological constructs regarding Jesus. What is attempted here is a hermeneutical analysis of the novel with special reference to the various theological realities like the doctrine of Trinity, concept of God, the life and teachings of Jesus, the church and so on. Therefore, this chapter tries to find the various strategies that Kazantzakis employs in order to uncover the interpretative possibilities in Christian theology and belief.

Any theological analysis around the Christian precepts and dogmas would necessarily end up in the concept of Trinity, which may be taken as the very foundational dogmatic position of the church. God according to the church is triune since though there is only one God there are three persons in the single Godhead. As elaborated in chapter three, this concept is the result of a synthesis of some of the biblical accounts and the traditional faith of the church. Though not explainable with the use of human reason, the church demands that faith in Trinity should be the fundamental and indispensable condition for being a member of the church (This is not maintained by all the denominations in Christianity. But the Catholic Church makes it a necessary precondition for its community of the faithful). Kazantzakis does not directly invalidate the Trinitarian existence as is evident from his portrayal of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the novel. There are a few instances in the novel where Kazantzakis refers to the Holy Spirit. The appearance of the Holy Spirit to Mary, the mother of Jesus, is in the form of a dove, which is a traditional symbol in the Church, for the Spirit. The dove came to her and spoke to her as if it wanted to reveal some secret. “She looked at the dove and felt sorry for it. Leaving her spindle, she called the bird in a very tender voice, and the delighted dove took a hop and landed on her joined knees. And there, as though its whole secret was that it had been longing to reach those knees, it squatted, drew in its wings, and remained motionless” (59, 60). This appearance becomes significant when it is said that Mary could identify the words of God in thunder, as she was listening to the heartbeats of the dove:

She closed her eyes. In her palm she felt the dove's tiny warm body and beating heart. Suddenly—she did not realize how, she did not know why—dove and lightning were one; she was sure of it: these heartbeats and the thunder—all were God! She uttered a cry and jumped up in terror. Now, for the first time, she was able to make out the words hidden in the thunder, hidden in the dove's cooing: 'Hail, Mary ... Hail, Mary ...' Without a doubt, this was what God had cried: 'Hail, Mary ...'. (61)

What is to be noted in this incident is that the author does not give a clear statement with regard to the identity of the dove as the Holy Spirit, except that both the heartbeats of the dove and the sound of the thunder are the same and are words of God. Hence, the apparent manifestation of the Spirit is not a proof for the existence of Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity.

Pneumatology finds the greatest proof for the existence of the Holy Spirit in the biblical accounts of Jesus being baptised by John, the Baptist. As per the synoptic gospels, Jesus came to the river Jordan where the Baptist was baptizing people after making them confess their sins.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness'. Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him

and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' (Matt.3:13-17)

The descending of the Spirit is explained later to be nothing but mere illusions which different people who had witnessed it, came to experience. The words of Judas, during the discussion over the baptism of Jesus, testify to this. When Peter makes a recollection of the incident with some exaggeration about the miraculous revelation of the Holy Spirit, Judas emphatically states that he had not seen anything of that sort, and sarcastically explains, “ ‘And your lordship, straw-beard, saw because you wanted to see. You had an appetite to see the Holy Spirit, so it was the Holy Spirit you saw. And what’s more, now you make these numbskulls see it too. You’ll have to answer for the consequences.’ ” (287). But, the value and veracity of the words, coming as they do from Judas, do depend on the credibility of Judas as a character, both in the Christian tradition and in the novel itself. However, the author does not make Judas a mere traitor but as someone who participates in the execution of the will of God (discussed in the last chapter of this thesis). Again Judas’ negation of the appearance of the Spirit goes in tune with the witness given by other characters in the novel. Moreover, the author tries to give the reader different pictures of the incident and paves the way for arguing that there cannot be a single assertion that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. It becomes clear with the words of the tempter in the desert. While Jesus was praying for days in the desert for a revelation from God for his mission, Satan came to tempt him away from the path of God. He reveals to Jesus that it was not a dove that descended: “‘You are my son, my only son!’ That

was the message brought you by the wild dove. But it was not a wild dove; it was the archangel Gabriel” (263). Here again, the question of the veracity of these words come up, since it is Satan who is speaking. As he is the Tempter, his objective is to mislead Jesus, and it can be argued that his words constitute a lie; thereby the dove was indeed the Spirit. It could be again explained as one of the instances the author presents to bring in the idea that the Holy Spirit is not seen and explained by the different people alike, Satan being only one of those differing voices. The Holy Spirit is even presented as the son to be born out of the marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. During his last dream on the cross, he marries Magdalene. When asked what will be the name for the son they are going to have, Jesus replied: ““Let’s call him Paraclete, the Comforter!”” (450) (*Paraclete* is a Greek word transferred into English. This word, in Christian theology, denotes the Holy Spirit). Hence, it could be argued that though Kazantzakis gives the impression that he is adhering to the Pneumatological dogma, a close reading reveals the subversive strategy adopted tacitly.

Christianity believes in an omnipotent and omniscient God who pervades the entire world and controls humans. The representation of God as a person, rather than a force is typical to Christian theology. Though there is a general agreement with this idea in Kazantzakis’ novel discussed here, he seems to provide certain descriptions which run in the opposite direction. He, at times, provides the reader with a pantheistic picture of God. Jesus on his way to the monastery meets with different creations of God and realizes and identifies God with them. “He felt completely enveloped in God’s breath. It blew over him, sometimes warm and benevolent,

sometimes savage, merciless. Lizard, butterflies, ants, Curse—all were God” (127). Jesus also says: “Everything is God’s. When I bend over the ant, inside his black, shiny eye I see the face of God” (157). These and similar expressions, akin to the mystical way of looking at the divine, gives the impression that the author is tending more in line with the concept of God that exists in and through the different elements of nature. This way of looking at the divine, though not in conformity with the Christian concept of a God who is personal and residing outside the forces of the universe, provides the novelist more freedom in depicting a concept of God more acceptable to the modern reader.

The most important concept of God in Christian theology is the belief in a loving and compassionate God. However, Kazantzakis tries to bring out the other side of God who is demanding and sometimes cruel. It is in the portrayal of the relationship between God and Jesus that this nature of God, strange to the Christian concept, gets revealed. From the very beginning, it is stated that Jesus is tormented by God so that he may come to terms with the demanding will of God. Whenever Jesus turns away from the mission God has already designed, God interferes and torments him with terrible pain. He undergoes a terrible experience of excruciating pain on his head which lasts for a long time. While the young Jesus, after making a cross for the crucifixion of a zealot, was waiting for the time to take the cross to the place of crucifixion, he felt the terrible pain:

But while the youth leaned on the cross, his eyes shut, thinking nothing and hearing nothing except the beating of his own heart, suddenly he jolted with pain. Once more he felt the invisible vulture

claw deeply into his scalp. “He’s come again, he’s come again ...” he murmured, and he began to tremble. He felt the claws bore far down, crack open his skull, touch his brain. He clenched his teeth so that he would not cry out: he did not want his mother to become frightened again and start screaming. Claspng his head between his palms, he held it tightly, as though he feared it would run away. “He’s come again, he’s come again ...” he murmured, trembling. (25)

What is important to notice in this connection is the fact that whenever Jesus aspires/craves for the pleasures of the body, there is God’s tormenting interference. It seems that God does not wish for Jesus to lead a life of ‘worldly’ happiness.

..when the moon was full and he roamed the fields, or during his sleep, in the silence of the night; and most often in springtime, when the whole world was in bloom and fragrant. At every opportunity he had to be happy, to taste the simplest human joys—to eat, sleep, to mix with his friends and laugh, to encounter a girl on the street and think, I like her—the ten claws immediately nailed themselves down into him, and his desire vanished. (27)

The God of the gospels is not a sadistic one who demands a lot from Jesus and imposes pain on him when not accepting the ways of God. Kazantzakis here points out the possibility of looking at the Christ event proclaimed by the churches from a very different interpretative possibility.

The exercise of God's power is irresistible and demands unconditional submission to God, who is never satisfied with men who turn their face against him. Jesus, in the novel, is spared by God only when he submits to the will of God. However, it is not a willing and loving acceptance of God. The power of God is given prominence. "God was on every side. His grace pushed him where it pleased—no, not his grace, his power, his all-powerful power. The son of Mary now felt that this earth was his home—he had no other home; he felt that men were his desert—he had no other desert"(180). This power of God finally conquers Jesus and he is forced to accept the mission entrusted to him. "This was the moment he had feared for so many years. It had come; God had conquered, had brought him by force where he wanted him—in front of men—in order to make him speak" (183). Jesus feels at times that he is denied justice by God by compelling him to accept God's mission and that he is undergoing all sorts of suffering in life. "...he seemed to sense the injustice which was being done him. He swept his eyes around him like a trapped beast, and his temples drummed with anger and fear" (78).

Kazantzakis seems to underline the fact that the Christian understanding of a benevolent God is one sided and therefore tries to present the other side of God's nature. It is through the silent thoughts of old Simeon, the rabbi, that the ferociousness of God is presented. He says:

'Of course! God is a scorching wind, a flash of lightning - I know that,' he murmured. 'He is not an orchard in bloom. And the heart of man is a green leaf: God twists its stem and it withers. What can we do, how can we behave toward him to make his expression grow

sweeter? If we offer him sacrificial lambs, he shouts, ‘I don’t want them, I don’t want flesh; my hunger is satisfied only with psalms’. If we open our mouths and begin to sing the psalms, he shouts, ‘I don’t want words. Nothing but the flesh of the lamb, of the son, of the only son, will satisfy my hunger!’ (142)

Kazantzakis tries to subvert the Christian idea of a loving God further when he depicts the life of Mary Magdalene, who was Jesus’ childhood play friend and the old rabbi’s daughter. The novelist narrates the event in which God began to torment him for the first time. At the age of twenty, during the Feast of Passover, his mother forced Jesus to go to Cana, his mother’s village, to choose a wife. While he stood there with a red rose in hand, the girls in the village, danced under a poplar tree. Then came Mary Magdalene, the only daughter of his uncle, the rabbi. As soon as he held out his hand to give her the rose, God descended down on him with ten claws that pierced themselves into his head. He could feel two frenzied wings beat above him, tightly covering his temples. Then he shrieked and fell down on his face, frothing at the mouth (26). With this incident, Magdalene reveals later, she abandoned, with a broken heart, God who was cruel to her, and turned to prostitution. When Jesus meets her years later, she bursts out calling God a “boogey man” and tells him: “...for your God, I don’t want him—he’s already broken my heart!”(89). She further proceeds to blame God for being cruel and for not letting people experience happiness in life. She tells Jesus that, “God is the great enemy, she was thinking; yes, God. He never fails to intrude; he is evil, jealous; he won’t let a person be happy” (95). This is true in the case of various other characters in the novel including Jesus himself who had to

undergo all sorts of sufferings and even death on the cross only for fulfilling God's will and mission.

In short, one can find two layers of meaning, in the various accounts of incidents in the novel, with regard to the portrayal of God. On the one hand, an explicit rendering of events true to Christian theology and gospel accounts can be found in the novel. At the same time, however, there is an implicit and alternative description which is juxtaposed to the first. What the author is trying to arrive at is to propose the possibility for an alternative interpretation and its implications in the hermeneutics of Christianity as reflected in fiction.

Coming to the proper Christological themes too, Kazantzakis adopts a strategy which apparently goes in tune with the official versions of the gospels, leaving behind many interpretative clues to argue otherwise. One of the most important dogmas regarding Jesus is his divinity, the features of which were already analysed in the third chapter. According to Christian belief, Jesus is God, one of the three persons in the Trinity. Hence, Jesus is, it is argued, God himself, one is essence with the Godhead. It is very rarely that Kazantzakis refers to Jesus as God, in the strict sense of the term. When Rabbi Simeon questions him about his real identity, Jesus tells him that, “‘There’s a devil inside me which cries, ‘You’re not the son of the Carpenter, you’re the son of King David! You are not a man, you are the son of man whom Daniel prophesied. And still more: the son of God! And still more: God!’” (147). This proclamation of the divinity, as the novelist seems to reveal, is done not by God but the devil. However, it could even be logically argued that this is nothing but the flowering of a gradual consciousness Jesus had. But in no other place

in the novel does Jesus consider himself as God. This is a clear indication of the subversive strategy which tries to reinterpret the Christian theological concept of Jesus' divinity.

Another two important theological titles attributed to Jesus are son of man and son of God. They are indicators of an important Christological dogma which states that Jesus is the result of a hypostatic union. It refers to the faith of the church that Jesus is true God and true man. The church believes that Jesus is neither partially God nor partially man. Though there is no clear incident or statement in the novel which emphatically declares Jesus as God, there are lots of references to his human nature. He is represented as an ordinary human being with all the shortcomings and weaknesses typical to humans. In one of his conversations with the divine force demanding his acceptance of the role of the Messiah, Jesus refutes the offer saying that,

I'm illiterate, an idler, afraid of everything. I love good food, wine, laughter. I want to marry, to have children. ... Leave me alone!" and he continues to argue further that, "I don't care about the kingdom of heaven. I like the earth. I want to marry, I tell you; I want Magdalene, even if she's a prostitute. It's my fault she became one, my fault, and I shall save her. Her! Not the earth, not the kingdom of this world—it's Magdalene I want to save. That's enough for me!.. (28)

This ordinariness in life makes his critics doubt whether he is a genuine prophet from God. They always make comparison between Jesus and John the

Baptist to come to the conclusion that the human behavior from the former's part is a clear indication that he is false.

John the Baptist fasts and weeps,' they scolded, glaring at him with leaden eyes, 'he threatens, and does not laugh. But you—wherever there is a merry wedding, you're first and foremost. You eat, drink and laugh with the rest, and the other day at a marriage in Cana you were not ashamed to dance with the young ladies. Who ever heard of a prophet laughing and dancing?. (195)

Here Jesus appears as a typical human being without any of the vanities of a divine incarnated being or even of a prophet. Kazantzakis seems to assert the humanity of Jesus over his divinity and that is why he brings in the contrast between the Baptist and Jesus. The binary becomes clearer when both of them have a personal encounter and engage in a prolonged discussion over the mission of the Messiah. The Baptist is a man of fire and action who warns the people to flee from the impending anger of God and the powerful image he uses is that of an axe placed at the roots of the tree, symbolizing God's justice and anger against the sinners. However, Jesus stands for a position just opposite to it. The conversation proceeds as follows:

'Isn't love enough?' he asked.

'No,' answered the Baptist angrily. 'The tree is rotten. God called to me and gave me the ax, which I then placed at the roots of the tree. I did my duty. Now you do yours: take the ax and strike!'

‘If I were fire, I would burn; if I were a woodcutter, I would strike.

But I am a heart, and I love.’ (241)

Kazantzakis prolongs this juxtaposition further at different levels through many characters who are bewildered to note the contrast between them. Andrew is one of those who get confused and find it difficult to decide which of them is right and who must be considered the Messiah. John the Baptist whom he followed was wrapped in the skins of animals, gnawed away by the sun, and devoured by prayer, vigils and hunger. He cried to the people to repent. When he shouted, great waves rose up on the Jordan, the caravans came to a halt, and the camels were unable to proceed. On the contrary, Jesus is the man who smiled and whose voice was tranquil and wavering, like a bird struggling to twitter for the first time; and his eyes, instead of burning, caressed (184). On another occasion, Andrew shouts at Jesus making a comparison between him and the Baptist. Andrew cannot understand how and why Jesus always speaks about love and universal brotherhood, while the prophet on the banks of Jordan roars about the fire which has come to purify the earth and divide between chaff and grain (187). It could be argued that this contrast between two roads to salvation, namely, force and love, is introduced by the novelist to pinpoint the human/humane realm of existence which Jesus represents as against a divine/mystical realm.

Another pair of binary characters introduced by the novelist to bring about Jesus’ frail humanity includes Judas and Jesus. From the very beginning of the novel, Judas appears as a foil to Jesus. However, Judas is so powerful and commanding that Jesus is not at all capable to counter him both in physical power and mental caliber.

Judas is always after Jesus. At first Judas considers Jesus as an enemy, since he makes crosses for the Romans to crucify zealots, who followed guerilla warfare in the hills against the oppressive rule of Rome over Israel. He even goes to the monastery where Jesus goes in search of the abbot who could explain to him the meaning of his dream, and attempts to kill Jesus. Kazantzakis projects the character of Judas as a gigantic figure who could outwit Jesus in all respects. In this contrast Jesus is represented as if he is an ordinary and unassuming figure, without any of the grandness of God or the son of God. The frailty and helplessness of Jesus is emphasised when he confronts his counter character. There are different instances in the novel where Jesus escapes from danger only because of Judas' help. It is Judas who saves Jesus from Barabbas, a member of the group of zealots. Barabbas and his people go to Mary Magdalene's house to hunt her down accusing her of working (in the world's oldest profession) on a Sabbath, which is forbidden by Jewish law. However, Jesus with his disciples comes just before the people start to stone her. Jesus challenges them saying any one can pelt stones provided he/she has never committed any sin. Nobody dares to come forward and she escapes. However, Barabbas comes to attack Jesus. Judas, who holds a higher rank in the brotherhood of zealots, rebukes him and saves Jesus (171-178). Further. Judas comes to rescue Jesus when his brothers and relatives come to take him back home claiming that he is insane (310-312). On another occasion Caiaphas orders four Levites, his litter bearers, to get rid of Jesus from the tower. It is Judas who intervenes at the right moment and saves him from their hands (385). It is also clear that Jesus depends more on Judas than the other disciples who at times discuss this among themselves. John even complains to Jesus against Judas " 'why do you always call him to stay

near you? If you look into the pupils of his eyes you'll see a knife' ” (414). The dependency Jesus has over Judas reaches its heights where Jesus needs his help even for the accomplishment of his mission and to be crucified. The words of Judas to Jesus during the last dream on the cross testify to this.

A tear popped into Judas's eye. Crushing it angrily, he resumed his shouting. His heart was still not empty. “ ‘I am the lamb of God,’ you bleated. ‘I go to the slaughter so that I may save the world. Judas, my brother, do not be afraid. Death is the door to immortality. I must pass through this door. Help me!’ And I loved you so much, I trusted you so much, that I said, ‘Yes’ and went and betrayed you. But you ... you ...” (492)

What could be concluded from these accounts is that the novelist indirectly brings in the concept of a human Jesus in order to present the subtlety of the theological claims over a magnificent and royal figure of Jesus as traditionally propagated by the church.

The dogmatic assertion of the humanity of Jesus necessarily leads to the doctrine of sinlessness. The faith of the church naturally upholds that though he is fully human there is no sin in him. Jesus, in his capacity of being divine, keeps himself without blemish and remains stayed away from the snares of the devil. Though Kazantzakis apparently holds on to the official version of the church, there are certain indications to the fact that Jesus also has succumbed to sin in his life. Jesus opens up his mind to the rabbi Simeon revealing the inner state of his mind which is not without blemish. He says, “I'm a liar, a hypocrite, I'm afraid of my own

shadow, I never tell the truth—I don't have the courage. When I see a woman go by, I blush and lower my head, but my eyes fill with lust. I never lift my hand to plunder or to thrash or kill—not because I don't want to but because I'm afraid. I want to rebel against my mother, the centurion, God" (146). This is further aggravated when Jesus reveals that it is his mistake which led Mary Magdalene to turn to prostitution. He reveals to the rabbi that he committed a serious sin while he was a child. He tells,

‘It's my fault, mine, that she took the road she did. I drove her to the pleasures of the flesh when I was still a small child—yes, I confess it. Listen, Rabbi, if you want to be horrified. It must have been when I was about three years old. I slipped into your house at a time when no one was home. I took Magdalene by the hand; we undressed and lay down on the ground, pressing together the soles of our naked feet. What joy that was, what a joyful sin! From that time on Magdalene was lost; she was lost—she could no longer live without a man, without men.’ (145)

Though it cannot be called a sin, in the strict sense of the term, because they were only children, what the author tries to drive home is the fact that the possibility for Jesus engaging in sinful acts cannot be overlooked.

Soteriology speaks of Jesus who dies on the cross for the entire human race, which is submerged in darkness as a result of sin. The ultimate aim of his death on the cross is the expiation of the sins of others. However, it could be effected only through someone who is blameless and untouched by sin. That is why the gospels as well theological discourses repeatedly uphold Jesus as impeccable and sinless. But

Kazantzakis reconstructs the entire soteriological significance when he makes Jesus state that his death is also for the sake of his own sins. The answer Jesus gives the redbear, when asked how he is going to pay for all his sins in life, is very significant. “The young man remained silent for a long time. His lips moved, but he was tongue-tied. ‘With my life, Judas, my brother,’ he finally managed to say. ‘I have nothing else’ ” (19). Hence the argument that Jesus is sinless is overlooked by the novelist.

The discussion on the sinfulness of Jesus naturally leads to the various temptations he had during his life time. The gospels limit the number of instances of temptations in Jesus’ life to three (Mt.4:1-11; Mk.1:12-13; Lk.4:1-13). However, Kazantzakis represents Jesus as a man who had to undergo temptations at different stages in his life. Among the various temptations, it is his desire for Magdalene that haunts him most. It is said even while he was passing through Cana memories rushed to him with all luring thoughts. “He shuddered. Suddenly he saw her of the thousand secret kisses standing once more before him. Hidden in her bosom were the sun and the moon, one to the right, the other to the left; and day and night rose and fell behind the transparent bodice of her dress” (70). However, he won over the temptation and ran away from this ‘trap of Satan’s’ soon. The novelist presents a victorious Jesus who claims that he could win over all temptations except fear. “Night and day his sins were knives in his heart. He had fought in vain those last few years to vanquish Fear, the only one of the devils which remained. The others he had conquered: poverty, desire for women, the joys of youth, the happiness of the hearth. He had conquered them all- all except Fear” (13). But finally, he was able to overcome fear

and to begin his mission of imparting good news to the people. Even when Jesus claims to conquer the temptations, the novelist depicts him as having to grapple with them at every moment of his life before he begins his public ministry (145- 146).

Though various instances of temptations, not found in the gospels, are depicted in the novel, Kazantzakis does not turn his face away from those narrated in the synoptic gospels. He invokes the biblical narration of the three temptations in the wilderness, though with some differences in their details. At first a snake with the eyes and breasts of a woman appeared to him and tempted him to take Mary Magdalene as his wife. The second was in the form of a majestic lion which came and offered Jesus all earthly powers represented by four kingdoms on earth. The third temptation was more enticing and difficult, because the tempter appeared in the form of the archangel and promised to make him God. However, Jesus did not fall prey to them. He chased those enticing temptations away (255-264). Though Jesus returned victorious from the desert, the greatest and the final of all temptations in his life was yet to come. The tempter, being defeated for the third time in the desert had challenged him already. "He heard peals of laughter in the air. Jesus gave a start. The angel had vanished. He uttered a piercing cry, 'Lucifer!' and fell prone onto the sand. 'I shall see you again,' said a mocking voice. 'We shall meet again one day—soon'" (263). Lucifer, keeping his word, comes as a temptation which Jesus has to endure while he is dying on the cross. He faints on the cross and then has a dream in which he finds himself getting down from the cross and being led by an angel first to Mary Magdalene and then to the house of Lazarus. There he gets married to Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus, and leads a happy family life, satisfying all the desires of

body. This dream was the final and decisive temptation. Finally Jesus comes out of the dream victoriously, realizing that he has not given up his mission and yielded to temptation.

Suddenly he remembered where he was, who he was and why he felt pain. A wild, indomitable joy took possession of him. No, no, he was not a coward, a deserter, a traitor. No, he was nailed to the cross. He had stood his ground honorably to the very end; he had kept his word. The moment he cried ELI ELI and fainted, Temptation had captured him for a split second and led him astray. The joys, marriages and children were lies; the decrepit, degraded old men who shouted coward, deserter, traitor at him were lies. All—all were illusions sent by the Devil. His disciples were alive and thriving. They had gone over sea and land and were proclaiming the Good News. Everything had turned out as it should, glory be to God! (495-496)

The depiction of the various temptations, and especially the last temptation, takes up the novelist's concept of human life as the arena of spiritual warfare. Theologically too the novelist seems to confine his ideology to the official position. This is evident because, he presents Jesus as one who undergoes severe troubles and temptations. At the same time, he is depicted as not being defeated by them. He comes back from that momentary deviation from the path of God. As a result, Kazantzakis writes: "He uttered a triumphant cry: IT IS ACCOMPLISHED!"(496). These temptations are signs of the humanity of Jesus which is always contrasted with his divinity.

This fundamental conflict in human life is further expanded when Kazantzakis writes about the binary relationship between the body and the soul. Human mind, as Kazantzakis sees it, is a locus for conflict. Man is torn between desires of the flesh and longings of the spirit. There are many places in the novel where the body and its cravings engulf Jesus who is denied access to them by God. Kazantzakis realizes that these two are the basic substances of human existence which are in perennial conflict. In his prologue to the novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ* Kazantzakis writes about this battle between the two. He says that,

My principal anguish and the source of all my joys and sorrows from my youth onward has been the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh” and continues to explain that “The anguish has been intense. I loved my body and did not want it to perish; I loved my soul and did not want it to decay. I have fought to reconcile these two primordial forces which are so contrary to each other, to make them realize that they are not enemies but, rather, fellow workers, so that they might rejoice in their harmony—and so that I might rejoice with them. (1)

The ultimate success of human life, according to him, is in the ability of human beings to realize the fundamental unity between body and soul. This goes in tune with the basic philosophy of unity found in Kazantzakis. “I believe in the innumerable, the ephemeral masks which God has assumed throughout the centuries and behind his ceaseless flux, I discern an indestructible unity” (Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God* 130).

Kazantzakis, even when speaking about the unity of two natures, seems to give many instances where the body is considered to be evil and an obstacle to human salvation. The conversation between Judas and Jesus, for example, makes a debate over it. Jesus stands for the prominence of soul saying that it should be the foundation which should be delivered first. However, Judas contradicts it and asserts that the foundation is the body which should be freed from the clutches of political slavery under the Romans, and the soul afterwards may be freed from sin (204). However, during the dream on the cross, Jesus tells Magdalene that ““Beloved wife, I never knew the world was so beautiful or the flesh so holy. It too is a daughter of God, a graceful sister of the soul. I never knew that the joys of the body were not sinful”” (450). There are many other statements in the novel where body is preferred over soul in human life. In short, Kazantzakis makes a silent revolt against the one-sided dogmatic approach of Christian theology which lays emphasis on the human soul as the fundamental reality and advocates taming the body as a means to salvation.

Another area of Christological teachings of the Church concerns Jesus’ consciousness and knowledge. Though the theological precepts infer that Jesus was totally conscious of his divine nature and mission, Kazantzakis does not give a clear answer to the question. He portrays Jesus who is a seeker with regard to his Messianic mission in life. He goes to the abbot of the monastery in the desert to get an interpretation to his dreams and thereby his real identity, and to make an end to the confusion in his mind.

It had never entered his mind to come to this monastery to ask the Abbot to explain the dream he had on the night he constructed the cross: that wild chase in his sleep and the redbearde rushing in front and the dwarfs who followed him with their instruments of torture. But now as he stood irresolutely on the threshold, suddenly the dream tore across his mind like a flash of lightning. That's it! he shouted to himself. I've come because of the dream. God sent it in order to show me my road, and the Abbot is going to untangle it for me. (136)

Similarly, Jesus approaches John, the Baptist in order that he may reveal or recognize Jesus as the Messiah who is to come. Jesus is advised by him to seek the silence in the desert where God speaks so that he will come to know his true mission. Many a time Jesus states that he does not know what to speak to the people as part of his mission. He speaks what God puts into his tongue. He says: "I am a simple, illiterate man, poor and despised like yourselves. My heart has much to say, but my mind is unable to relate it. I open my mouth and without any desire on my part, the words come out as a tale" (183).

At the same time there are many indications to the fact that Jesus had prior knowledge about his real identity and mission. When the redbearde ridicules him for making cross for the crucifixion of the zealot whom they suspect to be the Messiah, Jesus emphatically denies it, saying, "No, the Messiah will not come in this way. He will never renounce his rags or wear a royal crown. Neither men nor God will ever rush to save him, because he cannot be saved. He will die, die, wearing his rags; and everyone—even the most faithful—will abandon him. He will die all alone at the top

of a barren mountain, wearing on his head a crown of thorns” (17-18). This is a clear pointer to the Messianic consciousness Jesus possessed from the very beginning. The only thing is that he was not ready to accept this divine mission entrusted him and rebelled. When Judas asks why Jesus makes crosses, his self-consciousness is disclosed.

That was his secret—how could he reveal it? How could the blacksmith give credence to the dreams which God sent him, or to the voices he heard when he was all alone, or the talons which nailed themselves into the top of his head and wanted to lift him to heaven? And he resisted and did not want to go...He clutched sin, desperately as a means of keeping himself on earth. (156).

In short, one can deduce that Kazantzakis, being deeply religious, does not break away completely with the ecclesial version of the mystery of Christ, who had a tremendous influence on his sensibility. At the same time, he does not follow the Christ of the church who is many a time the product of a metaphysical way thinking. He tries to combine both the divine and the human in the man, Jesus.

Any discussion on Jesus, especially on his divinity, leads to certain Mariological dogmas promulgated in the church. The most important one is the question of the virginal conception which states that the mother of Jesus was a virgin before, during and after giving birth to Jesus. The gospels do not give any conclusive proof for this argument. But the tradition of the church upholds it. Kazantzakis too takes an ambivalent position in this regard. He gives clues to establish that there was no sexual union between Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus. On the day of

their wedding, they climbed Elijah's summit to implore the mediation of the prophet. They were to get married in the evening. While they were praying, a great thunder and lightning occurred and they fell unconscious. When Mary came to her senses, she saw Joseph lying face down on the granite--paralysed (60). It indicates that Jesus must have been born miraculously from his virgin mother. At the same time, the author gives clues to the fact that Jesus had siblings. On two occasions we find reference to his brothers. Redbeard mentions Simon, the traitor as his brother (19) and reference can be found about Simon, the lame and Jacob, the devout who had come to bring Jesus back home thinking that he has gone insane (309). So the argument that Mary was a virgin throughout her life is left a matter of debate.

With regard also to the concept of the immaculate conception of Mary, another Mariological Dogma, Kazantzakis gives an ambiguous possibility. Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, are presented as an aged and holy couple.

They were saintly people. The angels went regularly in and out of their simple cottage, and one night the neighbors saw God Himself stride across their threshold disguised as a beggar. They knew it was God, because the house shook as though invaded by an earthquake, and nine months later the miracle happened: Anne, an old woman in her sixties, gave birth to Mary. (43)

So, one can say that the author, in accordance with the apocryphal accounts, makes Mary a mysterious figure, but he is not concerned with the dogmas of the church as such, and hence does not say anything about the immaculate conception.

Kazantzakis projects the mother of Jesus, in contrast to her highly esteemed position in the church as mother of God, as an ordinary woman who undergoes all the sufferings of life. He makes her lament over the tragic life she has lead.

She had been so unfortunate in her life, unfortunate in her husband, unfortunate in her son. She had been widowed before she married, was a mother without possessing a child; and now she was growing older—the white hairs multiplied every day—and yet she had never known what it was to be young, had never felt the warmth of her husband, the sweetness and pride of being a wife and mother. Her eyes had finally been drained dry. Whatever tears God apportioned her she had already spilled, and she looked at her son and her husband dry-eyed. If she still sometimes wept, it was in the spring when she sat all by herself and gazed out at the green fields and smelled the perfumes which came from the blossoming trees. At these times she cried not for her husband or her son but for her own wasted life. (30)

She is never to be treated as an extraordinary and miraculous being. She partakes in all the ordinary experiences of human life. She tells the rabbi: “I am like all women. I love all the cares and joys of women. I like to wash, to cook, to go to the fountain for water, to chat merrily with the neighbors; and, in the evening, to sit in my doorway and watch the passers-by. And my heart, Father, like the hearts of all women, is full of pain’ ” (63). She desires the little joys of human life and not the divine and angelic beatitude; she wants children and grandchildren and not angels around her son (190). Moreover, the church considers her to be one who works

together with Jesus for the salvation of the world. This idea makes the church confer upon her the title, co-redemptor. However, the novel presents Mary not as someone assisting Jesus in fulfilling his mission. She is even portrayed as trying to deter him on his way to save the world (311- 312). Kazantzakis even goes to the extreme where it is said that people begin to curse her as the mother of the cross maker (34).

The concept of the church in theological discourses are largely respected and accepted in the Kazantzakisean analysis. As in the gospels, Jesus gathers disciples from all walks of life and from among them selects a few to be his close circle called apostles. The difference in the novel is that unlike the gospels there is no descending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the instance Christian theology demarcates as the official inauguration of the church. It may be because the novelist does not want to give undue importance to the church which has later become institutionalised and alien to the spirit of Jesus. Moreover, he may be upholding the idea that it is St. Paul who actually built the church after Jesus, who only preached the good news of the kingdom of God. When Jesus is visited by Paul, in the last dream, Paul tells him that he is going to preach a resurrected Christ, without bothering about its veracity. He says: “Be quiet, or men will hear you and die of fright. In the rottenness, the injustice and poverty of this world, the Crucified and Resurrected Jesus has been the one precious consolation for the honest man, the wronged man. True or false—what do I care! It’s enough if the world is saved!”(477). Paul begins to proclaim about Jesus after the latter’s crucifixion and is not worried about the truth or falsehood of the stories about Jesus. He is led by mere pragmatic considerations. That is why he declares that he is going to construct a Jesus according to his idea and not the real

historical Jesus. Paul declares: “I shall become your apostle whether you like it or not. I shall construct you and your life and your teachings and your crucifixion and resurrection just as I wish. Joseph the Carpenter of Nazareth did not beget you; I begot you—I, Paul the scribe from Tarsus in Cilicia’ ” (478). This is how Kazantzakis visualizes the church. It is only a pragmatic entity constructed by Paul. What is subverted is the teaching of the church and the faith of the members of the church about its divine origin.

Kazantzakis further delineates the picture of the church which is going to be established after the death of Jesus. This future thing is considered to be an institution which will function contrary to the desires of Jesus. The disciples tell him the type of church they are planning to construct and Jesus gets upset. “We cannot oppose God’s will and the will of our master. As the prophets tell us, Rabbi, it is your duty to die, ours to live: to live so that the words you spoke shall not perish. We’ll establish them firmly in new Holy Scriptures, we’ll make laws, build our own synagogues and select our own high priests, Scribes and Pharisees” (427). This is a church which is antithetical to the vision of the church in Jesus’ mind. So the novelist says Jesus was terrified and shouted that they will kill the spirit. However, Jacob tells him that though the spirit is absent it will look like spirit and that will be enough for their work (427).

The Catholic Church claims to be of divine origin and hence a holy one different from Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish religion. Kazantzakis brings in a different version of the establishment of the new church and the election of Peter to be its head. The episode of the establishment of the church, as presented by

Kazantzakis, is not represented as Jesus directly declaring it. Rather, it is presented in such a way that it gives the impression that we get to know about it from Matthew's recording. Peter demands to know what Jesus spoke and he extracts from him the details he needed. Accordingly Jesus will build his church on the rock, Peter and promises to give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven (378). Kazantzakis presents this incident indirectly pointing to the fact that all those gospel accounts on the establishment of the church and the supremacy of Peter over other apostles, are the result of later theological reflections and hence not what really happened. Hence many of the ecclesiological claims on the absolute power of the church are subverted.

Kazantzakis makes interesting observations with regard to the very process of the formation of the Bible which is of utmost importance in the development of an alternative Christology. Matthew, one of the apostles, is found always with writing materials and he is presented by the novelist as writing down, at the end of each day, the deeds and teachings of Jesus. His writing is described as a tedious but dedicated work to safeguard the history of Jesus' life. He does it with all elegance and the commitment of a true disciple. "When the meal ended and all the others lay down to sleep, Matthew knelt below the lamp, drew out the virgin notebook from under his shirt, took his quill from behind his ear, leaned over the blank pages and remained meditating for a long time. How should he begin? Where should he begin?"(326). The novelist considers it a sacred work entrusted to Matthew, who stands here as the representative of other evangelists. This divine nature of biblical writings is endorsed when Kazantzakis writes:

God had placed him next to this holy man in order that he might faithfully record the words he said and the miracles he performed, so that they would not perish and that future generations might learn about them and choose, in their turn, the road of salvation. Surely, that was the duty God had entrusted to him. He knew how to read and write; therefore he had a heavy responsibility: to catch with his pen all that was about to perish and, by placing it on paper, to make it immortal. (326)

Kazantzakis, however, does not present the accounts given by Matthew as firsthand information, which is not practical too. The evangelist gathers his information from various other people. He goes to Peter and asks him about what happened in the river Jordan and about John, the Baptist, so that he may record the baptism of Jesus. He also meets two carters from Tiberias and enquires about the death of the Baptist. He wanted to know what happened in the king's palace where, it is said, Herod, the tetrarch was drunk and his stepdaughter danced before him naked (327- 328). It definitely argues against the single as well as divine authorship generally attributed to the Bible.

Kazantzakis further writes about the interpretative possibilities involved in the Bible. He is concerned very much with the ways in which misrepresentations and mistakes creep into the very process of writing scriptures. Jesus himself questions the veracity of what is written in the notebook Matthew holds, when he comes to know that Matthew is regularly writing down what he says and what he does. Jesus bursts out at the evangelist:

I say one thing, you write another, and those who read you understand still something else! I say: cross, death, kingdom of heaven, God ... and what do you understand? Each of you attaches his own suffering, interests and desires to each of these sacred words, and my words disappear, my soul is lost. I can't stand it any longer! (415)

Through this accusation the novelist is hinting at what might have actually taken place at a later stage of biblical interpretations.

As the Bible is not the result of a single day's labour and the work of a single author, there is always a selection process involved which is also referred to by Kazantzakis. When Jesus was arrested, the apostles went in hiding and were planning to go back to their former life. The novelist writes:

Peter turned anxiously to Matthew, who was sitting off to one side. He had been listening with cupped ear, not breathing a word. "For God's sake, Matthew," Peter said, "don't write all this down. Play deaf. Don't make us ridiculous for all eternity!"

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing," Matthew answered. "I see and hear a lot, but I select. ... A word, however, for your own good: Come to a noble decision; show how brave you are—so that I can write about it, and you poor fellows can be glorified. (439)

Finally, Kazantzakis makes a very crucial intervention in delineating the status of the Bible as the sacred book. The words he puts on Jesus' tongue shatters

the entire biblical discourses. For, he presents Jesus who becomes angry after reading what Matthew has written about him.

‘What is this?’ he screamed. ‘Lies! Lies! Lies! The Messiah doesn’t need miracles. He is the miracle—no other is necessary! I was born in Nazareth, not in Bethlehem; I’ve never even set foot in Bethlehem, and I don’t remember any Magi. I never in my life went to Egypt; and what you write about the dove saying „This is my beloved son to me as I was being baptized—who revealed that to you? I myself didn’t hear clearly. How did you find out, you, who weren’t even there?’(391)

Now the Bible turns out to be a collection of lies, in Jesus’ words. The implication of those words are important since the allegation made against the gospel writers is that they write about many things which they never witnessed. Many miracles in the Bible, then turns out to be fabricated stories. Kazantzakis provides an example for it. Peter, in his dream, witnesses Jesus walking over the sea and saving peter when he drowns while walking over the water to Jesus. Peter later explains this to Matthew with all exaggerations and expresses his doubt whether it is real or a dream. “....he began to turn over deeply in his mind how he could set it down the next day on paper. It would be extremely difficult because he was not entirely sure it was a dream, nor was he entirely sure it was the truth. It was both. The miracle happened, but not on this earth, not on this sea. Elsewhere—but where?”(343).

To sum up, Kazantzakis presents the Christological themes with the critical attitude necessary for the reworking of ancient texts. His novel takes up those gaps

and silences which the original gospel writers left untouched and makes them part of the new gospel he is writing. It could be seen as the attempt to find new and more dynamic hermeneutical possibilities in the biblical and theological accounts about the man, Jesus.

Chapter 6

Interpreting Hermeneutic Multiplicity

The present analysis of revisitations of biblical accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus and other related theological themes, represented in two major fictional works, carried out across the last two chapters, bear out the hypotheses of this study. They directly deal with Christological themes, are set in Biblical times, and address biblical questions head on. However, there are some other works that are not directly set in the biblical context, but still address some of those questions and are part of the culture of revisitation and of hermeneutic interpretation. Taking them up will provide a more comprehensive picture of the contemporary culture of hermeneutics. Therefore, this chapter seeks to extend the argument to novels of different authors, who concern themselves, directly or indirectly, with the hermeneutics of the biblical and theological Jesus. These works include Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son*, Nino Ricci's *Testament*, and Simon Mawer's *The Gospel of Judas*. These are novels of widely different fictional form, cast, and stature. They are not directly set in the biblical landscape and biblical time, but in the modern/contemporary social setting. Their major thematic concerns involve the representation of the life of Jesus, interpreted from different perspectives. They could be read as diverse attempts to understand the single reality of the central character in the gospels and other New Testament works.

It is with Brown's controversial novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, that a renewed interest in the life of Jesus gained popularity, and the position of Mary Magdalene in the life of Jesus as well as in the church came to be debated. The portrayal of Magdalene

as Jesus' romantic companion/wife is the most crucial issue brought up by the author and this idea can be corroborated with most of the alternative fictional practices. Brown proves this hypothesis with reference to the famous painting, *The Last Supper*, by Leonardo Da Vinci, where it is argued that the figure sitting adjacent to Jesus, at the right hand, is a woman. Sophie, one of the important characters in the novel, studies the person sitting near Jesus in the painting and finds it true. "As she studies the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. It was, without a doubt...female" (327). The novelist finds fault with the church for deliberately erasing the evidences of this relationship. As Teabing, another important character in the novel, states:

The early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a *divine* being. Therefore, any gospel that described earthly aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible. Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling *earthly* theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene...her marriage to Jesus Christ. (328-329)

It is as part of this conspiracy that Magdalene was branded a prostitute and made unacceptable to the community of the faithful. A careful reading of the gospels reveals the fact that nowhere in the Bible, is it mentioned that she is a prostitute. There are instances of 'sinful' women appearing in front of Jesus on various occasions and nowhere is it specifically stated that Magdalene was one of them. The famous passage where a prostitute is brought before Jesus for getting his permission,

as per the Jewish law, to stone her unto death, does not say that her name is Mary Magdalene (Jn 8:1-11). Even where her name is announced, she is not represented as a woman who has sinned. “The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources” (LK.8:1-3). This is in tune with the argument raised by Brown on the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, who was about to be handed over the power over the church. This idea proposed by Dan Brown, though does not form part of biblical narratives, can be seen as one probable cause for Magdalene being ostracised because patriarchy was disinclined to accept a woman as the leader of the church.

There are two important concepts which are highlighted in the novel. One is the idea of the Sacred Feminine, the concept of a Goddess cult which was prevalent among ancient religions. Margaret Starbird argues that the Goddess in Christianity was Mary Magdalene whose epithet meant ‘elevated’. However, during the time of crusades and inquisition, she argues:

..beautiful and important epithets that once belonged to the Magdalene were shifted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and churches built to ‘Our Lady’ ostensibly honored the mother of Jesus as the preeminent bearer of the archetypal feminine- ‘alone of all her sex’. Statues and effigies of the Virgin proliferated, most often with her child on her lap, reminiscent of the Egyptian statues of Isis and Horus. After the mid-thirteenth century, the ‘voice of the Bride’ was effectively silenced,

although it is whispered that the masons of Europe kept the true faith
and built its symbols into the very stones of their Gothic cathedrals...

(100-101)

This points to the need for looking at the Bible as a whole, and the gospels, in particular, from the perspective of a feminist hermeneutics, which feminist theology has been trying to do. It realizes the need for the affirmation of a feminine legacy which existed in the early years of the church and was thrown, as centuries passed, into the dustbin of history. This could be viewed as coming from a critical feminist perspective and Carol P. Christ observes: “the critical feminist paradigm questions the alleged universality of patriarchy and takes a fresh look at the discredited theories which hypothesized a transition from ‘matriarchy’ to ‘patriarchy’” (571). The whole novel can then be interpreted as a subversion of the power relations in the church whereby the conscious and the malicious efforts of patriarchal Christian authority to maintain its hierarchical dominance are set aside to regain the lost primacy of the feminine.

A second question which the novel raises is the existence and relevance of the apocryphal books in the Bible. The basic elements and notions with regard to the Apocrypha have already been discussed in the second chapter. The author bases his arguments on the non-official documents in the early church which later came to be known as apocryphal gospels. Many of these books underwent a selection process as in the case of any historical writing. All historical documents and writings have to undergo this filtering process. Carol P. Christ points to this nature of the historical documents when she argues:

History is not so much a matter of fact as it is a matter of interpretation, affected not only by time and space, but also by power relations. Many historians will even admit that the existing written records for most historical periods are themselves limited and biased in favour of the powerful, given that most people were not literate and that only a few had the skills and time to write. Moreover, they will agree that both chance and power politics have dictated that only a small number of the written records from the past have survived.

(Rebirth of the Goddess 73)

The different apocryphal gospels are used by Brown to establish the superior position Mary Magdalene adorns in the church. These works are important since they testify to the major argument of this study which focuses on the plurality of hermeneutic practices that has to be given importance.

Among the wide range of fictional practices that radically rewrites the orthodox Christian understanding of Jesus and God, Norman Mailer seems to stand out differently because of his allegiance to orthodox principles. The Jesus of his novel *The Gospel According to the Son* is different from the powerful, rebelling one and he enlivens a character that resembles the Son of God in the canonical gospels. “Traversing the borderland which lies between literature and theology, Mailer situates his novel where Christian and Jewish traditions converge by revisiting the drama of the mystical and historical figure whose story constitutes both the Jewish origins of Christianity, and the Jewish refusal of Christian messianic claims” (McDonald 79). This convergence of Christian and Jewish tradition renders the

novelist less freedom to present an individual who can break away from the traditional and less progressive paths to embrace a more creative and daring freedom. As a result, Mailer's Jesus failed the expectations of critical readers who were waiting for a powerful iconoclastic figure rising up against all delimiting representations.

However, apparent absence of the presentation of a figure who directly opposes church dogmas and precepts are due to the particular style of Mailer which involves an implicit subversive strategy while maintaining a rather amicable presentation of the life of Jesus, in consonance with the gospel accounts. The most important of the hermeneutical strategies he adopts is visible when he treats the traditional concept of the hypostatic union of Christ which accounts for his being fully God and fully man at the same time. He is presented as one who is wanting in full knowledge about both of his natures. Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, referring to Mailer's representation of Jesus, argues:

Jesus not only lacks knowledge of his position as God's Son, but he also is confused by the interference of his human nature. His problem as he matures and develops in his public ministry is not so much in discovering his divinity, but rather in knowing when the father is speaking through him and when His power is available to him. (68)

This figure of a weak and doubting Jesus, who is alien to the picture presented in the tradition of the church, is the result of a subtle interpretative strategy of the novelist.

This idea of a helpless human individual can further be noticed when Jesus loses the very consciousness of his divine sonship/divinity. As a real human being he becomes weak and fails to realize or recognize the words of God within him. Jesus speaks in the novel: “On this morning I was no longer the Son of God but only a man. God’s voice was weak in my ear; a low fear was in my heart” (197). These words of Jesus invoke two important ideas. The first one is the confusion regarding Jesus’ divinity, one of the fundamental dogmas of the church, which invariably demands acceptance by the faithful. From these words, it is clear that the human element at times conquers the other and the equality between two natures is lost. The second one is the possibility for interpreting lack of full knowledge in his life, as is claimed in the teachings and tradition of the church. He is not even sure about the possibility of considering his miracles as really performed by him. Jesus’ thoughts, after the incident in which Jesus calms down the sea, bear witness to this. He thinks: “I do not know if I can say that this miracle was mine. Even on awakening I could sense that the end of the storm was near” (67).

However, the humanity of Mailer’s Jesus does not lead him to sin, contrary to many of the other rewritings on his life. Even if he is presented as a sinner, his sins are trivial in nature. The novelist tries to maintain the holiness attributed to Jesus in the church’s teachings. The rationale behind the representation of Jesus as an embodiment of holiness is the theological view that he, who has come to bring in expiation for the sins of the whole world, must be free of the taints of sin. At the time of his baptism administered by John, the Baptist, Mailer makes his Jesus confess his sins to show that he is bereft of any mortal sin, and even those sins committed by

him are of a very inconsequential nature. "I searched to find evil in myself and came back with no more than moments I could recall of disrespect toward my mother and contests in the night with lustful thoughts. Perhaps there had been a few acts of unkindness when judging others" (33). In this regard, he is more akin to the official version than the other presentations of his life in contemporary fictional practices. Comparing Mailer's account of Jesus with that of others, Jeffrey F.L. Partridge observes that, "Jesus is not the sinner of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and he is not the Jesus who rationalizes his sin in Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*. He is sinful, but, by his own admission, his sins are small. They are hardly worth mentioning" (68).

There is an apparent contradiction in the novel which again gives room for arguing against the presentation of biblical accounts as the only true sources of information with regard to the life of Jesus. The incongruity is that apparently the novelist entirely depends on the Bible for his development of the story of Jesus, but there are indications within the novel which deconstructs this idea. When he begins his ministry, Jesus is depicted as stating that, "While I would not say that Mark's gospel is false, it has much exaggeration. And I would offer less for Matthew, and for Luke and John, who gave me words I never uttered" (3). This could be taken as an indication of the rejection of the absolutist interpretations of the gospel by the church, since the very sources of interpretation seem to be not 'objective' representations of the event of Jesus. It could be argued then that no account of the life of Christ can lay claim to truth. As a result, every fictional account of the same will become as authentic as the 'original' gospel accounts.

Another significant point in the analysis of Mailer's vision is his dependence on the dualistic philosophy where he considers the world as inhabited by two equal forces: God and Satan. However, there is no suppression of the one below the other as in the case of Manichaeism. Ashton Howley states:

As someone who could sound like a Platonic theologian when speculating about God and the Devil as transcendent personalities, but who could also sound like a proponent of Aristotelian naturalism when elaborating on his commitment to the immanent world, Mailer engaged the major tension that Western philosophers and theologians of the medieval period inherited from their counterparts in the ancient world. (60)

It is this tension which makes his God and Satan equal forces continuing their conflict incessantly. As against the Christian concept of the conflict between God and Satan as well as good and evil where God/good wins over Satan/evil, Mailer's God is not victorious at the end. Jeffrey F. L. Partridge would argue that at the end,

we have a God who is still battling Satan with no sign of victory in sight. Satan, as he had declared to Jesus in the desert, appears to be God's equal. The cross of Christ, which stands in orthodox Christian theology as the symbol of God's victory over Satan, is, in Mailer's novel, no more than a subtle act of misdirection on God's part — God's spin on a tragic event. (73)

The Christian concept of a good and benevolent God is also subverted through this as God presents the death of Jesus on the cross as a victory over Satan, while it is not really a victory. Jesus himself realizes this and declares God to be as cunning as Satan and says that, "For my Father saw how to gain much from defeat by calling it victory. Now, in these days, many Christians believe that all has been won for them. They believe it was already won before they were born. They believe that this victory belongs to them because of my suffering on the cross. Thereby does my Father still find much purpose for me" (241).

This can also be analysed as a subtle interpretative strategy employed by Mailer, which has significance as far as soteriology is concerned. In Christian theology, Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate sign of God's love for mankind and salvation is effected through it as it is God's victory over sin whose source is the Devil. Mailer's work somehow operates contrary to this to show that the cross is no more the sign of victory. Jesus' death on the cross is insignificant and is of no use. "The cross of Christ did not defeat Satan. There has been no atonement for sins. In fact, Mailer's gospel seems to have no use for Jesus's death on the cross other than as a deception. He is not the God of Truth, for he willingly manipulates people in a manner as cunning as the Devil" (Partridge 73). This presentation of the wile ways of God gives the reader a concept of God which is totally different from the omnipotent and all benevolent God of Christianity. So Mailer wants to offer a new interpretation of the concept of God which he had already made clear: "if man is made in God's image, then perhaps God too is an existential Being: "God is not all powerful but existential, discovering the possibilities and limitations of His creative

powers in the form of the history which is made by his creatures” (Presidential Papers 632). To sum up, though Mailer’s novel seems to give a prima facie impression that it is an imitation of the canonical gospels, an in-depth analysis brings out the fact that he addresses a lot of thematic concerns which bring out the possibilities of hermeneutics in reading/writing fiction.

Before coming to the conclusion that may be derived from the analysis of the texts so far considered, I would like to briefly address two more important novels which have offered alternative narratives to the gospel stories. Nino Ricci’s *Testament* is a novel which looks into the life of Jesus from four different perspectives. Four different characters who appear in the gospel story recount their encounter with Jesus who had influenced them in different ways. It is through the viewpoints of Yihuda of Qiryat (Judas Iscariot), Miryam of Migdal (Mary Magdalene), Miryam (Jesus’ mother), and Simon of Gergesa (a Greek Shepherd) that the story unfolds. What is of significance in this regard is that the four perspectives compared here correspond to the rendering of Jesus’ story by the four gospels. As the gospels are different attempts at recapturing the life of Jesus, these characters retell the story about the central character in the gospels. However, Wallis Wilde-Menozzi, in one of her reviews of the novel states: “His novel is about four characters far more than it is about Christ who remains a distant, quite stereotypic icon” (117). At the same time, they act like interpreters who analyze and give their own unique meaning to the life of Yesuha (Jesus). The result is that we get a new ‘bible’ with four gospels. This is significant for the analysis in this study since there is a justification for offering various interpretations of the biblical accounts.

Ricci challenges the biblical notion of the divinity of Jesus to emphasize humanity as the core aspect of the Christian saviour. He is not the Son of God, who is always portrayed in the gospels as having a miraculous conception and birth. The novel shocks Christian sensibilities when Jesus is presented as being conceived by his mother as a result of being raped by a Roman legate. This shatters the idea of the divinity of Jesus. Ricci uses this also as a rewriting strategy to subvert the Mariological dogmas. The teachings of the church which uphold virginal conception and Immaculate Conception are negated, when Mary is presented as an ordinary woman. She is forced to marry Joseph, an old man, only to save her face in the event of pregnancy out of wedlock and this goes contrary to the belief in a divine and holy family of Jesus. The ordinariness of her character is asserted by Wallis Wilde-Menozzi who states that, "Mary is a woman who cannot distinguish between her own feelings and those of Yeshua; a woman whose ignorance and fear make her deny Yeshua the Greek teacher who sees his gifts; a woman who is never quite certain if her illegitimate son is mad or is indeed a holy person" (118). In the novel, it is through the eyes of Mary that the vulnerability of his human nature is revealed, which, needless to say, goes against all Christian interpretations of a divine figure.

Ricci employs, as a subversive instrument, characters in the Bible who are of less significance or are notorious, except for Jesus' mother, to narrate the life of Jesus. One of them is Judas, fighting for the political freedom of the Jews, who gets strengthened by his conversations with Jesus about a free nation, though Jesus speaks about a more philosophical kingdom. Mary Magdalene who travels with Jesus, explicates the teachings of Jesus. Finally, Simon of Gergesa, provides the readers

with the last phase of his life leading to Jerusalem. Ricci seems to use all these narrators to highlight the process in which the reality around a historical figure is being constructed. It can be observed that the four different accounts reveal how the biblical account on the life of Jesus unfolds through the filters of narrations during and after the life of Jesus. This finally exposes the fact that the Bible is nothing but the result of a hermeneutic process.

Another important text which comes in the tradition of rewriting canonical texts is *The Gospel of Judas*, a novel by Simon Mawer. This novel is set in the modern times with characters from modern society whose response to a particular concrete situation leads the narration forward. As Barry Maitland states, “Simon Mawer's novels have a way of putting their characters in a situation - on a mountainside in *The Fall*, for instance, or confronted by the discovery of a radical new desert scroll in *The Gospel of Judas* - which places them in a crucible of stress” (86). The novel is actually a reinterpretation of the life of Judas who is maligned in history as the one who betrayed Jesus and hence is blamed to be the cause for the death of Jesus on the cross. The central plot revolves around the discovery of a lost text titled *The Gospel of Judas* (the novel takes its title from this apocryphal gospel) that belonged to the pre-gospel era in the history of the Church. “The theological shock lies in an ancient papyrus scroll discovered near the Dead Sea. It is from the first century AD, earlier than the gospels and written by Judas Iscariot” (Hughes 590).

The theological themes that underlie the novel are the concepts enumerated in this ancient text. The central concern of the text is the relationship between Jesus and

Judas as different from official biblical accounts, and how Judas becomes a friend and helper to Jesus, instead of being a traitor. Though writers like Kazantzakis have already pointed to the innocence of Judas in Jesus' death (as described in the previous chapter), Mawer's account gets cemented with the real discovery of the Coptic codex. Simon Gathercole provides, in his *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity*, the importance of this document in the Christian interpretation of the Bible. The volume of the Coptic codex containing the text of the *Gospel of Judas* is a leather-bound codex of 66 pages, measuring about 16 cm×29 cm. The *Gospel of Judas* appears on pages 33–58, with the title coming at the end of the work. He says that it is not only a copy but copy of copies. The language it appears in is not Greek, but Coptic, a language descended from ancient Egyptian, but predominantly written in the Greek alphabet (7). Simon Gathercole further observes:

This traditional picture of Judas undergoes serious surgery, however, in a newly discovered manuscript from Egypt containing the *Gospel of Judas*, finally released to the public a month after the *Mail on Sunday*'s portentous announcement. In this text, which survives in the ancient Egyptian language of Coptic, Judas, far from being an infamous villain, is actually Jesus' specially chosen disciple, and the recipient of a special revelation from Jesus. This secret knowledge is far superior to anything possessed by the other disciples—in fact, it is of a different character altogether. (2)

The secret knowledge which is mentioned in this text is the 'gnosis,' a Greek word which means knowledge, and hence points to the existence of Gnosticism,

prevalent during the early days of Christianity. Simon Gathercole further explains the salient features of Gnosticism. He finds three major characteristics of Gnostic philosophy:

1. The world was not the product of the creative activity of God, but the creation of a deity inferior to God. As a result, this world is imperfect, evil, and corruptible.
2. It is therefore the duty of the humans to escape from this earthly and bodily confinement. One should always strive to liberate his divine self from this imprisonment and to help his self, return to its original heavenly luminosity.
3. Salvation may be attained by gaining a special 'knowledge' (gnosis), which is an insight revealed only to an elite few favoured by the supreme deity. (3)

This philosophy exerted a great amount of influence upon the origin and development of Christian philosophical and theological precepts.

The subversion of Judas's role in Jesus's life as given in the text is not new. It could be reasoned out that it is Judas who helps Jesus fulfill his mission. Simon Gathercole testifies to it when he states that:

According to the New Testament Gospels, Jesus' death 'as a ransom for many' was, strange as it may sound, part of his intention and part of God's plan. Judas is accordingly presented as paradoxically fulfilling his role in this divine purpose, even though his action of

handing over the innocent Jesus to the authorities was in itself an act of wickedness. (172)

This logic, which is usually scorned by the church, is affirmed by the apocryphal gospel of Judas. Moreover, the very concept of the duality between the inner self and the body in gnostic philosophy also comes to justify Judas. Quoting from the text, Marvin Meyer states:

Jesus states that Judas will sacrifice the man—the physical man with the fleshly body—who is the biological basis for the real person of Jesus. In other words, here Jesus appears to indicate that Judas will help the inner person of Jesus—the spiritual person, the true person—become liberated and will turn the man in to the authorities to be executed. Judas Iscariot, often vilified and marginalized in Christian tradition, is restored as an insightful disciple in the *Gospel of Judas*, and here Judas is completely devoted to Jesus. (50)

What is strongly subverted in this document is the soteriological significance of the death of Jesus on the cross. For Christians, Jesus died on the cross as a ransom for the sins of the people. However, this utmost importance attached to the sacrifice is strongly criticised and even the rituals in the church based on soteriology came under severe criticism.

The practice of sacrifice in general is strongly criticised in the *Gospel of Judas*, and advocates of a sacrificial interpretation of the death of Jesus and the Eucharist, such as the leaders of the emerging Orthodox Church, seem to be accused

of sacrificing their own children, apparently a reference to Christian believers in the church. The *Gospel of Judas* thus seems to reject in a vigorous way the belief that Jesus died as a sacrifice for sins and that the salvific death of Jesus should be celebrated in the eucharist. (Meyer 49).

Thus the novel, *The Gospel of Judas*, strikes at the root of many misunderstandings and willful errors that have occurred in the interpretation of many Christian precepts and dogmas. The novel does this with the help of an apocryphal text of the same title, which throws light on the early days of the development of the Christian church. This alternative is a powerful proof for the existence of different voices present in the hermeneutical practice of the church.

The various novels on the life of Jesus as analysed in this and previous chapters of this thesis, in the light of the theoretical frame work of hermeneutics, necessarily lead to certain conclusions. The existence of various fictional practices differing from the official version of Christological/theological themes has been problematised in the study and the following answers are generated to explain it.

The very first problematic is a vicious circle regarding the interpretation of the Bible. The church always claims that its authority to interpret and explain biblical truths is not humanly given but of divine origin. This prerogative is derived from the biblical passage where Jesus is presented as giving the power of interpretation to the head of the church when he entrusted the authority to Peter. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter proclaims his faith in Jesus as the true Son of God, after which he is made the head of the church. Jesus proclaims:

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Mtt. 1:17-19)

It is based on this and other similar biblical passages that the church demands exclusive power over the interpretation of the scriptures. However, what is purposefully forgotten by the church is the fact that the Bible upon which the source of its authority is attributed is nothing but the result of a selection process carried out by the church itself. It is the church, as the history of the formation of the Bible indicates, who decided which of the then available scriptural works, must be granted official position as part of the Bible. Therefore, it is only logical to argue that when the church selects the texts in the Bible and then attributes the reason for its own origin in those texts, the church commits the fallacy of *Petitio Principii* (Begging the Question).

Following the same argument, the veracity and authenticity of any interpretation of the scripture, given by the church, can be questioned. The point of argument here is that since the scripture is selected by the church, it may select only those texts favourable to the interests of the church. What forms the biblical canon is therefore limited and biased. Even the inclusion and exclusion of a certain passage within the canonical texts, could be controlled by the interests of the church who makes the final decision as to the official nature of the biblical texts. In the light of

these reasons provided, any argument against the possibility of a variant reading of the gospels in fictional accounts cannot be sustained.

The notion of canon in the biblical trajectory with regard to the formation of the Christian Scripture, calls for a new way of looking at the hermeneutics of the Bible. The canonical texts were the last phase of a long process extending over a considerable duration of time. It had to evolve through years before coming to its final form. This journey through the time made a lot of changes in the subject matter and when it reached the final stage it must have gone through radical transformations. As discussed in the second chapter, the different stages and the different types of biblical criticism brought about a great amount of deletions, insertions, omissions, interpellations, errors of judgment etc. Some of them took place as a result of human mistakes, while some of these elements were the result of deliberate attempts from the part of those people involved in it, because, any writing/editing process would naturally involve the interference of the personal and political choices of the people concerned. It implies that the possibility of an absolute and objective meaning, as upheld by the church, is a pseudo argument. What follows is that in the absence of a single meaning, the attempts of the fictional writers to give different meanings cannot be ignored. The meanings they contribute are also equally valid.

One of the chief characteristics of the Bible is that it is culture specific and context bound. The meaning attributed to it is not a universal one. Space and time are determinants of meaning in the case of any scriptural writing. The biblical writings originally were addressed to the community of a particular place and of a particular period in history. The gospels as well as the other works were meant for some

communities. The titles of epistles like, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans etc, point to the communities for whom these books in the Bible were written. Some of them were even addressed to individuals like Titus, Timothy etc, in whose name those books came to be titled. This points to the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Bible which played a great role in the understanding of their meaning. What follows, then, is that if the Bible is written for particular persons and communities, the meaning it entails will also undergo changes as per the shift in the community whom these texts address now. Similarly, a meaning different from the original will have to be adopted for the changing times. This spatio-temporal dimension can equally be applied to the theological principles in the church. Theology is nothing more than reflections on some religious event which took place at a particular time and space in history. These reflections too are the products of history and hence cannot be free from the influence of the time and place of their occurrence. Even the dogmas, which are considered to be universal and unchangeable or unquestionable, cannot escape their being bound to space and time. Hence, those theological truths have to be interpreted for the contemporary humans which may sometimes be criticised as challenging the official positions of the church. However, the fictional practices which are analysed in this study are attempts in this line and hence they can be justified on the basis of the above mentioned arguments.

The existence of the Apocrypha leads to the confirmation of the concept that the church, at its infancy, had the freedom for plurality and multiple meaning in their understanding of faith. Various apocryphal gospels in the early church were different ways of looking at the same reality, Jesus and his life. They exerted a great amount of

influence on the people of the community where they thrived. There existed, it can be assumed, the freedom to disagree and to take in the so called mysteries around Jesus and the new life he proclaimed. It is this freedom which can be taken as the essence of any true spiritual movement. However, this freedom and spontaneity were thrown into the dustbin of history when canon formation began to gain momentum and by the time the process was completed and the number of books that forms part of the official canon of the Bible were fixed, meaning became a matter of authority and power. Monopolization of power over meaning and interpretation was established and many books/traditions of the early church were branded as apocryphal works and therefore negated by the church authorities. The attempt of the novelists who fictionalize the life of Jesus, I would like to submit, is to bring back that golden age of hermeneutical freedom. They earnestly try to break the binary between the Canon and the Apocrypha, providing umpteen interpretative possibilities in and through their works. Moreover, the selection process involved in differentiating the early scriptural works into canonical and apocryphal, leads to the idea that the present Bible is only the result of an arbitrary selection and therefore it cannot claim uniqueness and objectivity of meaning.

Another significant feature of the Bible is that the inception of all the texts can be traced back to an oral tradition. With regard to the gospels it could be assumed that the evangelists were not the writers in the present sense of the term. They were only compilers of material existing in different faith communities. Those biblical materials were transmitted through an oral communication of the religious experience of the people concerned. The lack of objectivity, a prominent characteristic of any

oral transmission can be observed in the case of the orality of the gospels and other texts in the Bible. This is due to the chance for omissions, mistakes, exaggerations, misunderstandings, inability for proper communication, and all other possible problems attached to oral communication. The kernel of faith proclaimed in the early church depended on the subjective experience of the individuals concerned. Synoptic problem could be the best example for the diversity that occurs in the biblical passages, due to the subjective elements involved in the transmission of the faith of a group of people who later came to be called the church.

A major shift takes place when the oral traditions of the Bible gave way for the written documents. It is this solidification into the materiality of writing that prompts the church to make absolutist claims over the objective meaning of the Bible. However, the element of subjectivity involved both in the writing process and in the later interpretations of the text, argues against the singularity of meaning. It is this feature of the Bible that expiates contemporary novelists who engage in newer and divergent hermeneutical practices with regard to the theological concepts represented through their works.

Finally, all those revisitations of theology, analysed in this study and other similar fictional works by various authors, can be evaluated and justified as expressions of a postmodern hermeneutic orientation towards plurality. They realize and advocate the pluralistic nature of the biblical texts both in form and content. The books in the Bible are manifestations of the spiritual experience of a group of people, rendered in a more systematic and textual form. Therefore, they teem with the differences in the nature and individuality of those people. This orientation towards a

plural expression can also be expected in the interpretations. Informed with this postmodern sense of the divergent realities, the fictional writers on theological themes venture to cross the limits and borders of disciplines and enter into the celebration of plurality. They are also encouraged in their attempts at rewriting the biblical texts, by recent trends in the field of theological research. Theology is no more a puppet in the hands of church authorities, since there are many who dare to think in terms different from the official versions of biblical and other theological thematic considerations.

The conclusion we may draw from the study of Christological themes in the fictional texts, selected for the purpose of analyzing the hermeneutical possibilities involved in them, is that all of them can be considered as counter narratives to the official versions of the biblical themes. Typical of the postmodern suspicion of metanarratives and dominant authorial positions, these writers analysed, at length, the various possibilities in the hermeneutics of the Bible only to come out with different gospels written by them. Though they differed in the subject matter, style, and methods of narration, all of them were unanimously certain about the need to investigate and present a Jesus who does not yield to the official and conservative hermeneutics of the Bible. And it could be asserted, without doubt, as we move towards the conclusion of this study that the hermeneutics of the Bible and theological concepts about a man who could mesmerize the whole world, never come to an end.

Conclusion

Hermeneutics has come to be recognised as a prominent theoretical framework for the analysis of literary texts. Though it remained a mere tool for biblical exegesis in the beginning, with the advent of Romantic tradition, there was a revival and as a result, hermeneutics became independent shedding its servitude to theological disciplines. Any text could, then, be critically evaluated using hermeneutical principles. However, with the advent of postmodernism, which was perceived to nurse a suspicion to meaning, hermeneutics began to decline in its popularity. This must have been due to the misunderstanding that hermeneutics is always concerned with a definite meaning, and also the false notion that postmodernism was against meaning as such. What postmodernism advocates is not a negation of meaning but the denial of the insistence on a single and absolute meaning. Hermeneutics also, at a deeper level, gives room for multiplicity of signification. It is this realisation that gives a new impetus to hermeneutics in the analysis of literary texts in the present scenario.

At the same time, another major shift was taking place whereby the practice of rereading and rewriting got momentum, popularising the revisitations of the canon. This again led to an increase in religious texts being incorporated into the secular literary tradition. As far as the readers of the original religious texts were concerned, deciphering the meaning of those texts was not difficult for them, primarily because they were people sharing the same sensibility and tradition. "The reader is drawn into the text because he or she can understand it only through some sense of what is shared with it: a shared language or a mutual tradition or common set of interests and ideas. Understanding takes place through some sort of common

‘horizon’” (Clarke 62). Hence when it comes to those who do not share it, interpretation becomes a necessary factor. It is at this juncture that control over the interpretative process is passed over into the hands of those who wield power over the community and text. This was what had happened to the Bible in its long history of centuries. The church authorities who possessed and administered power and authority, claimed monopoly over the meaning of those texts to which they attributed holiness and divinity, as a result of which no one was allowed to question them. Interpretation was restricted, controlled, and limited.

The practice of rewriting biblical accounts was one of the most powerful resistances to the above mentioned onslaught on the meaning of the Bible. These writers began to question many of the traditional understandings of the Scripture. Even age old dogmas were reconstructed. They tried to present the picture of a Jesus who is a stranger to the biblical accounts about him. They were directed by the desire to create an image of Jesus more appealing and acceptable, devoid of the mysterious vestiges showered upon him by a prejudiced church. The present study was inspired by those interpretative fictional works which tried to analyse the biblical and theological picture of Jesus.

To analyze the hermeneutical possibilities involved in these rewritings, two major authors were studied in detail and four other writers who may be termed, at least in the purview of this thesis, popular novelists. Analysis of these texts leads to the idea that all of them, along with many other writers with similar purpose, are the result of the literary writers’ zest to recapture and redeem hermeneutics from long chains of slavery in the hands of those monopolizers of power. The quest for a counter Christ was the chief motive behind all these practices.

The present study was an attempt to find justification for narratives of Jesus written parallel to the official biblical and theological presentations. The analysis took into consideration various ways in which the Bible could be approached and based on them, it was argued that the biblical accounts are neither absolute nor objective. Analysis of the Bible based on the basic principles of hermeneutics allows one to appreciate the differences and contradictions within the text as ways in which the plurality of reality is represented. The final point of arrival is the acceptance and validation of multiple hermeneutical possibilities inherent in the Bible and in the theological traditions of the church, which again is the justification and need for variant representations of Christological themes through rewritings of the Bible; attempted in and through the fictional practices.

This new perspective about the biblical and theological accounts needs, from the part of the church, a radical change in its approach. The most important thing is to realize that these rewritings are, in no way, harmful to the church. They are various attempts to present Jesus in new ways that are more acceptable to the contemporary society. The history of the church bears witness to the fact that the growth and development of the church was due to its capacity to adapt itself to the cultural milieu where it is planted. Even the gospels are the products of such an attempt to interpret the life and teachings of Jesus to the specific communities. In the pluralistic society, it is advisable for the church to be ready to accept differences and to be always dynamic in the expression of its faith. This study may be taken as a point of departure for further investigations into the possible ways and orientations in the biblical and theological reflections of the church.

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