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OR DROP IN!!
Living in Rome, I am often struck by huge Generalate houses now devoid of members and used as rental apartments for tourists. These testify that any Congregation that cannot read the signs of the times and adapt accordingly will certainly die out. In fact, when a congregation has nothing challenging to offer, it has no right to exist. Talking to various Superior Generals/Provincials, I realize that conforming to the ‘status quo’ seems to be still the norm of the day.

Congregations with a definite charism, working in certain areas must be challenged to respond to the new needs of the times but formators tend to conform to the irrelevant needs of the establishment. Naturally they cannot attract new members, nor respond to the demands of society and the Church today. In survival pangs, some Congregations search for an alternative base in developing countries like Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Each Congregation needs to re-interpret its charism and make it alive and relevant to the changing situations. In Europe and the US, health and education have been taken over by the government. The areas unaddressed are that of religion, spirituality and value education. These are acute areas due to growing secularization. Ignoring these areas, several congregations migrate to developing countries, ascribing a strong social and pro-poor dimension as a reason for their existence.

It is heartening to see, India has Congregations that are responding to the Spirit identifying themselves more with the marginalized and the deprived of society. However, even these tend to be at home with relief and remedial measures than addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality and dehumanization. Attempts to collaborate and get the Government to act, are minimal since Congregations prefer the style of “Private Limited Companies”.

As long as the Government fails to better the lives of the marginalized, our services may be viable. What if one day we are no more needed in these areas, when welfare systems as in Europe, may take over!

Be it the secularized, Godless, developed world or the developing world, there is tremendous erosion of genuine values, as seen all over, especially in the third world enmeshed in dishonesty, bribery and all sorts of corruption.

Are religious congregations concerned about this situation? Do they feel challenged to be living testimonies of selflessness, sincerity, generosity, simplicity, forbearance, honesty, love and respect for all religions? No one can teach non-violence while giving in to violence even towards children. No one can preach sincerity while being ‘walking lies’. And it all hits at the basic need of a formation that promotes selflessness, maturity and genuine search for God. Witnessing through one’s own life is everything today.

As Companion’s home city hosts the annual meet of the CRI Women’s wing and discusses the theme “Our Consecrated Life - Our Mission” Companion wishes a fruitful dialogue and meaningful future to religious women in India – almost one lakh of them!!!

Dr. Jacob Srampickal SJ
COMPANION
INDIA
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We thank our readers for the encouraging response to Companion. Due to limitation of space we are unable to publish all comments. We select some representing different areas and topics. Please continue to get back to us with your ‘voices’ and suggestions. Thanks

Editor

Theology made easy
You know what I like about Companion? It makes profound theological concepts easy to understand for the common man. A great example of how media can make theology understood what most journals and authorities in the church fail to do. Keep up the great work.

Dr. Bernardo Suate,
SIGNIS, Rome

Just excellent
Excellent content, refreshingly beautiful layout. That is the way to go.

Christopher Joseph
UCAN, Delhi

I want to promote it
Thanks for sending me the electronic copy of Companion. I have forwarded it to many others too. It is a worthwhile magazine in content as well as in layout. I really appreciate it and want to promote it.

Jose Palakeel MST
IMPACT, Kochi

Foreign journal?
The article on Xmas had lots of useful relevant information; and artistically presented as well. Its look is that of a foreign magazine on our home stand. And thanks for keeping it affordable so that lay persons like me can pick up one without hesitation. Hope it keeps up the quality.

Veronica Alva
Mangalore

Great work indeed
Thanks for Companion. It really is worth reading. I perceive it as a professional Catholic magazine which is very readable.

Sreeja David SND
Patna

A treasure for the Church
I was excited to see a Catholic magazine that is up to the times. The editorial set the tone - this magazine will improve the knowledge of the readers and empower them to make informed decision shaped by the faith culture of the Catholic religion. It was reminiscent of Gaudium et Spes of Vatican II. Companion reviews the past, examines the present in detail and summarizes what present knowledge tells about the future.

Ralph Coelho
Bangalore

Living faith
Living Faith is indeed a lively column. Last time I enjoyed Chhotebhai’s version and now Francis Lobo’s. Their experiences touched me. Thanks to Companion that brings such down to earth material to help Christian living.

Anslem Britto
Kolkata

A companion always
I found companion very useful; the content very good. Yes it is really a companion for us when we travel and especially when we are down. It generates optimism.

Sr. Jolly
Kroo Nivas, Assam

Colourful and nourishing
Thanks for “Companion”. It does nourish from page to page. Keep up the good work you and your companions are doing.

K. Jose SVD

Youth power
Liked the comments, observations, and suggestions of Allwyn Fernandes on our approach towards youth. Surprisingly in our church circles there is lot of talk about resourcing youth power, but hardly ever we do anything concrete, except organize camps for them. It is too late that we cater to the real needs of our younger generation and channelize their energies for the benefit of our fellow beings. Chris Valentine does make a point when he stresses the right spirituality for the youth.

Shaila SRA
Benares
Naxalites

The analysis of Fr. Lakra on the Naxalite issue was an eye opener. A lot of terrorist uprisings are symptoms of justice denied to marginalized groups. The marginalized, when totally helpless and cornered give in to clandestine warfare, to achieve their goals. It is sad that our country after many years of independence and having the best of Constitutions, still lag far behind in meting out justice to its people. How can we forget the French Revolution? It is history that man learns nothing from history.

G. Anoop Kumar
Muzzafarpur

Inspiring life

I was very excited to see my old professor, Peter Lourdes speaking to Companion. No one who has encountered him can forget the compassion and wit he communicates. He was one who knew too well the follies of human nature and with a blatant nonjudgmental attitude he could help those in trouble. May his tribe increase in the Church! Thanks to Companion for bringing him back to my memory.

Ancy Fernandes
Pune

Informative

Companion is informative, educational and interesting. I wish that it reaches many more hands soon. To deserve a good magazine like this, we have to promote it as well. It is a great responsibility for you and your board members to keep up the standard and uniqueness of Companion and also publish it regularly.

Fr. Sebastian Ettolil
U.S.A

Funerals without coffins

‘Funerals without coffins’, I feel is a brilliant idea for the Indian church. It is also one way that the Church can inculcate its ways. I think all dioceses can emulate this model and do yeomen service to people who have no money to go through expensive funerals. Companion needs to be congratulated for picking up new initiatives by local churches to bring it to the National audience. Change has to start somewhere by someone.

Angela Pereira
Vasai.

Excellent work

I went through the entire “COMPANION”. I congratulate you. It is excellent work.

+Bishop Felix Toppo, S.J.
Jamshedpur

Quality is here

Companion is improving in quality and content with every issue. The December issue of Companion was a bonanza for the readers. It touched on matters which mean a lot to us and relates to our lives. Poetry of existence by Francis Lobo inspired me and gave boost to my faith in God. Christmas inputs such as Silent Night, St.Nikolas were interesting. I felt Growing Pains-Gen next, the article of the hour. The write up on Lourdes was interesting too. The fillers - True Peace, and ‘Success don’t happen in isolation’ carry really good social messages. I wish Companion a great success in India.

Allen R. Johannes,
Bihar

Attractive, rich

Companion is attractive and ‘simply’ rich. It gives a pleasurable reading even while talking about vitally important matters. Things can be improved still but I can understand the struggle of the Editorial team and their determination to do something beautiful for the Church in India. I wish their efforts find support.

Dr. Cajetan D’Mello
Pune

Editorial: story

I have gone through the December issue of Companion, the whole of it in one go. Impressive, to say the least. And the Christmas message: Paradox of the “more” in the “less” - you can’t be more succinct than that. “Less said, more conveyed”. Well done!

Fr. Mathew Alapattumedayil
Kottayam

Long way to go

The description of an ideal parish pastoral council made hair stand up! In fact I have not yet met a parish priest who actualizes a PPC this way. Many do not have one, and those who do have, take the total control. And yet, it is the teaching of Vatican Council. So how can the Church really grow in India? We have a long way to go yet!

George Bastian
Mumbai

Send your Letters to: companionindia@yahoo.com

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Pope Benedict XVI has created a new in-house watchdog called the “Authority of Financial Information”, with the power to supervise all Vatican transactions, including those of the Vatican Bank and Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples). Vatican’s new rules, set forth in a motu proprio, released on December 30, come at the end of a year marked by complaints that the Vatican bank, the Institute for Religious Works (IOR), had been involved in questionable money transfers. In September, Italian banking authorities seized €23 million in funds from the IOR as part of money-laundering investigation. Italian courts have rejected the Vatican’s bids to free those funds, authorizing the investigation to continue.

The Vatican spokesperson, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, today described the new laws as “a step towards transparency and credibility” with “far-reaching moral and pastoral significance.”

Traditionally the various departments have been largely autonomous in their financial dealings, with a rather loose coordination provided by the office of the Apostolic Patrimony of the Holy See (APSA). By pledging cooperation with international monitoring agencies, the new “motu Proprio” mark a break with the Vatican’s traditional reluctance to open up its internal financial operations to outside scrutiny.

The Vatican City, a 108-acre sovereign state surrounded by Rome, aims to comply with the rules of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a Paris-based body that lists nations failing to comply with standards on money laundering and terrorism financing. By adapting the norms, including that of establishing a Financial Information Authority (FIA) along the lines of those in other countries, the Vatican commits to comply with FATF standards and liaise with the group and law enforcement agencies. The new laws will take effect by April 1, after the new FIA is set up and its members chosen, the Vatican said.

In part, the law is designed to implement an agreement between the Vatican and the European Commission on fighting money-laundering, signed in December 2009. It establishes criminal penalties for violation of financial norms, including four to twelve years in prison and fines of almost $20,000.

In addition to creating new penalties for financial misconduct, Benedict XVI has also criminalized environmental pollution. In article 18, the new law establishes a penalty of up to six months imprisonment and a fine of $3,500 to $35,000 for anyone who pollutes soil or water. The jail term rises to a year, and the fines range from $7,000 to $70,000, if the pollution occurs with hazardous substances.

Benedict’s environmental teaching and activism, including the installation of solar panels both at the Vatican’s audience hall and his private home in Regensburg, Germany, have already earned the pontiff the nickname the “Green Pope.”
The unique features of the Church in Bengal?

The Church in Bengal follows two distinctive traditions: one of the bhakti tradition as initiated by spiritual gurus like Chaitanya, Sri Ramkrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Brahmanbandhab Upadhyaya, and Animananda, the other, missionary expansion under Padrado with the patronage of the British empire in India. Brahmanbandhab who had great influence on Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore, had attempted to establish a truly Indian Church on the basis of rich Indian traditions. Contributions of Bengal Christianity to the nation?

The greatest was the translation and publication of the Bible in various Indian languages, undertaken by Serampore College, under the leadership of William Carey and his companions. Since then more translations of the Bible came to be undertaken, enriching the language and the literature of the regions. A movement towards Eucharistic devotion was given a lot of importance in the early Bengal Church, which later rippled on to the wider Church. The traditional belief of Bengalis - matri bhakti (devotion to the mother figure) and guru bhakti (devotion to the master) influenced Christian worship of Jesus, the Guru and devotion to Mary, Mother of God. Communist government’s attitude to the Church?

As far as the religion is concerned, we have no problem. Even when we had minor problems they were quick to tackle them. Instead, we are disillusioned in the area of education. Due to the high-handedness of Communists, the state developed a very poor work culture, the state being paralyzed by strikes, agitations and rallies. Church’s response to movements like Nandigram, Singur and Lalgarh?

The governmental manner of tackling people’s uprising was not effective or realistic. Our approach is one of love; the Communist way is of force. They neglected the interests of the people they were serving for the past 34 years. The Church is for the poor, and stands by them for their just causes. Approach to immigrants from Bihar, Bangladesh?

History has it that persons from the priestly castes of other states were brought to help in the religious rituals of rural Bengal. We still find them in many villages. The Christian missionaries established localities of people of the same language or culture, for example, Stella Maris parish in Kolkata. The missionaries also brought people from other areas, and helped them settle in their missions; those who came newly could easily insert in the locality of their own kind. The missionaries also catered to their spiritual and pastoral needs. So, there is a systematic way of reaching out to the immigrants. Integration of Anglo-Indians in Indian culture?

The Anglo-Indians of Portuguese and English origins, had difficulty integrating into the Indian culture. Many of them migrated to Canada, Australia or to England. The remnants did not want to join the natives. So, the locals began to look at them as if they were aliens. Some of them married Muslims, in order to win the support of the group; but those who remained Catholics are looked after, even politically, with their representative in the State Assembly. Mother Teresa effect on Christians/religious?

Mother Teresa is an inspiration for all – priests, religious, common people; Her spirituality is of religious origin. She had never thought of starting a congregation, but had to do it for the service she undertook. She touched the lives of the people irrespective of religion. The motivation behind founding two diocesan religious congregations?

During one of the Jubilees of the diocese of Krishnagar, some girls came forward to offer their lives and services to the Church. This and the needs of the local church motivated me to found two new Congregations - Adoration Sisters of the Heart of Mary and Adoration Brothers of the S. Heart of Jesus. Image of priests?

They are appreciated for their social commitment as well and are respected. What is your dream for the Church in West Bengal?

I wish to see the people of the state self-sufficient and self-reliant. This is possible only through cooperative societies, where people take active part to save, circulate and trade with prospective clients. The money that is collected from the people should not be deposited in banks. Instead, loan the money directly to people. This is a viable dream for Bengal and for the country.

Interviewed by: Julian S. Das
1 Mourning Christmas

Egypt

A church explosion in Alexandria, Egypt, killed 21 Coptic Christians, in the early hours of 2011. In Shubra, some 500 Muslims, Coptic activists, and civil society leaders led a protest to show solidarity with the Coptic minority and to denounce the deadly assault. Marchers shouted slogans like “We want Egypt to be a secular state”. They carried banners showing the crescent along with the cross, a historical symbol of unity between Egyptian Muslims and Copts. The neighbourhood of Shubra is one of few suburbs in the capital where large communities of Christians live alongside Muslims. Copts account for 10% of the country’s population of 82 million. Jan. 7 (Coptic Christmas) will be a mourning day without any celebrations.

2 NCR Person of the year

USA

The National Catholic Reporter announced Sr. Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity, President and CEO of the Catholic Health Association (CHA) in US, as the ‘NCR Person of the year 2010’. In a video message delivered to the CHA convention in June, President Obama had praised Keehan: “Your work, your passion, your commitment, helped make the difference and you did so in a way that protects your long-standing beliefs and the beliefs of so many others across the country.” In the spring of 201, Keehan led CHA to endorse the legislation on health care and helped pass it through Congress. This put health care coverage within the reach of an additional 32 million Americans. The CHA also supported St. Joseph’s Hospital facing the verdict of Bishop Olmsted. “She was one American Catholic who showed extraordinary leadership and courage in 2010”, said NCR.

3 Nobel Prize for Theology

Vatican

The new “Vatican Foundation: Joseph Ratzinger - Benedict XVI” intends to create a Nobel Prize for Theology. This was announced by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the foundation’s scientific committee. The award is in view of promoting research and study of the thought of Ratzinger. It will also organize scientific congresses and award scholars who are outstanding for their theological research. Monsignor Scotti, president of the foundation, said that experts of theology must have “the humility to listen to the answers that the Christian faith gives us. In this way humanity is also helped to live.”

4 Jesus Youth Jubilee

Kochi

Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, urged Jesus Youth (JY) to witness Christ “with our sweat, with our word and, if God wills, with our blood.” He was launching their Silver Jubilee Convention at Kakkanad, Kochi. More than 20,000 JY members from 29 countries attended the five-day program. He urged the participants to become “liv-

5 Religious Education valued

England

New research among young people in London indicates that Religious Education (RE) is a valued subject that leaves a lasting impression on those who study it. This timely research comes as the government sets out its Schools White Paper, calling for a return to traditional humanities-based subjects. The study was commissioned by the RE Council of England and Wales (REC). It involved 1,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 years. 80 percent of respondents suggest RE for better understanding among religions. 83 per cent of those who had studied RE at GCSE shared the same view. There was notable support for this sentiment from all religions, including 77 per cent of those who called themselves atheists.

6 Leaders Join to Defend Marriage

Washington DC

Religious leaders from Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish, Lutheran, Mormon, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Sikh communities in the United States united to publicise a letter affirming their commitment to protect marriage. In the open letter, they underlined marriage as “the permanent and faithful
First Catholic Woman Priest

Latin America

On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patron Saint of Latin America (12 Dec. 2010) the first Latin American woman was ordained a Catholic priest, opening a new chapter in the history of the Catholic Church there. It reminded of Pope John XXIII’s saying in ‘Pacem in Terris’ (1963), “Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity…the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons” (41). The ordination took place in the catacombs as a reminder to sinful structures of gender discrimination and to represent small Christian communities, where ‘bread’ is broken today. Although made valid through the laying on of hands apostolic succession, it violates the Canon Law that stipulates ordination only for baptized males (can 1024).

Help Abused Domestic Workers

England

The Domestic Abuse Working Group (DAWG) of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales have begun a new website with a range of resources to help the Catholic Church to grow in awareness of issues surrounding domestic abuse (http://www.cedar.uk.net/). The aim of CEDAR (Catholics Experiencing Domestic Abuse, Resources) is to create an environment within the Catholic community to understand and recognise domestic abuse as unacceptable. The site also provides appropriate responses. Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham, David McGough said: “Domestic abuse is possibly the most widespread, yet most hidden form of abuse in society today. I know from experience as a parish priest that the Catholic Community is no exception.”

Anti-blasphemy Act

Islamabad

“Citizens for Democracy” in Karachi is ahead with a national campaign, demanding amendment of the controversial blasphemy law. They have expressed full support to the amendment bill submitted by the Parliamentarian Sherry Rehman, on 26 Dec. On Christmas day Pakistan Christians marched against the anti blasphemy laws. However, Islamic religious groups are on agitation for stabilisation of the law. It started after President Zardari announced pardon to Asia Bibi, the woman condemned for death for blasphemy. Muslim neighbours, her co-workers in the field, had abused her as “untouchable” Christian woman for using the common glass provided to the workers to drink water. Later she was implicated with blaspheming the Prophet. In a sad development, Pak Punjab Governor Salman Taseer,66, was shot dead by his security guard for supporting Christians. He had become the target of Islamic fundamentalists in recent weeks after he took a bold stand on the law.
“Yes, we will build a renewed Church for Jesus Christ,” pledged the enthusiastic young women religious at Institute Mater Dei (IMD), Goa at the end of a course on ‘Social Teachings of the Church’ by John Desrochers CSC. Listening to those determined voices, one could simultaneously visualize scenes from Goa beaches.

It was such a pledge that motivated Sr. Laurentia to take up the cause of marginalized women and children on the Goan beaches. “I came to Goa in 1992,” she recalls. “Goan beaches were becoming notorious for trafficking, not only drugs but also women. Behind the façade of tourism promotion women and children were treated meanly. I frequented the beach, heard their cry, saw their misery and was deeply moved to offer possibilities of new life to them.”

The faces of human trafficking - women, youth and children - speak volumes of extreme human greed and blatant violence of human rights. Exposure to the shocking human misery motivated the theologians of IMD to commit themselves to a just social
order. “What shall we do to offer them a dignified human life?” they pondered with deep concern.

“I just wanted to be with them, to feel with them, and to experience firsthand what it means to be looked down upon. We cannot work with or for a people unless we empathize with them,” explains Sr Beena who joined landless daily wage labourers in a paddy fields at Kutkoli, a small village in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka, during her early formation years.

Today, religious in India have started to opt for more challenging and frontline ministries using their expertise in law, ecology, media, community health, and counseling. They care for prisoners, prostitutes, HIV affected, pavement dwellers, street children, broken families. There are those who dare, at the risk of their own lives, to take up remote village-level justice issues helping the ‘voice suppressed’ poorer classes to take courage and speak up for their rights. Some have suffered rape, mutilation and even death for such labours of love.

“The challenge today, in the multi-cultural, multi-religious context of India, is to radically live the Christian values, to be another Christ. It is time that traditional teaching or mechanical following of meaningless rituals give way to new expressions of faith and love. We need to make our presence felt in areas most needed,” added Sr. Seli, a practicing lawyer in the local court of Krishnagar, West Bengal.

The Women’s Section of the Conference of Religious India (CRWI), has been challenging women religious in India, to renewal and adaptation after the spirit of Vatican 11. Some of the members showed more openness and courage while there is a changed awareness gradually spreading among all. Neither Hindus nor Muslims understand the value of virginity accepted for the Kingdom. And yet women religious have accepted the challenge through their consecrated life, committed to the vision of Jesus.

Plenary Assembly at Cochin
The current Plenary Assembly of the CRWI at Cochin, (Jan 8-12) on the theme - ‘Our Consecrated Life – Our Mission’ intends to delve deeper on the challenges posed by the present age, on Religious Life. Inputs by Dr. Sr. Rekha Chennatt RA on ‘Biblical and Theological Perspectives of Consecrated Life’ and Dr. Sr. Evelyn Monteiro SCC on the ‘Emerging Challenges to Consecrated Life’ will pave the path for further study and reflection. The theme of the Assembly takes into consideration the challenges of community life in the globalized world where individualism is becoming rampant. Around 624 Major Superiors of 253 congregations intend to plan together ways to challenge and lead forward almost 100,000 members, to render Consecrated Life and Mission even more relevant and meaningful. Traditions, constraining structures and attitudes exist but the challenge continues.

Looking Back
The post - Vatican era opened

Agents of Transformation

The mission, enhanced by spirituality and community life, has to be at the heart of consecrated life. The whole structure of religious life will keep renewing when the focus is Jesus and His mission. Our contribution to the transformation of this globalized world is our creative, radical and critical fidelity to our vocation. In today’s context of massive poverty, materialism, individualism, religious pluralism, communal-ism, casteism, child labour, mass media exploitation, excessive quest for power etc, the vows take on new dimensions. Greater fidelity is expected of us through our consecration and mission. The CRWI has been inspiring us to take up this challenge.

Sr. Sahayam Augustine
FSAG,
Treasurer, CRWI.
The Real Challenge

To me, consecrated life in North India is primarily to be a contemplative in action, as prophetic witness in a fragmented world. My experiences among the poor santals have given me an impetus to find Jesus in the poor and in my sisters. CRWI’s Kochi plenary is posing a challenge towards an inward search, to understand consecrated life and authority with a new vision. The call to fullness of life through a passionate commitment to the mission of Jesus, has to be supported by life-giving structures, that can free us as well as promote unity. We are called to the service of leadership, entrusted with authority in order to facilitate collaboration, interdependence and shared responsibility among and beyond our sisters. Our community life and our commitment to the poor are means wide not only the windows but also the doors of Religious Life to a new world vision, enabling the religious - women and men - to return to their origins. It was an invitation from the Divine Spirit to renew and adapt their charisms to the changing needs of the times (Cf Perfectae Caritatis No 23). Religious were invited to create structures of collaboration for the common mission of the Church in the context of the complex Indian reality.

It was Archbishop J. R. Knox, (1957-1967), the spirit-filled Inter-nuncio for India who initiated a joint meeting of women and men religious at Bangalore in March 1962. This resulted in the formation of a Conference for Religious. The Holy See formally approved the statutes of the Conference of Religious of India (CRI) in 1963. Today we have separate sections for men and women.

In 1992, a paradigm shift from prophetic animation to prophetic action was proposed. The five-fold thrust of revitalization was: 1. The cry of My people (openness to the needs of contemporary men and women), 2. Proclamation in deed (Life actualizing the compassion and mercy of Jesus), 3. Prophetic-activist leadership (not a conforming, passive, observance imposing leadership) 4. Liberation movement thrust (Seek the Kingdom within you and around you especially in the poor and in those who suffer injustice) 5. Solidarity and networking (better collaboration among different Congregations and the dioceses).

Together for a better world

1. Formation for a New Way of Being

CRWI has been managing the Institute Mater Dei (IMD), the National Theological Formation Centre, since 1964. The first executive council of CRWI, under the guidance and active collaboration of Archbishop Knox and Fr. J B Miranda SJ of JDV shaped the vision for IMD as a premier Institute of formation. The commitment of CRWI to build

Move out of fossilized, static structures

My forty years of commitment to consecrated life, has taken me along some pretty rugged terrain. Shunted from one ‘apostolic’ assignment to another, with or without professional preparation, to meet congregational needs, led me to experience my own personal brokenness while at the same time, discover my potential and versatility. I grew in the understanding that consecration calls me to BE and not merely to DO something for God. Close encounters with the poor in ministry, shook me from my self sufficiency and complacency, challenged my perspectives and personal paradigms, and toppled my worldview. The age-old dictum, “to be in the world, yet not of the world”, I believe is all the more pertinent today. In a world driven by corruption, greed, violence, and injustice, I am called, first and foremost, to a life of total integrity at all levels and in all aspects of my commitment. Consecrated life today calls us to move out of our fossilized, static structures into creatively connecting with all of life.

Sr. Nancy Vaz FdCC
Ex. Provincial Africa

Sr. Sreeja David
Gen. Councillor
Notre Dame Sisters, Rome
the Church of Christ through inter-congregational collaboration and solidarity saw expression in the development of IMD into Mater Dei Academy (MDA). Today it is a centre for higher learning and research affiliated to the Theology Faculty of Jnana Deepa Vidyadeep (JDV), Pune. An average of hundred women religious passes out from here every year. There are 7 residential Staff members. This year, 116 women religious from 50 congregations are being formed for a deeper and contextual faith commitment. About 5000 women religious have passed through the portals of this Institute. MDA has contributed its mite to form an array of enlightened leaders in various Congregations.

2. Grow in Communion

CRWI networks effectively with international organizations of women religious and other related groups in the service of the universal Church. The Plenary Council Meet of the International Union of the Superiors’ General (UISG) at Prerana, Bangalore, has been an unforgettable experience of the confluence of spiritualities and cultures. Writing to the former President of CRWI, Sr Innamma JMJ, the then UISG President, Sr Amelia Kawaji, MMB stated, “…we come to India from the four corners of the world to learn from you and share with you, learning from one another …. to respond to ‘the call to weave a new spirituality that generates hope and life for all’.

3. Move Beyond

The XV Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious (AMOR) in October, 2009 held at Thailand with the theme, ‘Moving Beyond’, was another occasion to build bridges among Asian women religious, enriched by Asian cultures and spiritual treasures. Sisters Innamma JMJ, Jyoti Pinto BS, Olivia AC and Sibi CMC represented Indian women religious there. Sr Jyoti Pinto BS was elected to be on the executive council of AMOR.

4. Combat Dehumanization

Closer home, two workshops were conducted in October, 2009 (Raia, Goa) and in May 2010 (Kolkatta), for women religious of South Asia involved in the prevention of ‘trafficking’ and to ensure ‘safe migration’. The network, ‘Asian Movement of Religious women Against Trafficking of Persons’ (AMRAT) was created at the end of the second session to assist women religious of India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh, Nepal and Sri Lanka to work in solidarity with each other.

5. A New Gender Policy

“Gender sensitivity is not a woman question; it is a human and a spiritual question,” says the Gender Policy of the Catholic Bishops’ Church of India (2010). This paradigm shift heralds a new gender relationship. Together with other sections of CRI, the CRWI is actively involved in the implementation of the Policy Document of the Catholic Bish-

### CRWI 2008-2009

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- **Sr Jyoti BS**, President, Mater Dei Academy Trust, Goa
Don’t Spray Us to Death!

Enlarged heads, disabled bodies, underdeveloped brain, malfunctioning nervous system...human misery at its worst...media bring us these pictures and the villain behind is Endosulfan, an agrochemical sprayed as pesticide. It has once more revealed the dreadul face of the reckless use of pesticides in India. Endosulfan has already proved fatal claiming a heavy toll in Kerala, Karnataka and other parts of the country.

Due to its air spray for two decades across 4,500 acres of cashew plantations in Kerala, more than 9,000 people are now suffering from serious ailments like cancer, physical deformities, mental retardation, skin diseases and growth abnormalities. An estimated 10 per cent of Karnataka’s coffee growers are using Endosulfan. It was reported an year ago that out of about 8,000 people in Kokkada, Patrame and Nidle villages of Beltangady taluk, nearly a thousand suffer from mental and physical disorders, cancers, heart diseases, dumbness, blindness, etc. Alarm bells are already ringing in Punjab as water bodies and the soil are being found to be poisoned with pesticides. The havoc caused by the use of Endosulfan can be best described only as a bio-tragedy, impacting the environment, biodiversity and human beings.

Alarmed World

Having become aware of the deadly effects of Endosulfan, 73 countries including the European Union and several Asian and West African nations have banned or phased out its use. The United States Environmental Protection Agency classifies it as a highly hazardous pesticide. The same Agency, which earlier allowed its restricted use on tomatoes, cotton and other crops, has stopped the use completely since June 2010. But Endosulfan continues to be used in countries such as Brazil and Australia, besides India. This chemical is under consideration for inclusion on a list of persistent organic pollutants under the 166-member Stockholm Convention. It is a treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals. At the sixth meeting of Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee to the Stockholm Convention held at Geneva during October 11-15, 2010, India opposed a global ban on the manufacture, use, import and export of...
Having become aware of the deadly effects of Endosulfan, 73 countries including the European Union and several Asian and West African nations have banned Endosulfan. Of the 29 members in the review committee, 24 supported the ban and four (Germany, Ghana, Nigeria and China) abstained. Ironically many of those 24 countries cited reports of Endosulfan-caused health problems from Kerala to back their demand while only India opposed the ban! (Kerala banned the use of Endosulfan after a state panel proposed so in 2001). Despite India’s opposition, the committee has recommended a ban to the Conference of the Parties of Stockholm Convention scheduled for April 2011.

India Cool!

In general, India still remains cool and lethargic towards the Endosulfan tragedy, barring the following things: central government appointed study groups for scientific reports. National Human Rights Commission speaks more of rehabilitating the affected people and giving compensation for them. State-wise ban on Endosulfan has been issued by state governments - for example, Kerala since 2005. Unbiased media have sufficiently exposed the dismal situation of the abased victims.

Why this Violence Allowed?

Addressing adequately the Endosulfan tragedy primarily means asking the important question, why this violence is allowed in India. I dare to make four simple, but not necessarily untrue, speculations. First, the central government may be acting under the pressure of industrial lobbyists. The government may choose to let down a few thousand lives and their political support compared to the financial support of the industrial multimillionaires. It is not rare that government policies, in India and outside, are likely to be high-jacked by business houses that fund political parties. Secondly, death in a pesticide tragedy catches less attention of the society, than let us say, death in spectacular terrorist attacks. Recall the due national response to the Mumbai terror attack of 26 November 2008, in which at least 175 lives were claimed and 300 people were injured. But the loss of innocent human life is horrendous whether gunned down by terrorists or killed by a pesticide. Thirdly, the government seems to ignore a few thousand lives, in a country of more than a billion people. Fourthly, the affected people are poor, the first choice to be let down in any socio-political and economic race. Not banning the use of Endosulfan nation-wide amounts to letting the manufacturers kill innocent people. Any government, professed to protect the life and welfare of its people, cannot remain indifferent. It is also the duty of Indian Church to mobilize and wield a suitable response to this bio-tragedy.

Challenge to the Church

As protector and promoter of life, the Church has to intervene effectively and make the government stop the chemical atrocity against innocent people. The use of Endosulfan amounts to the violation of the fifth commandment, ‘thou shall not kill,’ in its wide and profound sense. A pro-life Church cannot overlook this bio-tragedy. Just as we rightly protect unborn human life, we need to protect life in all forms. Giving occasional press release asking the government to ban Endosulfan would not be enough. Approach of the Church must be comprehensive and effective.

First, there must be concerted efforts to pressurize members of the parliament to force the government to ban Endosulfan. Mobilize people in various parts, especially the worst affected regions, to protest against the sluggish attitude of the government. Secondly, make sure that the victims or their relatives get adequate compensation for the tragedy. Make the responsible agencies, definitely the producers, pay the compensation. Giving the whole compensation by the government means punishing the public for the crime committed by certain business corporations. That is unjust. Thirdly, in the agricultural sector, the situation demanding the use of pesticides, such as Endosulfan, still remains. Banning Endosulfan would not solve the whole issue. Farmers need viable alternatives. Research and development must be promoted in this area. Fourthly, Endosulfan is not the only villain among the harmful pesticides. An objective evaluation of the impact of all kinds of pesticides and fungicides is necessary. Banning Endosulfan should not be an occasion for other equally toxic pesticides to seize the market. That would make a mockery of the whole effort.
Having recently come to Bangalore, I noticed, the city nicknamed ‘pensioner’s town’ has grown to be one of the most sophisticated cosmopolitan cities of India. Besides the IT complexes, some of the business centres and super markets can compete with any of the best in the West. If you have the money you can purchase any item produced in any part of the world. Yet, poverty and misery exist just 100 kilometers away from the heart of Bangalore, with no proper drinking water, no toilet facilities and children forced to study in dilapidated classrooms with no toilet facilities.

Last month, I travelled from Ranchi to Jamshedpur in Jharkhand; both these towns have outgrown their capacity. Yet, over a 100 kilometer stretch of road, there were hardly any schools, primary health centres or market places. Being totally a tribal dominated region, Jharkhand boasts of over 60 percent of India’s minerals.
Corruption, injustice and illiteracy add to the gap between the rich and the poor

But the people here are forced to live a sub-human life. The coal mined from here illumines Delhi, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana. The irony is that these tribal villages have neither electricity nor safe drinking water!

On the other hand, the four richest Indians are now richer than the forty richest Chinese. Mukesh Ambani is the second richest Indian. He has built a new home - Antilia (after a mythical, phantom island somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean). At a cost of $1 billion this would be the most expensive home on the planet. A 173 meters tall family residence, for a family of six, the equivalent of a 60-storeyed building! The first six floors are reserved for parking, the seventh, for car servicing/maintenance, the eighth, houses a mini-theatre. A health club, a gym and a swimming pool are there too. Two floors are reserved for family guests. Four floors above these are family floors with a superb view of the Arabian Sea. On top of everything are three helipads. A 600-member staff takes care of the family and home!

In 2004, India became the 3rd most attractive foreign direct investment destination. In the same year, the United Nations had requested the Election Commission of India to assist them in holding elections in Afghanistan. India has been sending its army personnel to be part of the UN’s peace-keeping force. 12 percent of America’s scientists, 38 percent of its doctors, 36 percent of NASA scientists, 34 percent of Microsoft employees and 28 percent of IBM employees are Indian! They provide consultancy to some of the most prestigious business corporations in the world.

This is not the end of the story. Sabeer Bhatia created and founded Hotmail. Sun Microsystems was founded by Vinod Khosla. The Intel Pentium processor, that runs 90 percent of all computers, was fathered by Vinod Dham. Bollywood (Bombay Film Industry)
India aspires to be a world power and wants other significant nations like USA to recognize and support the aspiration. A reality check is good as it forgives ahead. Millions of rural poor still do not have access to quality services like transport, telecommunications, schooling and health care. India Inc. cannot showcase islands of urban prosperity and have the delusion of grandeur as a world power while the vast country side of Bharat (rural India) languishes in misery. Major hurdles to be overcome on a daily basis are: rampant corruption, caste based discriminations, religious fanaticism, insurgency and poor infrastructure. There is a long way to go with determination and commitment. Above all, we need a different political culture and politicians who are ‘with the people and for the people’.

Fr. M.Mihir Upasi
Director, Social Services
Berahmpur, Orissa.

India aspires to be a world power and wants other significant nations like USA to recognize and support the aspiration. A reality check is good as it forgives ahead. Millions of rural poor still do not have access to quality services like transport, telecommunications, schooling and health care. India Inc. cannot constitute the basic element of India being a world power. The number of phone connections in India –mobile and landline- has crossed 400 million in January 2010. This means, there are 35 phone connections for every 100 persons. This is a phenomenal growth in the last few years.

No wonder these facts led President Obama to state that India is claiming its rightful place in the international arena. He further stated that India built the institutions upon which true democracy rests, i.e. free and fair elections, which enable citizens to choose their own leaders without recourse to arms; an independent judiciary and the rule of law, which allows people to address their grievances; a thriving free press and vibrant civil society which allows every voice to be heard. The President also assured to support India to secure a seat in the United Nations Security Council.

We are happy that our economy grows. But this economic growth is not fully reflected in the quality of life, in the majority of people, particularly in rural areas. India witnessed a widening of income inequality during the phase of acceleration in economic growth in the post-reform period (1993-94 to 2004-05). There is an ever widening gap between the urban elites - owners, managers, professionals, rural moneylenders and absentee landlords on the one hand, and the unskilled urban workers, marginal farmers, agricultural workers and unorganized sector workers on the other. While one day consultancy fees of a professional in India could be between Rs. 5,000.00 to 10,000.00, an agricultural labourer’s family would earn Rs. 5,000.00 per month! One wonders as to how these families survive. Corruption, injustice and
Mind the gap!

Dr. John Crasta
Moral Theologian, Ranchi

Unequal distribution of wealth is the worst enemy to progress in India. The political parties, national or local, have failed to rise above caste and communal lines. Corruption has permeated our society so much that we have learnt to live with it as a “necessity”. Crime graph is alarmingly rising. Incidences of rape and illiteracy add to the gap between the rich and the poor.

The agrarian crisis pushes farmers into distressful situations and ultimately to suicide. It is argued that the cumulative effect of a number of factors is responsible for the present agrarian crisis. These factors are categorized as technological, ecological, socio-cultural and policy-related. In the last ten years, over 10,000 farmers have committed suicide every year due to their inability to repay loans taken for agricultural purposes. But the ruling class is totally unconcerned about this impending crisis. Since the agricultural sector is in crisis, food insecurity has become a major issue. It is the poor and the most vulnerable who bear the brunt of it. And, again the irony, they produce food and others consume it!

India ranks among the 30 most corrupt nations, according to a survey by a leading international NGO, Transparency International. Politicians thrive on false promises. The recent scam in the telecom sector has shocked the entire country. Billions of rupees, supposed to go to the treasury have been siphoned off into the kitty of politicians.

The death of 35 Birhors, a primitive tribal group in Jharkhand, in October and November 2008, has once again driven home the message that the poor and the vulnerable have no place in India. Official apathy contributes to the vulnerability of these very poor tribal communities. Their land and resources are appropriated for the ‘development of the country’. They are forced to starve and death. It is not just suicide of farmers but starvation deaths reported regularly from this world power, called India! The national media prefer to ignore such news.

Speaking about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Indian context, Erna Witoelar, United Nations Special Ambassador for MDGs in Asia and Pacific, advocated that the Indian governments should balance pro-poor policies with economic growth to achieve the MDGs. If we don’t concentrate on poverty and don’t make the extra effort for pro-poor development, the gap will constantly grow. Along with tackling poverty, we also need to handle problems of illiteracy, insufficient health care etc.

How can India be a world power when almost 50% of women among the Dalit, Tribal and Muslim communities are illiterate? If Indians have done well in higher education and IT, it should have reflected in the overall development of all its citizens. But this is not the case. People who come to visit India are amazed by the unprecedented progress and growth achieved in the last fifty years. But they are immediately stunned as they move in rural areas or the slums in the cosmopolitan towns! That is a deplorable India.

In fact, there are two Indias in reality: one, an emerging world power, projected by the media to the outer world. The other, a discriminated, exploited and pauperized India which the media does not address. In the latter lies the Heart of India, as Mahatma Gandhi stated. It continues so, even after 64 years of independence.

What is real power?

Dr. Louis Prakash SJ
Social analyst, former Director, ISI, Delhi
Co-ordinator, Jesuit Refugees Services.

Dr. Rudi Heredia SJ
Social Analyst, ISI, Delhi

From “will India survive?” at our Independence, the question today is: “India a great power?” Power tends to corrupt, great power corrupts greatly! Our bewildering cultural diversity, political differences and economic disparities demand participative democracy and inclusive development, better quality of life, greater social equity and secure human rights, not high GDP, accelerated growth or military might. This is closer to the vision of national freedom movement than great power status, closer to the India of Gandhiji’s dreams, a model for a brave new world, more human, less powerful, a free and happy people, not a rich and powerful nation.
When I got into The Times of India over 40 years ago, there were just three women journalists in the whole of Mumbai. In public relations, there was just one woman. Both fields were literally a man’s world. Today as much as 40% of the staff in most publications are women! In PR, perhaps as many as 60 per cent are women!

The same thing has happened in several other fields -- financial services, information technology, retail, hospitality... The IT-BPO industry, one of the largest recruiters of a qualified workforce, is hugely responsible for the large number of women working in urban India today. At least half the jobs in the IT and ITES sectors are held by women. The number of women in the IT industry grew from 4.21 lakh in 2006 to 6.7 lakh in 2008. In technical functions, traditionally considered all-male bastions, the percentage of female employees has seen a steady rise to 36 per cent at present.

The result of this is a whole new perspective in work space. In media, for instance, women were initially assigned to cover soft subjects like women's issues and education. Politics and sports were out of bounds. So were assignments to trouble-spots in rural areas or even riot-hit areas in cities. All that is now history because as women entered the profession and sought no concessions from men, attitudes changed.

With that grew gender sensitivity. Language changed and became gender-neutral. In journalism, we no longer talked of ‘eve-teasing’, ‘man hours’, ‘chairman’ or ‘actress’. This is not just about placating or pleasing women by substituting one word for another. Language developed from mindsets, from a time when only men worked outside the home and women were confined to the home. Today we acknowledge that our choice of words reflects an attitude and with the change of words comes an attitudinal shift. Comments over women’s bodies or clothes are now a complete no-no in the work space. One does not even comment on how pretty a colleague looks.

Imagine my surprise therefore when in the mid-nineties, my son came home from a Teenagers’ Orientation Programme (TOP) and told us over dinner of the “joke” they had been told by the seminarian from St Pius X College. A priest distributing communion was so distracted by the dress of the girl receiving communion that he said “Christ, what a body”.

In subsequent years, I have heard this repeated several times in my own parish from the pulpit. I have been tempted many a time to stand up and shout back, “Are you sure that it was a male who said this? Because today many of those distributing communion are women.”

Gender in the Church

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stupid story from the sanctuary?”

In the world of work, such corny, apocryphal anecdotes would never be told. Many companies which pride themselves as “best places to work” include attitudes towards women in their orientation sessions. One of the points made is that this is not a 9-5 attitude, but begins at home. Many companies have strong women’s networks that aggressively discourage any tendency towards gender harassment or sexual harassment (the two are distinct) and any behavior or language coloured by such attitudes. Women are now just co-workers for many of us – most times we are not even conscious of their gender. But in the church, time seems to have stood still.

One of the things that surprises me when I interact with nuns of various congregations is their suppressed anger towards priests – not just among young nuns but even those at major superior/provincial levels. This is not about ordination or women. It is the attitude of superiority that women in the church experience from priests or bishops. “Many of them lack basic courtesy towards women. Laymen are different, in fact we feel more comfortable with them,” nuns tell me. Bishops set the trend sometimes by trying to order women school and college principals about, as if they should be taking orders from them even on professional matters like admissions.

Clearly, a lot needs to be done to bring male clergy in tune with the times. That has to begin in the seminary itself. These are not matters related to faith, morals or the teaching authority of the church. I wonder if gender issues are part of the curriculum for priestly formation, not just for young seminarians but also for older priests who clearly need a regular continuing education programme to keep them in tune with the times. We also need similar programmes for women in formation in the church to empower and encourage them to stand up to offensive behavior. For that, those in charge of formation need to be trained, right from those in charge of novices. Such programmes would also bring about a maturity in the way we handle conflicts in the church.

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Allwyn Fernandes
Crisis Communications
Mumbai

CHURCH AND BAR

In a small town in America, a person decided to open up his bar business, which was right opposite to a church. The church & its congregation started a campaign to block the bar from opening, with petitions to authorities and daily prayer to God.

Work progressed. However, when it was almost complete and was about to open a few days later, a strong lightning struck the bar and it was burnt to the ground. The church folk were rather smug in their outlook after that, till the bar owner sued the church authorities for $2million on the grounds that the church through its congregation & prayers was ultimately responsible for the demise of his bar, either through direct or indirect actions or means.

In its reply to the court, the church vehemently denied all responsibility or any connection that their prayers were reasons to the destruction of the bar. In support of their claim they referred to the Benson study at Harvard that intercessory prayer had no impact!

As the case made its way into court, the judge looked over the paperwork. At the hearing session he commented: ‘I don’t know how I am going to decide this case, but it appears from the paperwork, we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer and an entire church and its devotees that doesn’t.’
AIDS & Condom

Question: I am a Catholic living in Pune. I came across lot of arguments and counter arguments regarding Pope Benedict XVI’s comment, “condom use is acceptable in certain cases” in the new book, “Light of the world: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times”. I would like to have a clear understanding of the practical implications of this saying. Asher D’Cunha

Answer: Dear Asher, you have asked a very relevant question. I must admit that this is a thorny issue. The Pope does not see the use of condom as a real and moral solution. The head of the world’s 1.1 billion Catholics said: “In certain cases where the intention is to reduce the risk of infection, it can nevertheless be a first step on the way to another, more humane sexuality.” Pope Benedict sparked an international outcry in March 2009 during his visit to AIDS ravaged Africa. He had told reporters that the disease was a tragedy “that cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which even aggravates the problems.

The Pope’s apparent shift in position is illustrated by an example he offers: “There may be a basis in the case of some individuals, as perhaps when a male prostitute uses a condom, where this can be a first step in the direction of a moralisation, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants. But it is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection. That can really lie only in a humanisation of sexuality. “She (the Church) does not regard it (the use of condoms) as a real or moral solution, but, in this case, nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality”. What he is trying to say is that the use of condom in the battle against HIV/AIDS, must be situated against the larger background of Church’s teaching on love and sex.

Pope desires to move the debate to a deeper level. There are proponents who argue that consistent and correct use of condoms is a source of effective reduction of HIV transmission. Equally strong are the voices of those who hold that condom availability has not brought about the de-
sired drop in the number of new infections. More important, condoms as prophylactics do not address the issue of a world without HIV/AIDS, but simply advocate an accommodation of the virus.

We need to go beyond from “How can we make sex safe?” to the more fundamental question, “What is sex for?” There have been, however, calls by various cardinals, bishops and moral theologians for condoms to be used as a protective measure when couples find that either one or both of them are HIV positive. Indeed, the Ghanaian cardinal Peter Turkson did touch on this issue in a Press Conference. It would seem to be an opportune moment for the Catholic Church to make clear that there is a great difference between the use of condoms as a method of contraception and their use in particular pastoral cases, as a life-enhancing prophylactic.

The teaching of the Catholic Church does not rest upon the rights or wrongs of condoms, because condoms do not in themselves have a moral value. What is uppermost in the church’s concern, as shown in the teaching of Humanae Vitae and Pope John Paul II’s ‘Theology of Body’, is whether a sexual act mirrors the fruitful, faithful, total and free love of God.

If we continue a polarized debate we will fail to be agents of hope and life. Besides, the pandemic that we are trying to eradicate will continue to take its toll, generation after generation. While the media, politicians and activists call for ‘safe sex’, the Catholic Church calls for something more humanly fulfilling. It is not merely a question of sex being safe, but sexual activity being rooted in love. The challenge of HIV/AIDS is that sex is not ultimately about being safe, but it is about giving and receiving life. It is to this Gospel of life that the Church needs to give clear witness.

To remain silent on this thorny issue, the Pope might have thought, would be to miss the opportunity of bringing hope to those affected and infected. That would once again be playing into the hands of those secular agencies which are not convinced that the Catholic Church has no credible contribution to make.
God, Religion and Happiness....

Respect for other religions is the crux of genuine faith. How can we express this respect? Godfrey D’Lima suggests creative ways of peaceful conviviality

One night an unknown Hindu truck driver brought a bedraggled Christian youth, to our Shirpur Mission. He was found lost on the roadside. I hesitated to accommodate the youth not sure of how and why he had confessed his creed to the driver. Seeing my anxiety, he pacified me saying that he lived in Shirpur and that he could keep the young man as his guest. He could later take him to his destination as well. I, a Christian, bound to love my neighbour, was relieved, but left wondering at the Hindu driver’s hospitality. That evening I learnt again that the law of charity has practitioners beyond baptised church membership. The Buddha, it is said, discovered his vision of life and salvation from everyday events such as this. How true it is of insights into life! They depend on our sensitivity to what can and does happen around us day after day.

An Ambedkarite friend of mine was insulted on a journey by an imagined ‘high-born’. But when incensed co-travellers wanted to jettison the latter, he said: “No, let him travel peacefully, I have no quarrel.” When the journey ended the offender begged my friend to share a cup of tea together. He came to regret his behaviour at my friend’s equanimity, despite the provocations.
Two years ago, during my tenure in Nandurbar town, I was involved in setting up training halls. There were moments when critical decisions of design and fabrication needed to be made with limited professional guidance, finances and pressure of deadline for completion. With me was a Muslim mason Asif, a Catholic fabricator Antony, their Hindu friend Nana, a skilled carpenter. This trio so determinedly worked out solutions to my architectural and practical problems that I felt a deep sense of security at every step.

The world abounds with religious and others who abstain from God-talk but truly live the law of charity seriously, even at their own peril.

The foundation of my respect for religions is not so much dogmatic, doctrinal, spiritual or theological. It is related to concerns of human life, the matter of the Lord’s Prayer, the only prayer Jesus is supposed to have taught specifically. In this prayer the concerns of faith are summarised. They are: respect for God, desire to cooperate with God’s Will to establish goodness in this world, security for our daily needs, forgiveness with the awareness that we too fail, and protection from the ravages of sin and evil.

I have observed that people of different faiths have the same concerns as expressed in the Lord’s Prayer. In different ways the world’s believers and non-believers articulate their convergent human concerns. The great and small religious traditions have their particular versions of human well-being. In all peoples there is a complementarity of faith awareness.

In India, the Jains and some Hindu sects advocate among other values, that of vegetarianism. Apart from the dietary value of such an approach there is an implied concern for life. One can keep arguing about the anomalies of this approach. But all religious principles have their anomalies or their limits of rational justification. Christians advocate the law of love. Yet colonial peoples have suffered exploitation from Chris-
tian nations. Today there is no doubt that Christians genuinely strive to improve life for poorer societies. Muslims uphold reverence for God and God's Word. At the same time we know that they struggle with one another's variant understandings of God, the actual Word He spoke and its practical implications. Yet who can deny that Muslims point to a just world and the need for an egalitarian society? Buddhists extol compassion and wisdom of the Buddha. There are, however, Buddhists who have indulged in armed conflict. This does not take away from the Buddhist contribution to human serenity and tolerance. The Buddhist mark on Dr. Ambedkar's liberation struggle for the dalits has been impressive.

No religion has escaped internal conflicts, confusion, suppression of freedom, historical mutations, and doubts about its claims. Yet, all religions have struggled greatly to introduce aspects of humanism in their adherents. If the struggle seems unsuccessful at times, it can never be an excuse for condemnation. In the history of every religion there had been times of failure in values. Slavery thrived under the radically egalitarian Islamic and Christian powers! World Wars were sparked in Christian nations even though the Christian announces peace on earth. Jews and Arabs fight in the Middle East. The West exports deadly arms. India of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and other different religions sinks low in corruption and casteism. Religious sects within the broad fold of each religion have had the bloodiest of communal riots. Religious texts have both their faults and their triumphs. Some parts of them read like a horror story, even extolling murder. In other parts, they are full of noble ideas and injunctions for human happiness.

**RESPECTING OTHER RELIGIONS**

**Dr. Noel Sheth, S.J.**

*Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune*

Believing that all peoples comprise a single community, the Catholic Church looks with sincere respect upon the ways of conduct and life, rules and teachings of other religions, even when they differ from what the Church holds (*Nostra Aetate* 1 and 2). Respecting other religions does not imply agreement with all their beliefs and practices. Indeed, the differences can help each religion to gain insights into its own unique features. Furthermore, respectful inter-religious dialogue also brings about mutual understanding and enrichment, so that we can join hands together to heal a broken world and build bridges of peace and harmony.
Looking at the tapestry of religions, and the religious expressions among their adherents, one can intuit the splendour of God. But this knowledge only infinitesimally mapped by the limited human mind. And we acknowledge that we are heirs to a fascinating quest in which every human being and every creature bears a vital testimony to the Truth that lies at the heart of our universe. This Truth is so profound and yet is so simply expressed in the type of faith prayer that Jesus articulated.

Sometimes we are aghast at what we see as intolerance of faiths. The temptation of every believer is to imagine that s/he holds the whole truth in concept, precept and practice. The believer then goes on to attack the faith of others. Ultimately aggressive attacks are charged with ignorance and bigotry. One of the ways to avoid religious conflict is to examine whether what one opposes in the other really affects a universal human value or just some peculiar way of living. Food habits, clothing, language and culture are some instances where great variety is possible. If these do not offend fundamental human values we should welcome these do not offend fundamental religious convictions, but that in no way prevented them to revere a faith that many of their brothers and sisters subscribed to. Welcoming people in our homes and being a guest at their homes are moments of spiritual interaction in addition to bringing us joy and love and appreciation. So even if we are not among the experts who can sort out what our religions have in common and where we differ, our yeoman service will be to simply ‘meet and greet’ people coming from all walks of life who follow diverse faiths. These experiences replete with peace, joy, fellowship and harmony will build the bridges and bonds of the Kingdom of God, making our world a better place.

Dr. Matthew Coutinho SDB
Moral Theologian, Shillong

I passed by a small Hindu temple this morning. I was impressed by the attitude of the passersby. Every one reverently bowed their head acknowledging the presence of the divine in that sacred place. Some of them were evidently followers of other faiths, but that in no way prevented them to revere a faith that many of their brothers and sisters subscribe to. Welcoming people in our homes and being a guest at their homes are moments of spiritual interaction in addition to bringing us joy and love and appreciation. So even if we are not among the experts who can sort out what our religions have in common and where we differ, our yeoman service will be to simply ‘meet and greet’ people coming from all walks of life who follow diverse faiths. These experiences replete with peace, joy, fellowship and harmony will build the bridges and bonds of the Kingdom of God, making our world a better place.

At times religious adherents oppose art or literature that depicts their religious icons ridiculously as in the Danish cartoons, the novels on Christ’s private life, the images of Hindu deities in advertisements, art that exploits holy images in erotic depictions etc. It is foolish to say that the offensiveness is unintended or is based on scriptural data. If we grow in sensitivity to the evolving religious understanding of others we shall find ourselves converging progressively on more humanistic faith.

India is home to varied scriptures and traditions, ancient and new, imported and exported, religions of minorities and majorities, in flux and stable. Guiding all religions is the Indian Constitution - an exemplary humanistic document hardly surpassed by any individual scripture. If all religious adherents in India could see the link of ideas and ideals between their particular faith aspirations and the goal of the Indian Constitution, we would have a citizenry committed to improving the living conditions the poor and the deprived.

Respecting faiths is a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge to persevere in true secularism despite the faults of faith traditions, to embrace all the enrichment offered by diverse creeds. The opportunity is to manifest one’s faith convictions in a way that others can appreciate and converge on.

One of the greatest fields of convergent faith action is the area of development of the poor. No doubt, the best minds of India need to bring the riches of their religious tenets - respect for life, compassion, love and service - into this extremely challenging task, as mandated by the God of faith. Our sense of religion will be at its highest when India struggles for better living conditions, egalitarian education and development for the poor and also reaches out to other nations in distress. We will learn to respect religious faith by caring for the least of our brethren in solidarity with all peoples of goodwill. The universal celebration of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta is a parable of faith convergence.

The future of religion is neither dark nor bright. It depends on what we as believers seek to do with our lives. We can squander them in fratricidal conflict sparked off by religious personages or rally together to work for human betterment. It is up to us to draw from the riches of God-given inspirations and religious traditions for a more humane world.

Fr. Godfrey D’Lima SJ
Social activist among Warli tribals in Talaseri, Maharastra

Smart Companion India | January 2011
Fellow Pilgrim

On the path of interfaith dialogue

Dr. Albert Nambiaparampil CMI


• The fundamental assertions in inter-religious dialogue?
A common, but mistaken notion is that dialogue partners should talk mostly on ‘religious’ topics. I think dialogue has to be ‘interfaith’, i.e. between persons of different religious traditions, where they talk about their genuine commitments. In my correspondence with persons of other faiths I address them as ‘fellow-pilgrims’. Even while at the CBCI, I emphasized this person to person dimension of the interfaith ministry. In the living-together experiences of 3-4 days we conducted this was the thrust. The participants could taste interfaith celebrations, cultural and ritual aspects of different religions. On the eve of the departure, interfaith processions were held as well, with the flag of Gandhiji, as our banner, stopping on the path, to meet believers and praying for the followers of that tradition. They also shared their personal experiences with anecdotes from their lives. This indeed has been a departure from the tradition of holding dialogues and discussions ‘on’ religion.

• Your background in this field?
My background was that of the new ‘openness and fresh air’ that I experienced within the Church after Vatican II. My participation at ‘the Church in India’ seminar of 1969 and regional seminars gave me new insights and wavelength to the issues involved in interfaith dialogue. As I set out in this ministry, I studied linguistic philosophy which helped me to found four religio-cultural centres, all aimed at religio-cultural integration. These and further exposures to other faiths gave me greater depth.

• Difference between Inter-Religious and Intra-Religious dialogue?
During the 1st World Conference of Religions in Kochi, Kerala (1981), the draft proposed for discussion after a decade of interfaith networking, was objected by a group of Buddhist delegates. Raimundo Panikkar moved an amendment confessing our inability to arrive at a formulation acceptable to all. He admitted that the draft was over-loaded with theistic words. This proves that inter-religious dialogue demands from partners the readiness for intra-religious dialogue. That is, one needs to have clear understanding of one’s own religion, its
In the pilgrimage with those of other traditions and ideologies, the challenge is to find new dimensions of the same call.
E-Ministry, a Boon to Church

All that he has is a small computer with a slow Internet connection. Sometimes he has to wait for hours to upload, and yet Vijay Mcwan’s zeal drives him. All those who have an I-connection in and around his parish keenly look out for his postings on the blogspot http://vijaymacwan.blogspot.com. The Bhumel Broadcast News –BBN relayed here is his attempt at catechizing. “I started this website because I want to do something for God and people. I bring news and events to all through my website. It does cost but I feel immense joy to spread the Good News in my own way - my e-ministry. I want to be a bridge between God and my people by sharing important news and events. I find the blog an effective way to reach out also to my Gujarati brothers and sisters who are away from home land,” Vijay Macwan sums up his vision.

Once a Jesuit novice, he now works as a senior officer in a Call Centre in Ahmadabad, which sustains his family of wife and a school-going child. The 50 mile motor ride each day from his village to the office is no excuse for lack of time. Macwan, 35, is the sort of young man we wish catholic laymen to be. Although he could not make it as a priest, he continues to be a missionary. In his parish Macwan acts almost like a catalyst to Basic Ecclesial Community and his main tool, his website. Charismatic and dynamic, he speaks warmly of his parish, Bhumel, describing it as “the place where real Christianity is practiced even today. It is not exactly their activities and celebrations but their genuine concern for each other – for spiritual welfare, financial needs and support to women”. In the intense spiritual life of his parish, prayer, song and dance play an important role. Bhumel has produced many vocations - priests and nuns - to the Church. Vijay is happy to narrate how the parish has ensured to keep even small children active. Right from the start, they are helped to feel that they can make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of their families and community. He animates a small group called Jagruti Bal Parivar (JaBaPa). “The children began their first ministry by conducting prayers in every house”, he says. JaBaPa has now extended its activities, assuming some liturgical responsibilities in the parish, conducting a Sunday school, arra Yet the life of the parish does not focus entirely on the children. There are approximately 350 Catholic adults, representing 55 families in an area where the total adult population is almost 4,000. Most of the people are Hindus, the ‘aborigines’ of the area who, in spite of their rich, vibrant and ancient culture, are still simple and educationally backward.

“It is not only Catholic information that I give in BHUMEL News, but all that helps to live a sane life. We cannot separate the spiritual and the material. My dream is to see my church ever more participatory. And to do that one must be in the know of what is happening and why it is happening. I also wish that people around us know that a Christian community exists here and that we practice faith in specific Gujarati ways.” Daily mass readings, current happenings in video format etc., posted on his site provide for the faithful to live enlightened lives. In fact, every Indian parish needs a ‘Vijay Macwan’ today!

G. Anoop Kumar

A
Church leaders and activists have blamed the Orissa government for the abrupt closure of the trial of a nun's rape case. Public prosecutors handling the case boycotted work on Dec. 7 saying that the government has not paid them their fee. They also told the Court that they would not resume work unless their grievances were addressed. “We have received fee only for two months and payments for another three months are pending,” said Sangram Sahu, one of three public prosecutors. The trial was underway in the district session court of Cuttack.

**New cathedral at Guwahati**

Guwahati

The new Cathedral at Guwahati has incorporated local art and culture in it adding to its appeal among North eastern people who frequent it seeking divine solace. Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil opened ‘Christ the Bearer of Good News Church’ at Dispur on Dec. 19. The church has used japi and horai that local people use to honor guests. The church is centrally located in northeastern India. The Dispur parish was started in 1997. Guwahati diocese was erected in 1992 carving it out from Shillong archdiocese and Tura and Tezpur dioceses. It became an archdiocese in 1995. The Catholic population of 68,000 is spread over 42 parishes and centers.

**Church collaboration**

W. Bengal

Church groups in West Bengal will collaborate with government and NGOs to improve disaster preparedness in the state. Government officials hailed the planned joint effort. This is a first time initiative of the kind. About 40 government officials and representatives of NGOs and Church groups attended the workshop on “Emergency Need Assessment.” The Dec. 7-9 program at Burdwan, 120 kilometers northwest of Kolkata, decided to set up an Emergency Need Assessment Team as required by the Sphere Standard - a charter on improving emergency responses signed by more than 300 international humanitarian NGOs. Assessment of a disaster being crucial, the groups have planned to do it within 12 hours and a second assessment within in the next 36 hours.

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**Nun Rape Trial Stalled**

Orissa

**Presbyterian, Head of ICCI**

Bangalore

A Presbyterian theologian, Rev. Roger Gaikwad, has been installed as the new General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, which groups together 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches. “My aim is to strengthen ecumenical relations at the grass roots to bring out greater unity among the churches,” Gaikwad told ENInews. He was installed on Dec. 19 at the NCCI’s Nagpur headquarters, in central India. Fifty-seven-year old Gaikwad had been the Principal of the Aizawl Theological College of the Presbyterian Church of India. His was chosen unanimously for the post, in August 2010.

**Body for medical research**

Calcutta

The Calcutta province of Jesuits has handed over the body of Father Ruy Joseph Cordeiro for medical research. A member of St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata Father died on Dec. 19 at the age of 92. Within two hours of his passing, an eye bank removed his eyes. Within 24 hours, his body was donated to Nil Ratan Sarkar Hospital and Medical College in the city. “It was wonderful to see an old man deciding to offer his body for the service of humanity”, his Rector, Fr. Ponodath said. Belgian Father Gerard Beckers, had mooted the idea of donating organs for medical research and his body was handed over to the medical college in 2006. Now Fr. Cordeiro followed suit. Father Albert Huart, who handles records on organ donation in Calcutta province, said 17 other Jesuits have already pledged their eyes and 14 have agreed to donate their bodies. Emulating Jyoti Basu, almost 7,000 members of the CPI (Marxist) have reportedly pledged their organs as well.
“Save us please... they are killing my husband” standing by the roadside she kept shouting in desperation. Fr. Lievens, who was passing by his horse, heard her cry.

“What’s the matter lady?” he asked.

“Please come with me,” saying that the woman ran ahead towards her village. An angry crowd had gathered in front of her house. They were preparing to offer her husband as a human sacrifice. Fr. Lievens instantly sensed the danger. He wasted no time in futile discussion with the raving crowd. Immediately he dismounted from his horse, went up to the hapless victim, lifted him up swiftly, put him on his horse, and speedily dashed off before the people could catch up.

Chapa was a tribal, who became a Catholic and ever since he had refused to offer sacrifices to the village spirits, who they believed were causing cholera. Firm in his new found faith in Jesus Chapa had the audacity to refuse the spirit worship; hence the people’s outcry and resolve to offer him as a human sacrifice to appease the ‘angry’ spirits.

This happened in 1889 at Murma, a village close to Ranchi in Chotanagpur. Fr. Lievens, a Belgian Jesuit missionary had arrived from Calcutta in 1885 for evangelization.

Chotanagpur, the present State of Jharkhand, reeled under the oppressive British rule in the 19th century, when Christianity was preached in the region. The tribal people had lost their land ownership rights under the new tenure system introduced by the British in 1793. This busted the tribal agrarian system called the Mundari Khuntkatti or Oraon Bhuinhari (collective tenure). As a result, besides paying rents and taxes to the landlords, they were subjected to forced labour, extortion and repression by the non-tribal traders, moneylenders, government officials and the police as well. They were treated like slaves and contemptuously called Kols (uncultured people) by non-tribals.

**Liberation Movements**

Due to dehumanized social status and dispossession of ancestral lands, many tribals migrated to the tea gardens of Assam in the North East India. Those who stayed back took to rebellion to restore their lands. The whole of Chotanagpur was in crisis. Messianic leaders like Birsa Munda among the Mundas and Jatra Bhagat among the Oraons rose up to drive away the British from their lands through armed struggle. As a means to bring about tribal self-rule, they also preached a new religion, advocating monotheism, vegetarianism and giving up alcoholism. They were accepted as God-sent for tribal liberation. But both Birsa and Jatra were captured by the British and put in prison. Birsa died in 1900 and Jatra in 1917 of cholera, leaving their adherents disillusioned.

It was in this context that the Lutheran missionaries first came to Chotanagpur in 1848 preaching Christ among the aboriginals. As a result, four Oraons became Lutherans in 1850. The Anglican missionaries who came in 1868 accepted about 3000 Lutheran converts into the Anglican Communion. These missionaries also tried to help the aboriginals in the court cases pertaining to their land but without much success.

**Apostle of Chotanagpur**

Under the Bengal Mission of the Catholic Church in the Indian subcontinent, Fr. Augustus Stock-
man was the first German Jesuit to come to Chaibasa in Chotanagpur in 1869. By 1873, he baptized about 28 Mundas into the Catholic faith at Kathupani. However, it was Fr. Lievens who started a great missionary movement in Chotanagpur. He first tried to understand the tribal agrarian system and studied the existing land laws so that he could help the hapless tribals in the court cases. The expected happened and through the legal aid of Lievens, many tribals were able to redeem their lands confiscated by the zamindars. He also told them to refuse forced labour and undue land rents. This made the tribals question why their guardian spirits had failed to protect their lands and resources, while those of Lievens’ religion had succeeded to do so. When the news spread of the first successful case of tribal land restoration through Lievens’ legal advice, hoards of them began to come to him for similar help. He shared the same spirit of St. Francis Xavier who preached Christ in the 16th century, in Goa and South India.

Fired by this passion, he travelled far and wide on foot as well as on horseback through the dense forests of the Munda areas in south Chotanagpur to the west Chotanagpur of the Oraon areas. By August 1, 1888, Lievens had 11,291 baptized Catholics and 39,060 catechumens in 832 villages, from 7,139 families. He also had a band of 189 catechists. He had also built 95 chapels and 77 schools with 2,400 children.

Being alarmed at the mass conversion of tribals, and freedom from their clutches, the landlords raised false allegations against Lievens to the British authorities. He was accused of preventing the people from giving taxes to the government and of inciting rebellion against the crown. But he spoke eloquently in his defense and apprised the British authorities of the falsity of their accusations.

In a span of just 7 years, Lievens and the other Jesuits had sowed the seed of the Catholic faith among the tribal people of Chotanagpur. Thus was born the tribal church of Chotanagpur. The starting of St. Peter’s Primary School for boys in Ranchi in 1887 was another significant event of the Church in Chotanagpur. In the course of time, St. John’s Middle School and High School were annexed to it under the patronage of St. John Berchmans.

The overall impact of evangelization in Chotanagpur was the twin liberation experience of the tribal people – first the experience of socio-economic emancipation from the exploitation of the landlords and the second, the experience of freedom from the oppression of the alien and malevolent spirits of the tribal world. The Catholic Church in Chotanagpur had its roots on this foundational experience of liberation.

(To be continued in the next issue...)
William Johnston SJ (1926-2010)

Japan

“Johnston spent his Jesuit life on the frontiers, exploring the common ground between Christian and Buddhist mysticism, seeking words to express what is beyond language”, said Paul Andrews SJ, announcing the death of William Johnston, 85, at Tokyo. He was a Jesuit theologian who wrote extensively on Zen and Christian contemplation. Domiciled in Japan, he was actively involved in inter-religious dialogue, especially with Buddhists.

His autobiography, Mystical Journey (2006), clearly shows that while he was loyal to the Church, he passionately believed all religions should strive to work together in peace. After 9/11 he wrote in the Tablet: “We used to say that dialogue between the religions is necessary for world peace. Now we can say that dialogue between the religions is necessary for world survival.”

Born in Belfast in 1925, entered the Jesuit novitiate at Emo, Co Laois in 1943, was ordained a priest in March 1957. He immersed himself in the study of mysticism, transcendental meditation and has written profusely on it. He translated Endo Shusaku’s novel Chinmoku, published in English as Silence (1969).

John F. Harvey, OSFS (1918 – 2010)

Maryland

“Thank you, Father Harvey, for the kindness, love, and compassion you have shown us. Jesus is more real to many of us because of you”, wrote Tina remembering him in her blog. John F. Harvey, OSFS, 92, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales for 73 years, died on 27 Dec, 2010, in Maryland.

He was the founder and national director of Courage, which is a spiritual support group for homosexual women and men. He was a voice of compassion,” his provincial, James J. Greenfield, OSFS, said. He had helped to found both the DeSales School of Theology and Courage, was Director of Courage since its foundation in 1980. Today, there are more than 100 Chapters of Courage worldwide. Born in Philadelphia, he entered the Oblates Novitiate and made his first profession of vows on September 8, 1937. Specialised in Psychology and Moral Theology his commitment to pastoral care in the Church, was tireless.

M.A. Thomas (1937-2010)

New Delhi

Dr. M.A. Thomas, founder of Hopegivers International, passed away on 6, Dec 2010, at the age of 74. Hopegivers International rescues orphans and abandoned children. He built “Hope Homes” – Christ-centered orphanages that provide physical, mental, emotional and spiritual support for children – across India. The ministry later also supported those suffering from leprosy and HIV/AIDS in the country.

Hopegivers International has helped to start more than 70 orphanages, over 100 Bible colleges and institutes, and 25,000 churches in India. Thomas began his ministry as a missionary in Rajasthan in 1960 and started his first church with only a $25 donation from Dr. Bill Bright, the co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. He was lovingly called “Papa” by the orphans, Bible students and pastors within the ministry.

Thomas had received numerous awards and recognitions, including the Padma Shree from the president of India. He hailed from Kerala, S.India.
Cistercian monks’ community at Mt Atlas, Algeria, in the 1990s. The monks are contemplatives, who pray and work in silence and earn their sustenance. In spite of being contemplatives they do have strong bonds of friendship with the Muslim community around them. The Superior, Brother Christian (Lambert Wilson), studies the Koran and is friends with the local Mullah. Brother Luc (Michael Lonsdale), who runs a medical clinic for the villagers, also has a useful stock of children’s shoes; they sell their honey at the market. They are invariably invited to attend the village celebrations.

Being French expatriates the monks are increasingly viewed with suspicion, by the government troops who keep watch against terrorists as well as by terrorists themselves. When a group of Croatian workers are murdered, the authorities urge the monastery to accept a military guard, which they refuse on grounds that the villagers don’t have any protection. As more foreigners are killed the monks are urged to leave, and they deliberate slowly and carefully over this. One tells the villagers they are “birds on a branch, not sure whether to fly”, but the villagers tell them they are the branch itself, providing protection from the chaos beyond. Finally the monks unanimously decide to stay in solidarity with their Muslim friends.

The tension builds when a group of Muslim fighters break into the monastery just before Christmas Midnight Mass. Fr. Christian calmly tells them that he can’t help them because it is a sacred day. He quotes from the Koran and the fighters leave them to continue their celebration.

In another gut wrenching episode the monks continue to sing while a helicopter gunship swoops round and round over the rooftop. One of them says, “staying here is as mad as becoming a monk in the first place.” Seven of the monks are killed in the latter part of May, 1996.

Towards the finale, Brother Luc is shown serving wine and playing a record of Swan Lake during their evening meal. The camera gently moves around the table playing on the smiles and tears on their faces. This is a scene which is the moral and emotional heart of the remarkable film.

The group of middle aged and elderly men is very endearing and totally credible. There is a very touching scene when an elderly monk falls asleep in bed with his glasses on, book in hand, his brother monk gently removes them and covers him with a blanket. Lambert Wilson does a master performance as leader of the community; his inner struggles play in silence on his features.

The screenplay does not shy away from deep and reflective words which support the visual action. First of all, the words from the scriptures, especially about two together, one taken, one left, and the text on losing and gaining one’s life are most apt. But, each of the monks is given several opportunities to speak about his vocation and his commitment. It grows stronger as the risk situation becomes more precarious and their lives are endangered.

Yes, Xavier Beauvois’ “Of Gods and Men” is Christian cinema at its best - beautifully filmed, with a haunting soundtrack, sensitive performances and a gripping human story that deals with faith, community, inter-religious dialogue and the meaning of vocation. Filmed in Morocco, the theme of the film is matched by the beauty and austerity in its landscapes and in the interiors of the monastery; in the interior lives of the monks, their commitment to God, to their order and to the people. The director shows an instinct for depicting the details of monastic life with sensitivity and strong insight into monastic life.

Peter Malone
Sar news was established in 1981, by the Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) to gather and disseminate news about South Asia. Reports on religious events and trends through a network of correspondents in the region. It provides accurate and speedy news and features to Christian periodicals, personnel and organizations.

SARNEWS website covers issues of Christian concern that affect the Catholic and other Churches, denominations and society at large. Through its service, SAR NEWS is committed to promoting peace, justice, religious harmony, ethnic relations, ecology, environment, health, development, gender equality, issues affecting the poor, the minorities and the marginalized. It informs and assists newspapers and periodicals, Church leaders and other decision makers by highlighting events and trends in Church and society. It covers the whole of South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

With correspondents placed in every region, SAR NEWS insists on objective, impartial and comprehensive reporting. Besides covering spot news, it specializes in analytical, interpretative reporting and features.

The Indian Catholic press association (ICPA) is a Professional organization of Catholic newspapers, Periodicals, News Agencies, Publishing Houses, Working Journalists and journalism Teachers, promoting excellence and competence. It works in collaboration with the Catholic Bishops Conference Of India (CBCI), the South Asian Catholic Press Association (SACPA) and the International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP).

One day an acquaintance ran up to Socrates and said, “Hi, do you know what I just heard about Diogenes?”

“Wait a moment,” said Socrates.

“Triple Filter Test

“Before you tell me I’d like you to pass the Triple Filter Test.”

“Triple filter?” asked the acquaintance.

“That’s right! Before you talk to me about Diogenes let’s take a moment to filter your message to me. The first filter is ‘Truth’. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?” “No!” the man said, “Actually I just heard about it.”

“All right,” said Socrates, “Now let’s try the second filter, the filter of ‘Goodness’. Is what you want to tell me about Diogenes something good?” “No, on the contrary…”

“So,” Socrates continued, “you want to tell me something about Diogenes that may be bad, even though you’re not certain it’s true?”

The man shrugged, a little embarrassed. “You may still pass the test though, because there is a third filter of ‘Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about Diogenes going to be useful to me?” “No, not really.”

“Well,” concluded Socrates, “if what you want to tell me is neither ‘True’ nor ‘Good’ nor even ‘Useful’, why tell it to me or anyone at all?”

O
INSPIRING BOOKS: MUSIC ALBUM

Priest: Human Face of Divine Compassion

Dr. GEORGE THERUKAATTIL

In this book, Dr. Therukaattil touches the core of the New Testament priesthood by presenting the divine compassion explicated in Jesus’ priesthood. One who closely reads the letter to Hebrews, the only New Testament document on the priesthood of Christ, will agree with the thesis that the author brings out in the book: “The spirit of compassion is the main trait in the priestly personality of Christ. It is what made him a mediator between God and man – in fact a priest’ (p.57).

The first two chapters deal with the meaning of compassion while presenting God’s compassion as the source of Christ’s priesthood, the third and fourth chapters deal with the priestly ministry as a ministry of compassion, and the fifth chapter carries the author's reflections on the formation of candidates to priesthood in the spirit and praxis of compassion. For an effective training to become priests after the heart of Jesus, the candidates should be more exposed to contacts with the poor, the sick and the suffering, he asserts. “The self-emptying and self-donation after the compassionate Jesus for the service of the Kingdom of God, should be the goal of seminary formation programme” (p. 155). Bishop Bosco Penha recommends this book with the words, “to be thoroughly studied both by the staff and students in the context of seminary formation” (pp. 10-11).

Dr. Mathew Manakatt
Paurastya Vidyāpitham Vadavathoor, Kottayam

Proximity with the Other:

ROGER BURGGRAEVE

Emmanuel Levinas is the great Post modern Franco - Jewish Philosopher, whose works centre around humans and relationships. Based on his philosophy, Roger Burggraeve examines the relationship between the self, the other, society and politics. The book unveils a multidimensional concept of responsibility, which is often seen as the extension of freedom and self-interest. Levinas sheds light on another view of responsibility, namely responsibility that enables ethical proximity with the other. Some aspects of the book rebounds the author’s testimony about his own encounters with Levinas. A ‘must read’ title by all who considers personal relationships vital to one’s mission.

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Price: ₹125. Contact no: 08041116137

Devotional Album

Eeshavayam is a compilation of songs from the film Christaayan produced by Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, the communication wing of the SVD. The lyrics of the songs have been written after much research, reflection and learning about all the cultures of the country. The album contains 11 songs starting with a lullaby of Mother Mary for her Child Jesus. 10 popular playback singers have lent their voice to the tracks. The album is a sweet soother to the minds of the listeners, against the present craze for noisy music. Music is ‘double prayer’ St. Augustine said. This album strives to lead the listeners to their inner world to experience God in silence. The divine touch on the human souls can lead them to an inner awakening.
Jan 23: 3rd Sunday of the year
Mt 4:12-23

Context and Theme

Jesus begins his ministry immediately after his baptism (3:13-17) and the temptation (4:1-11). Jesus’ initial proclamation (4:12-17) and the call of four fishermen (4:18-22) are the two central themes.

Message

At the news of John’s arrest, Jesus withdraws into Galilee (4:12). This could be interpreted as a sign of defeat or fear. But the evangelist deduces it as the fulfilment of God’s plan revealed through the prophets (4:14-16). It is important that in your life too, the will of God must be the criterion that dictates your actions, even withdrawals. There are moments when you have to withdraw and accept your failures. If that is in accordance with the will of God, even your failure would turn into great success.

1. Jesus invitation to his listeners is for a change of heart. The reason for such a change is the imminence of the Kingdom of heaven (4:17). Today, he invites you too, to a change of heart. The Kingdom is not far from you; rather it is quite near to you. However, you have not entered the Kingdom. Unless you change your mind and heart you cannot enter in it. In other words, you have to change your way of looking at things, your thinking patterns, and your life-style. The first disciples of Jesus proved their change of mind in the act of by leaving behind their boats and nets to follow Jesus. Till that time, they had placed their trust on these precious possessions- boat and net- for their livelihood. Once they heeded to the call of Jesus, Jesus

Jan 16: 2nd Sunday of the year
John 1:29-34

Context and Theme

In 1:19-40 presents John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus. Today’s gospel deals with the second day’s testimony. The focal theme is Jesus’ identity - who He is. Jesus is identified as “the Lamb of God”, “the one who takes away the sin of the world”, “one who baptizes with Holy Spirit”, and “the Son of God”.

Message

1. John the Baptist came for testimony (1:7). His testimony is “the one coming after me is greater than me” (1:27-30). Witnessing to the greater one (1:33-34) his life acquires meaning and worth. Your life too is rendered significant, when your life and work brings out the greatness in others, or when your life makes others great. When you beget a son greater than you, produce a disciple more enlightened than you, or a friend more famous than you, your life becomes meaningful.

2. John tells about Jesus as “the one standing among you whom you do not know” (1:26). But at the baptism of John the Baptist (1:30-34), Jesus is revealed to all. There is lot of goodness that remains unknown and hidden in and around you. Your words and deeds should help to unveil the hidden goodness of those around you. It is then that your family and society becomes noble, divine.

3. The priests and Levites ask John, “Who are you?” (1:19-21). John does not answer that question. Instead, he describes who Jesus is (1:29). What is most vital in your life is not ‘who you are’ but who Jesus is to you. That determines the quality of your life. Your life acquires meaning and worth through your relationship with Jesus.
became the anchor of their trust, their security. This was indeed a drastic change of mind and heart that occurred in the first disciples. When you place your trust in Jesus, your life-style and patterns of thinking begin to change – you get transformed into his likeness.

2. The first disciples were fishermen. Jesus tells them, “If you follow me, I will make you fishers of men” (4:18-19). This is promise of a great change. Before meeting Jesus they caught fish. Once they met Jesus, they are promoted as fishers of men. The presence of Jesus brings in great changes in your life. But it is important that you are with Jesus. Be constantly aware of His presence in your life; He is always with you. That would bring about tremendous change in your life.

Jan 30: 4th Sunday of the Year
Mt 5:1-12

Context and Theme

Today’s gospel is the first part of the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29), which begins with the beatitudes (5:2-12). What is the greatest blessedness? This is the theme of today’s gospel. Accordingly, inheritance of the Kingdom is the greatest blessedness (5:3, 10, 11). It is equal to becoming Sons of God (5:9). The net effect of that blessedness is to be comforted by God (5:6), to get satiated by God (5:4), and to receive mercy from Him (5:7). In short, the Beatitudes portray the way to inherit the Kingdom and to become children of God.

Message

1. The disciples came to him and Jesus began to teach them (5:1-2). The thread of the sermon on the mount is the communication between Jesus and his disciples. In fact, this communication is the core of Christian discipleship. Build up a communication line with Jesus; that is the primary and necessary requisite to become a disciple of Christ. Through this uninterupted communication with Jesus you will gradually be transformed into a genuine follower of Jesus.

2. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are poor in spirit (5:3). One who is poor in heart depends on others for everything. God is the only dependable person for anything and everything. You are poor in spirit when you depend on God for everything. God, being your father, will not let you down. This must be your basic conviction. If so, you come under the purview of God’s reign, thereby becoming His child.

3. Possession of the Kingdom is synonymous to being sons/daughters of God (5:5). This is because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to God and you are His child and you receive an inheritance from the possession of your Father – the Kingdom. Through his temptations Jesus has taught the way to become a son/daughter of God, (4:1-11). (All three temptations of Jesus converge on to the core question – Is He the Son of God?). By gaining victory over the tempter, Jesus teaches that one who does the will of God (4:4), one who places one’s trust in God (4:7), and one who submits oneself to God (4:10), is the true son/daughter of God. Consequently these are conditions to your divine sonship/daughterhood. You become a son/daughter of God in the measure you seek His will, place your trust in Him, and submit yourself to Him.

Feb 6: 5th Sunday of the Year
Mt 5:13-16

Context and Theme

The beatitudes affirm that the greatest blessedness is to be a son/daughter of God. Jesus further explicates that the primary responsibility of the one who is blessed to be a son/daughter of God is to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13-16).

Dr. Jacob Naluparayil MCBS
Priests: Time for soul searching

Two news items surface in my mind right now: first, accused of a financial scam, a priest, eminent and popular in the country, is transferred into ‘wilderness’; second, a married lady claims that her parish priest has fathered her third child. She has approached the court for justice. These are not common cases and yet with the media around to pour oil on the fire, priests in general feel caught up in a whirlwind.

They are in trouble for various reasons: missionary priests who are attacked for their genuine efforts to ‘liberate’ people; priests in Khandamal, Principals and teachers in the North East etc, attacked and held at ransom by terrorist groups, or beaten up on their way to churches and back. Still a few others -luckily few- are attacked for their mischief, be it sexual misconduct, financial irregularities or arrogance.

The nostalgia of bygone days when priests were esteemed as leaders of communities still linger. Irrespective of religion, caste or class, people would flock to him for prayers, advice and even innocent entertainments. In fact, he was the only educated person in the village/ town and everyone needed him and trusted him.

Scandals tend to erode the unquestioned or even naïve trust of people, in their priests. A senior priest was once recalling an experience of his younger days. He had boarded the train to Calcutta from Chennai. Just as the train was moving, the father of a beautiful young girl rushed towards him and told him: ‘Father, my daughter is travelling alone. Please take care of her.” And the father walked out in absolute trust and confidence. How many parents would trust their daughters with a priest today?

The Church and the priests in particular have to confront this crisis at various levels. Obviously, it has to begin with a personal soul searching: a solid look at one’s own convictions, spirituality, self care, friendships and acceptance of one’s own brokenness. Priesthood, especially celibate priesthood, cannot be the result of sheer personal efforts. It is a grace, nurtured and cultivated day in and day out. Secondly, the Church and the priests have to learn their lessons from the past, particularly, from the experience of western churches in handling sexual abuses. Thirdly, the Catholic Church may have to be willing to look at the possibility of married priests. This makes all the more sense when one realizes the fact that some of the priests who get into trouble are highly acclaimed pastors, appreciated by one and all.

In an interview Fr. Thomas J. Reese S J reflected on the crisis of pedophilia they had faced in the U.S. which taught them solid lessons. His insight that protecting the victim is of prime importance is very relevant here. “Forgiveness, yes; but a sin that betrays the trust of the community must have consequences”, seems like a valid insight for us too.

Crisis times invite us to take a sincere look at the formation of our priests. Quantity we have, but do we have genuine quality? Is our formation outmoded? Is the theology and philosophy they learn become communicative, helping them to understand and respond to people in need? Does it generate the compassion of Jesus in our pastors?

The Church still needs priests. You ask a believer, or a genuine pastor. At the end of the day, they are happy that there are still some good priests around. And that may well be the reason that the people suffer even the bad ones.
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