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## Asian Journal of Religious Studies

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## Editorial

### Two Saints

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Pope Francis on 23 November 2014 conferred sainthood on two Indians-Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Sister Euphrasia. The canonisation day was a red letter day for the Indian Church, which received wide publicity. All the TV channels aired live images from Vatican in the afternoon and also ran discussions on the divinity and social contributions of Kuriakose Chavara, popularly called Chavara Achan, and Euphrasia, who is known as Evuprasiamma. Both of them were born in the 19th century and went on to become the solace for tens of thousands of believers. Chavara Achan was born about 70 years before Evuprasiamma and died in 1871 at the age of 65. Evuprasiamma died in 1952 at the age of 75.

Father Chavara is the founder of both Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), to which Sister Euphrasia belonged. He is viewed not only as a Catholic priest, but also as a social reformer. He established a school with every church and offered free education with a view to help people from lower castes who had extremely limited

access to education those years. He had made it his mission to encourage people from lower castes, particularly Dalits, to study. He even set up a school for Sanskrit, when it was the language of the social elite. He is also credited with the first noon meal programme for school kids.

Sister Euphrasia was known as praying mother and saint among nuns. Colleagues, fellow nuns, and local people say she was indeed a living saint. The 83-year-old Sister Athanasia of Christ Raja Convent, Pavaratty, remembers Sister Euphrasia. “I used to watch Sister Euphrasia praying with a rosary in her hand in the chapel. Whenever we faced some problems either in school or at home, we used to ask Sister Euphrasia to pray for us. She was a living saint,” says Sister Athanasia.

“Spirituality knows no borders. And saints don’t limit themselves to anyone. I reiterated this once again as I joined the multitude celebrating the Mass in Vatican after the Pope had canonised Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Sr. Euphrasia,” wrote Dr KS Radhakrishnan, Chairman of Kerala Public Service Commission in *Malayalam Manorama*. Many of those who participated in TV discussions on the canonisation were non-Christians.

These two saints challenge the Indian Christians to lead lives of commitment to the Church and to the nation. May they inspire us to follow Jesus by serving the people of this land.

As we enter the diamond jubilee of our journal, we strive to remain faithful to the Church’s vision to build a new society. In keeping with this vision, we are introducing some changes. Your continued feedback is welcome.

The Editor



## **Between the Two Francises: A Quest for a Space of Harmony in Diversity**

*Victor Ferrao*

Rachol Seminary, Goa

Pope Francis has brought in fresh energy in the Catholic Church. The intensity of its radiations has reached beyond its visible boundaries. As we celebrate the exposition of St. Francis Xavier in Goa, maybe it is worthwhile to examine how these two great personalities, though living across different times and cultures somehow exhibit some interstices of congruence. Like all Christians these two great persons share a common space in their life of faith in Jesus Christ. It is this imperative of faith that generates profound and dynamic responses of the Christian community to the challenges of their vibrant context in which they find themselves. Therefore, it seems interesting to discern attentively some spaces of congruence that intertwine the faith dynamism of St. Francis Xavier and Pope Francis while being aware that both of them certainly have equivocal, unique and different personality traits as well as context to respond .

Though their times and vivacious contexts are different, without an intention of transmuting them into monocultural sameness, we can make an effort to draw lines that can manifest a common space that might inspire us today. The common space is a perichoretic space, in the model of our triune God where sameness and otherness intermingle without dissolving the otherness into the sameness. The same can be envisaged of these two great human persons and a common terrain of their faith life and leadership can be drawn where their personal uniqueness and charisma admirably merge and inspire us

The common space is a perichoretic space, in the model of our triune God where sameness and otherness intermingle without dissolving the otherness into the sameness.

today. Hence, our concern is to construct a shared space of harmony in diversity in the life of this great persons and hope that it will ignite our minds and heart to respond authentically to the challenges of our times and build space that will never unhome any one in our society.

As we begin to arrive at a seeing together or synoptic vision that does not draw the curtain on the otherness of these two great persons, we are led to understand that building of such a shared space of harmony in diversity in their respective times and societies was the goal of Francis Xavier as well as the aim of Pope Francis . As we breathe and continue to strive to render a life livable for us and others, we can certainly discern how Pope Francis attempts to incarnate God's welcome,

compassion and mercy to everyone, positively removing the hurdles that unhome several people in the Church and the World at large. His views and witness towards the poor, the oppressed, the gays, the divorced, Vatican Bank, the luxurious life of the leaders in the Church and crass capitalism are known to everyone. In his own way,

【 We do not have the right to force anything to anyone. If God in creation ran the risk of making us free, who am I to get involved? 】

the Pope is creating a shared space of harmony in diversity. This shared space of harmony in diversity, is built on the foundation of humility and compassion of Jesus Christ. In His Book, *Heaven and Earth*, the Pope emphatically says that in our pastoral care, ‘we do not have the right to force anything to anyone. If God in creation ran the risk of making us free, who am I to get involved? (Judge the divorced couples, gay etc)... God left the freedom to sin in our hands.’ The profound life and message of Pope Francis cannot unhome any one and is at once an embodied presence of Gods welcome that became flesh in Jesus Christ to all, particularly the sinners.

St. Francis Xavier, being a Basque exhibits his struggle for the construction of the shared space for the harmony in diversity in his own way. To understand his struggle, we have to abandon the comforting distance of hindsight by which we are often tempted to view him. He belongs to an era when, humanity had not seen the rise of reason, enlightenment, science, technology, secularism,

materialism and consumerism of our days. It was a time when the politics, commerce and religions crossed each other's boundaries and hence, we need critically purify our lens of viewing his life and action. Certainly like every great saint, who exhibit traces of human frailty and divine excellence, Francis too does the same with great distinction. But the fact that his effort became God's welcome can be seen in his heroic life particularly in his shunning of his luxuries that came along with him being a Papal nuncio. His leadership is neither bureaucratic nor combative but one that was always alive to the context and sensitive to the vulnerable. His very absence from Goa on long missionary journeys speaks volumes about the way he reached out to the poor and oppressed particularly in South India, where he was most successful among the fisher folks. His struggles against the erring Portuguese officers, erring Church leaders, and the Brahmins, his method of evangelization from the children to the family, his dialogue with the rich and the powerful in Japan and his sheer courage and desire to take up missionary expeditions across the seas and his final unfinished journey to China powerfully manifest how he gave himself up to become God's welcome to the newly discovered people in the East. He felt at home with people of different cultures, languages and religious persuasions and opened himself to dialogue in order to bring about a shared space where diversity can live in harmony.

This shared space of harmony in diversity is not a neutral, flat and numbing space. It is a profoundly political space rooted in God's experience and the lives of the poor and the marginalized. Indeed both the Francis that we tried to understand are men for their times. St. Francis Xavier stood tall and ahead of the men of his time and became the guiding light for generations to

come. Pope Francis is certainly the man for our times. Both in their different ways allow God to work through them and build the Church and humanity. Hence, they continue to inspire tens of thousands to walk in their footsteps and become God's welcome in our families and societies. Channelling God's welcome to humanity afflicted with religious fanaticism, terrorism, economic dispossession, political disenfranchisement etc is both urgent and necessary for the very survival of humanity. We in Goa, with our openness and hospital culture has seeds of God welcome that do not unhome anyone. Often this seed of God's welcome are abused by the market driven tourism that has de-goanized and unhomed Goans. Hence, St, Francis and Pope Francis are indeed great inspiration for us to build a perichoretic space/ space of harmony in diversity were every shade of otherness is nurtured and valued and is not unhomed or forced to be dissolved into a sameness driven by narcissism. The two great persons that we have attempted to present here challenge us to purge all traces of narcissism in our theologies, moralities, philosophies, economies, and socio-political life. Can we become the liberating presence of God's welcome to each one of us? 🌱



## **The Synod of the Family, Pope Francis and St Francis Xavier**

*Albano Fernandes*

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The synod of family that took place in Vatican on 5<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October , with the focus on the theme “Pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization” promises to bring about a revolution in the Church’s attitude and ministry to the family. Like Pope Francis, Francis Xavier did put family at the centre of his evangelization, particularly in India. His missiological methodology from the children to the family indicates how family was the locus of his evangelization. Bringing Jesus to the families meant for him bringing happiness to the them. Today, we have increasing number of unhappy families that are breaking apart or threatening to break apart.

That is why the Synod on Family dedicated to the challenges of the family is indeed a moment of Grace for the families. The divorced couples are on an increase, civilly re-married Catholic couples are growing, applications for annulment are growing day by day, co-habiting couples and those in same sex union are on the rise. The Church teaching on marriage, procreation, and family life is steadily losing its hold over the people.

Several members of the synod, was bridging back both spirit and letter of Vatican II. Through the synod the universal Church strove to dialogue with the family as it exists today in our world with its joys and anxieties. This authentic dialogue that was responsive to the joys and anxieties of the family can be also traced in the life and work of St. Francis Xavier. He strove to build families by evangelizing them and bring them in the church.

Looking back on the two weeks of family synod Pope Francis called it a ‘great experience’ and affirmed that he felt the power of the Holy Spirit, who constantly guides and renews the church. Francis Xavier was led by the Holy Spirit to reach out to the families through his ministry to the children. Observing the children in the power of the Spirit, he understood the plight of the family and was enabled to respond to the special needs of the family. The final report (*Relatio Synodi*) is divided into three parts :

- 1) Listening to the context and challenges of the families
- 2) The Gaze of Christ, the gospel of the families
- 3) Comparison and the pastoral perspective

St. Francis Xavier made his encounter with the children the entry point into the family, the synod and Pope Francis makes the context and the challenges that the families encounter as the entry point to the families. He says love is the measure of faith. How much you love manifest the depth of one’s faith.

### **Listening with Greater Sensitivity**

The synodal bishops listened to the polyphonic voices of the families coming from different parts of the world and make to a common understanding that ‘growing danger

posed by an exaggerated individualism that distorts family ties and eventually considers every member of the family as an island, giving precedence in some cases, the idea of a person as absolute. (RS. 5). The synod attempted to listen to the crises that families are facing in varying degrees across the world and tried to draw a response that will be continuous in its responsive listening. Such a responsive listening was awakened in St. Francis Xavier by Ignatius of Loyola and we can trace how the ears and heart of St Francis listened to the struggles and pains of the families of his days particularly in south India. He continues this awakened and active listening even today from his resting place in Goa. Today steadily the institution of marriage has become 'residual Choice' as only few are getting married while others are choosing co-habitation as a way of life, especially in the west. We in India are steadily facing the tide increasing divorce and couple living in crises or separation. Voices for gay rights and marriage are also becoming louder in our society. Pope Francis and St. Francis Xavier are great models for us to listen with sensitivity and compassion to the pain and the struggle of our families in our societies. This will enhance the Christian heritage of mercy and can assist us to be responsive to wounded and fragile families in our days.

### **The Gospel of the Family**

The gospel is not just directed to individuals and societies but the families at large. Pope Francis laments that the dying families of Europe has impoverished Europe as it becomes exhausted and does not promise any creativity. We are living in an aging Society both in Europe and Goa. Our societies are suffering the virus of contraceptive mentality that does not welcome children. Besides this, the girl child is not welcome in Indian

society from womb to the tomb. Hence, there is an urgent need of Gospel to the families. The compassionate and freeing

Pope Francis and St. Francis Xavier are great models for us to listen with sensitivity and compassion to the pain and the struggle of our families in our societies.

look of Jesus can certainly spring forth new life and vigour in our families. We need to inspire the laity to live the gospel of the family. The families of Pope Francis and St. Francis are effective bearers of the gospel of families. That is way we can find that the Gospel is effectively lived and proclaimed by the life of their sons give to the Lord. Catholic families have the vocation to be the gospel to the world. They need to embody the compassionate look of Jesus to the broken families as well as those who do not accept the very institution o family. There is great room for Christian families to become prophetic evangelizers of families in the world. St. Francis continues the mission of Jesus by inspiring the imagination of many even today. The life and work of Pope Francis continues to incarnate the presence of Jesus among us. Hence, we need to draw inspiration from these stalwarts and live the Gospel of the families to the fullest with profound love and joy and witness to the world that marriage is a beautiful and fascinating way of life.

### **Pastoral Responses**

The Church continues to be concerned about the families across all religious persuasions. She firmly believes that

marriage and families are instituted by God , the creator. She cares for the families that are separated, divorced, not married , single parent families, and persons with homosexual orientation. The synod and the Pope urged called the Church to avoid any language and attitude of discrimination and even harassment. Everyone is to be accepted with respect, sensitivity and compassion. We in India and Goa are required to be sensitive to the social evils like alcoholism, dowry system, caste discrimination, extra-marital and pre-marital sex, pronography, domestic violence and lead the Catholics to grow and flowers as a domestic Church. St. Francis Xavier's prophetic struggles against the erring Portuguese officers and the Priests and the religious as well as the casteists Brahmins stand tall as an example of his compassion for the oppressed and the excluded. Hence, we are to draw profound inspiration from both St. Francis and Pope Francis so that catholic family becomes an effective vehicle of the gospel of the families today.

We can certainly notice how in complex situations Pope Francis and St. Francis Xavier continue to inspire us to make family the centre of our life. Family life is indeed, the most beautiful way of living a fulfilled human life. We need our family and our families need us. The very survival of humanity is dependent on the institution of family. Hence, it is important for the sake of humanity that we, protect and nurture our families. May God bless all families! 🌹



## **Pahlavi Text and Imagery Context of the “Persian Cross” in South- India: Part I**

*Shilanand Hemraj*

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One should be grateful to the [www.nasrani.net](http://www.nasrani.net) for presenting solid documentation on the 10 or 11 specimens of an ancient lapidary type of flowery crosses found in Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Agasaim (Goa), Kadamattam, Muttuchira, Kothanalloor, Kottayam [2], Alangad (all in Kerala), Anuradhapura [2] (Sri Lanka) and probably also Taxila (Pakistan). Locally, they are known as “Mâr Tomâ Slibâ” (Saint Thomas Cross), because of their association with the apostle Thomas. Some of them are inscribed with a Persian language text in Pahlavi script. The web-site gives a long list of scholars who proposed to unravel its meaning. This paper offers an alternative elucidation of the Pahlavi text. The web-site contains also valuable insights on “Symbolism in the St Thomas Cross”. Further observations are called for, with inculturated considerations and theological implications. This will be our concern in the

second part of this paper, which deals with the imagery context.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarly opinion seems to converge in dating the Persian cross-inscriptions to above the lower time-limit of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis of carbon dating of the sculptured granite slab, the matured type of Pahlavi characters, and the elaborate pattern of the cross relief. Yet, the script does not appear to be fully-fledged “Psalter Pahlavi” of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, whereas it keeps archaizing forms of the “Early-cursive Pahlavi” of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, which was to develop into plain “Book Pahlavi”. The cross-script is in between, with lingering usage of Aramaeograms (see below) and conventional consonantal letter-forms, which may not fully represent the actual Persian pronunciation. In any case, broadly speaking, the language is Western Middle Persian, which prevailed during the whole period of the Sasanian Empire (224-651 C.E.). The language remained basically the same from the time it was used officially by the Persian “king of kings” Shapur I, the Great (241-272), who extended his rule over northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia and Bactria / Afghanistan (as claimed in the inscription of Ka’aba-ī-Zardušt). In the process, Jewish-Christians among others faced deportation and resettlement. At first, freedom was given to the syncretist prophet Mani; but during the reign of Vahram I (273-276) the Zoroastrian chief-priest Karter/Kerdir had Mani arrested. Subsequently, the attitude hardened towards Manicheans and other believers, including “Nasoreans”. The persecution climaxed under Shapur II (309-379), with the martyrdom of Mar Shimun in 339. The main reason being that Christianity

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is first presented at the Meeting of the *Catholic Biblical Association of India*, Bangalore, Oct 2014; and sponsored by *Sri Sunil Elias*, Renaissance Tech., Bangalore, member of the Knanaya Christian Community.

was considered to side with the East Roman Empire, which had intruded into north-western border-areas of Sasanian rule.

But, even then, when crosses were being erected, why should the contemporary inscription not have been made in Syriac script?

Therefore, the 4<sup>th</sup> century would be the most likely period for Christians in Persian domain, including in disputed areas of eastern Syria, to seek livelihood elsewhere, especially in trade centres where fellow-Christians might already be engaged. Thus, some families could have migrated to south India (traditionally under the leadership of “Knai Thoma” or Thomas Cana the Merchant in 345). No doubt, they venerated their typical “Persian Cross”. Hymnic expressions tend to be conservative, so that the formula of the cross-inscription under review (although ascribed to the lower limit of the 6<sup>th</sup> century) could originate from that difficult period. To explain its importation one has not to wait for more peaceful times when Sasanian rulers became again tolerant towards religious minorities, in particular towards the East Syrian or Chaldean Church centered in the bishopric of Ctesiphon, which was now independent from the Western Church. This prompted south Indian “Thomas Christians” to establish hierarchical links with the Persian Church. But, even then, when crosses were being erected, why should the contemporary inscription not have been made in Syriac script (as found on some crosses) – unless devotionally or intentionally some

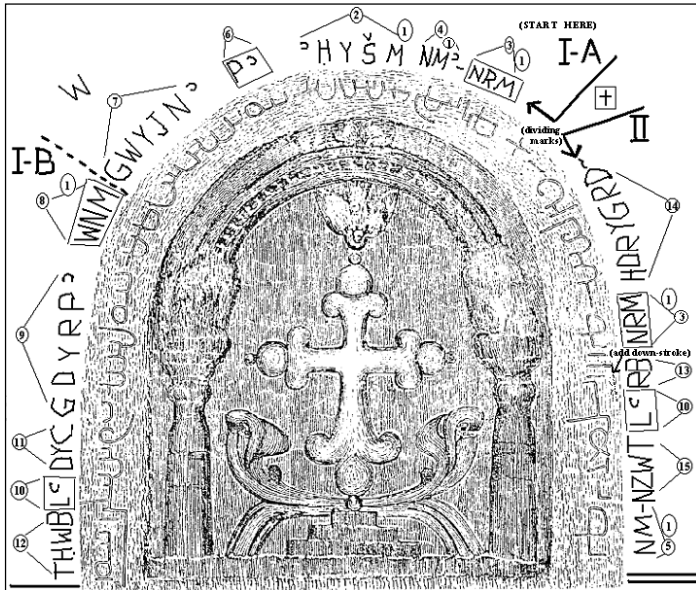
earlier Persian language model was replicated, for which naturally current Pahlavi script had to be used?

The cross-inscription is of particular interest to the Christian “Knanaya” community, which keeps its own identity among Syro-Malabar Churches of Kerala, because of its traditional link with the Persian immigrants – who belonged to the former Nazarenes of greater Syria and originated from the earliest Aramaic-speaking disciples, one of them named Simon the Cananaean (Mk 3:18), a zealous “zealot” (Lk 6:15 - qannâ in Hebrew, cf Nb 25:13) among the apostles. But when the author of this article visited St Mary’s Church of the Knanaya community in Kottayam, where one of the two ancient stone reliefs of the cross has a clear Pahlavi inscription, nobody could tell its exact interpretation, although many had attempted to make some hypothetical translation. In front of such manifest archaeological testimony of at least fifteen centuries of Christian discipleship on Indian soil, one cannot but be moved with intense devotion and admiration. The author pledged to attempt a different reading of the defying script, for which it was more convenient to work on a similar Pahlavi cross-inscription found at St Thomas Mount, Chennai. The method was simple: after marking the most identifiable letters, try to ascertain the indefinite ones, thereby proceeding step-by-step from the well known to the less recognizable and thence to the conjectural. It was some kind of discovery, which generated enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mr Sunil Elias of the Knanaya community in Bangalore (sunil@renaissanceind.com) kindly offered to sponsor its promulgation.

## A. Decipherment of the Pahlavi Cross-Inscription at St Thomas' Mount, Chennai



The latest reading of the Pahlavi inscription on the so-called Persian Cross at St Thomas Mount, Chennai, by Gerd Gropp is not very appealing, because the translation would be a prayer for the donor / inscriber and it would be quite inappropriate for someone to have his/her name inscribed in such big letters on an object of public veneration. In 1970 G. Gropp published his first attempt at translating the text as follows :

*“Our Lord Messiah may show mercy on Gabriel, the son of Chaharbokht (literally meaning having four sons), the grandson of Durzad (literally meaning born in distant land), who made this (cross)”.*

In 1997 G. Gropp offered a revised translation (hopefully after having consulted the interpretation by P. Gignoux, 1995):

*“Our Lord Messiah may show mercy over Gabriel, son of Chaharbokht. Long life may be for him who made this (cross)”*.

Out of devotion to this old symbol of faith and as a corollary to his Hindi translation of the Holy Gathas of Lord Zarathushtra (with Devanagari transliteration of the ancient Gathic original, written in Avestan Pahlavi, together with its Vedic equivalent, published by Bhuvan Vani Trust, Lucknow, 2014) and on the basis of experience gained from his palaeographic-epigraphic research on the bilingual Aramaic and Greek inscriptions of Aśoka (PhD, Allahabad, 2002), the author proposes an altogether new reading, rendered freely as follows:

***“My Lord is the Messiah and Life-giver,  
who be praised for ever because of salvation!  
Indeed, the Lord suffered crucifixion to redeem  
us.”***

This reading can be substantiated by analyzing carefully the available Pahlavi text. The following observations are made in numeral sequence, marked alongside the inscribed arch above the Holy Cross. The inscription is to be read first, while being in front of the text, from top down to the left (in two sections I-A and I-B); and then, in the second part (II) after the dividing mark “+ ~ “, facing the text from the right, down to the bottom):

1. The easiest and clearest Pahlavi letter is “mêm” (M), which occurs 6 times, as indicated.
2. The word which all previous translations have identified is the title or name Messiah, spelt as “M Š Y H “”, which occurs often in Manichaean Pahlavi in

its determined Aramaic form “Mašîḥâ”, the Anointed One.

3. The very first word is read by most translators as “Mâran”, our Lord , reflecting the outcry “Maranatha” of 1 Cor 16:21. But it is rather a typical “Aramaico-gram”, namely an Aramaic word written in Pahlavi letters which has become fossilized and serves as a substitute for a Middle Persian term. It is therefore pronounced in Middle Persian. Accordingly, the Aramaic noun “ M R “ (originally pronounced “mârê”, lord), if recognized as an Aramaic logo-gram in Pahlavi letters, is to be pronounced in Persian as “ḥwadây” (meaning “lord”). Yet, throughout Pahlavi writings, it appears in different forms either as “ MR “, “ M’R”, “MRY “, “M’RY”, . . . or even “ MR’ ḤY “ (in late Psalter Pahlavi)”. Still, whatever its spelling, it is pronounced “ḥwadây”. Only, when inseparably linked to a Semitic proper name, it may be a designation pronounced “Mâr”, e.g. “Mâr Yišo” (Lord Jesus). Admittedly in our text, if used as a logo-gram, the form “MRN” is uncommon— although one is never sure about the shape of the letter nûn “ N “, because a single vertical stroke could also be rêš “ R “ or wâw “ W “, and in the logograms even ‘ayin “ ‘ “, and sometimes it is simply a word-divider. Normally, the letters “MRN” would suggest a Parthian / Middle Persian word for “maran” (death) – which here does not seem to be the case. Nevertheless, we can consider “M R N “ to be an unusual Aramaeo-gram, as long as we pronounce it “ḥwadây” and translate it as “Lord” (and not “our Lord”). Already in the Aramaic inscription of Ašoka, inscribed many

centuries earlier, the Aramaic letters “ M R ‘ N “ were used for king Ašoka and although pronounced in Aramaic as “mârênâ” they may not be translated with the literal meaning “our lord”. This is how the indologist G.Ito argues: “In Imperial Aramaic *mârênâ* ‘our lord’ was commonly employed when subjects or people called the governor or satrap, whereas in Ašokan inscriptions the word has lost its original meaning, prevalent only in the meaning of ‘lord’.” In the second part of our text on the right side of the “Mâr Tomâ Slîbâ”, we can discover the same letters “ M R N “ right in the middle of the inscription. Supposedly, they should be read again as the same Aramaeogram for “lord”.

4. But, in the first occurrence, the fixed form “MRN” has some letters attached to it. They point to a genitive (possessive) pronominal suffix “ - ‘ M N ”, which according to Middle Iranian grammar indicates the first person singular “iman”, translated as “my”. The plural suffix “our” should have been written as “imâ”. Hence, when our earlier translators translate either “my Lord” (C. Winckworth) or “our Lord” (G. Gropp), the former is more likely correct. In the second occurrence of “ M R N “ (in part II) there is no suffix attached to it.
5. A similar suffix “ - M N ” occurs in the last word of the second part (II). But there it is an accusative (direct object) pronominal suffix after a verbal form (see below, Nr 15), which grammatically is “-am” for the first person singular “me”, whereas “-man” is used for the plural “us”. Hence, in this case the latter is more likely.
6. Another Aramaeogram is the Aramaic conjunctive “ ‘ P “ (‘aph) , meaning “also, and”. It is an often-used

alternative for the one-letter Aramaeogram “ W - “ (w<sup>e</sup>-), well-known in Aramaic and Hebrew for the frequent conjunctive “and”; but it is too short and easily mixed up with other words. Here, “ P “ stands out clearly as a separate word after the title or name “ M Š Y H ‘ “, the Anointed One.

7. Consequently, the word following the conjunctive “ P “ can be expected to be another title of the Lord, who according to the context of the redeeming cross is, indeed, also our Redeemer. Since the subsequent word is presumably a relative pronoun (see below, Nr 8), there is only space for at the most 6 letters. In the “Word-List of Manichaean, Middle Persian and Parthian” (by Mary Boyce, Leiden, 1977 – see also “A List of Middle-Persian and Parthian Words”, by W. Henning, 1954 and the recent “Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum: Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian”, edited by N. Samuel and others), mainly three terms are listed with the meaning of “Saviour” namely (1) “anjîwag” (literally “life-giver”), (2) “bojâgar” or related terms like “bohtâr” (saviour), and (3) “wišâhag” (literally “releaser”). The second term would be most suitable; but there is no initial letter bêth “ B “ and as we shall discuss below (Nr 12), “boht”, another form of the second term will be used afterwards. Therefore, presently this term can be discarded here to avoid repetition. Besides, the final letter of the word we are looking for, is probably “gîmel”, so that the choice is between the first and the third term, both ending in “-ag”. Yet in the text, the first letter of the word appears rather to be “âleph” and is certainly not “wâw”. Therefore, only the first term “anjîwag”

seems to fit in, if correctly read as “ ‘ N J Y W G “. Moreover, the presentation of budding flowers and flowing water suggest a context of “life-giving”. In Manichaean literature a similar title of “zîndakkar” (life-giver) is attributed to Jesus. In the “Great Parthian Crucifixion Hymn” it is said that “Living (zîwandag) ... he showed salvation”. Another attractive possibility is to read “ ‘ M W Z G “ (ammozâg) , also starting with “âleph” and ending with “gîmel”, meaning a wise Teacher ; but honestly the letter “mêm” is absent and we might be accused of abetting a Gnostic wisdom interpretation.

8. The second half of the first part (I-B) starts with a fixed Aramaeogram “MNW” –written beautifully with joint letters, which however are difficult to decipher. In Biblical Aramaic “man” is used either as interrogative or relative pronoun. Its form “mannû” is attested, as derived from “man-hû” (see the popular etymology of the heavenly manna in Ex 16:15 : “What is this?”). The Aramaeogram serves for the Middle-Persian relative pronoun “kê” (who). Relative pronouns are often used in hymnic style to describe the qualitative reasons for praise.
9. This is confirmed by the next word, to be read as “ ‘ P R Y D G “ (âfrîdag) , an adjective meaning “blessed, praised”. It starts apparently with the same two letters “ ‘ P “, which earlier constituted an Aramaeogram (see Nr 6) ; but here, together with the next letter “rêš”, they are part of a word. It is interesting that F.Burkitt & C.Winckworth had read those three letters correctly as the beginning of an hypothetical name “Afras son of Chaharbukht”. Why make it so complicated?

10. Before proceeding to the following word, we could identify another short Aramaeogram “ L”, preserving the many meanings of Aramaic “ ‘al “ (on, upon, concerning, towards, against... ). It signifies the Middle Iranian preposition “ô” (for, to). The Aramaeogram occurs twice, and as we shall see, both times it introduces the last verbal noun of the first part and the last verbal noun of the second part, so that a nice parallel sentence structure is obtained. But notice how the end of the first part contains crammed letters, as there was not much space left for inscribing the final letters!
11. The adjective “âfrîdag” (praised) (Nr 9) is probably used predicatively and no verb is required. Therefore, the following word of three letters can be best interpreted as an adverb “  C Y D “ (cîd), meaning “always, ever”. Gerd Gropp, picking up the clue from F.Burkitt and C.Winckworth, apparently read four letters “ C H ‘ R “ (cahâr), meaning “four” and combined it in a bizarre way with the next word to form the name “son of Chahar-bokht”, while interpreting the latter as “having four sons”!
12. Whatever be the strange interpretation, the second half of the name Chahar-bokht was read correctly as “boht” by our learned predecessors; but they missed the obvious sense, although several words from the same root for “salvation” are listed in the standard Word-List referred to above: namely, “bog” (salvation), “boj-” (to save), “bojâgâr” (saviour), “bohs-” (be saved), “boht” or “bohtag” (saved), “bohtâr” (saviour), “bohtagîh” (salvation), “boz-” (save), “bozegar” (saviour), etc. Hence, we can

confidently position the letters “ B W H T “ for “boht”, meaning the grace of being saved so graciously by the Lord, for which he is ever to be praised. The verbal form “boht” could be a past participle “saved”; but Mary Boyce mentions explicitly that the same form could be a “short infinitive”. Hence, it fits marvelously as a verbal noun. Thus ends the first part with a devout profession of faith, which disproves the statement that “there is a high degree of ambiguity in Pahlavi writing”. The inscription was in public view and could be read out easily by Christian immigrants or traders from Sasanian Persia and explained to fellow Nazarenes of the earliest Indian Mâr Tomâ discipleship (relating to the arrival of the apostle Thomas or/and of the merchant Thomas Cana).

13. In order to read the second part, one has to step to the right side and look towards the left. The central word has already been identified as “ M R N “, Lord, which should be the subject of a verb. In some reproductions of the text, there are three vertical strokes | | | , out of which the first one is the final nûn “ N “ of “ M R N “ whereas the third one could be rêš “ R “. But in other reproductions of the letters one can discern a faint horizontal line at the bottom of the second vertical stroke \_\_\_\_| , which allows to recognize the letter as bêth “ B “ (similarly in the cross-inscription of St Mary’s Knanaya Church, Kottayam). Thus, the following two-letter word, before the second occurrence of the Aramaeogram “ ‘ L “ , can be understood as the shortest verbal form “ B R “ (bar), which could either be the imperative singular or the third person of the past tense, meaning “(he) carried, bore, endured, suffered”. There are many such short

forms, like “bûd” (he became), “šud” (he was), “bîd” (he saw). Hence, it is not likely to be an Aramaeogram “ B R “, Aramaic “bar” for Persian “puhr”, meaning “son” in Semitic names. Besides, the term used for Jesus is “bag-puhr” (Son of God) or “mard-puhr” (Son of Man).

14. No doubt, what the Lord endured was the suffering of the “crucifixion”. This should be the first word of the second part and it may be suggested by the sign of the cross, engraved as a dividing mark, just next to it. Initially, the word can only be a guess; but it must be the direct object of the verb “bar”, bearing, enduring. It could be a lengthy compound word of seven to nine letters. The Persian noun in the accusative case (direct object) may or may not have “-râ” attached to it, e.g. when “mard” (man) is used as object in the sentence “I see the man” it takes on the form “mard-râ” or may remain “mard”. Hence, the accusative ending is not required for our lengthy word. Which word? The adjective or past participle “crucified” is attested in Mary Boyce’s Word-List and of course also in the Great Crucifixion Hymn as” D ‘ R W B D G “ (dârubdag), meaning”tree-affixed”. “Tree” is found in different forms as “draxt”, “dâr”, or “dâru”. Also in the Greek New Testament “xulon” (tree) may refer to “stauros” (cross), see Acts 5:30, and especially 1 Pe 2:24 (“he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross [literally tree]”). For “crucifixion” (tree-affixion) itself the noun “dârgirdîh” is listed, which is spelt differently (or read differently by different scholars) as “D ‘ R G Y R D Y H” or “D ‘ L K R T Y H “; other forms being “D ‘ R G Y R D Y B “and “D ‘ R W B D G Y P T “. As mentioned

earlier, Pahlavi letters are confusing; different letters share the same sign, letters may merge and take on a different value. Peter Daniels says about Pahlavi: “If one were to give each letter only one value, the words would be completely unrecognizable” (The World’s Writing Systems, 1996). Like the Aramaic logograms, complete words are to be read, not single letters. The meaning arises so-to-say from word-pictures, which create an impression as a whole, whatever be the detailed spelling. Hence, we have probably struck the right word. Earlier translations have read (or guessed) similar words like “crucifixion, tree (dâru), cross, suffering, pain (dard)”. G.Gropp’s translation has hit at least the first letters of the word : “Durzad”, explained as “born in distant (dâr) land” and “long (darg, Sanskrit “dîrgha”) life”.

15. Only one word of part II remains to be justified. It has three or four letters, out of which the first letter is certainly “tâw”.The context suggests a set of letters with the meaning of forgiveness, reconciliation as the fruit of the crucifixion, in parallel with the verbal noun “boḥt”at the end of the first part. Only one word or “word-picture” (as explained above) satisfies our quest, namely “ T W Z “ (toz), which is a verb with the meaning “to expiate, pay for, redeem”. The noun “tozišn” for “expiation” would be too long (unless there is a shorter form, like the three-letter noun “bog” instead of “bozišn” for “salvation”, see Nr 12). The infinitive form is “ T W Z N “ (tozan) with four letters, which is quite possible, although the shape of the final letter is not so certain. But the likelihood of a verbal noun is supported by the subsequent pronominal suffix “ – M N “ (-man), meaning “us”,

see Nr 5. The first person singular, implying that the purpose of the Lord's suffering would be "to redeem me", would be too limited. For, "he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jo 2:2). But F. Burkitt & C. Winckworth interpreted the inscription as a prayer by and for the sculptor "who cut this (cross)" -- reading probably for "cutting" the four-letter verb "TR 'S", also starting with tâw.

Final presentation:

(Transcribing Pahlavi words in reverse order; Aramaeograms are framed; pronunciation is in Middle-Persian)

Part I-A

<u>MRN</u>	-	'MN	<u>MŠYH</u>	'P	'NJYWG
Hwadây	-	iman	Mašîhâ	û	Anjîwag
My	Lord	(is)	Messiah	and	Life-giver,

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Part I-B

<u>MNW</u>	'PRYDG	<u>CYD</u>	'L	<u>BWHT</u>
kê	âfrîdag	cîd	ô	boht
who	(be) praised	always	for	saving .

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Part II

<u>D'RGYRDYH</u>	<u>MRN</u>	<u>BR</u>	'L	<u>TWZN</u>	-	<u>MN</u>
Dârgirdîh	Hwadây	bar	ô	tozan	-	man
Crucifixion	the Lord	endured	for	redeeming	us	

Consequently, the earliest inscription of "Nasranis" in India contains a very meaningful, straightforward message. It is a plain witness to their faith – as presented below in Sanskrit, with introduction followed by a śloka in anuṣṭubha metre of 8 syllables per quarter:

**Šrî-Yamala-dûta-parvate sansthite,  
Sudalita-šradhâlûnâm tîrtha-grihe,  
pratiṣṭhita-puṇya-šûlâ-sthambha-rûpe,  
Pârasî-lipyâ likhitam tat-stavanam :**

On St Thomas Mount, of apostle the Twin, at the pilgrimage-shrine of devout Sudalitas (=Nazarenes) , where the sign of the Holy Cross slab is erected, this homage is written in Persian language-script:

**Ayam Satyâbhiṣikto hi**

**Svâmî mam-aiva Jîva-daḥ |**

*This truly-Anointed indeed is my Lord and Life-giver,*

**vimukti-kârya-hetor yaḥ**

**stuti-yogyas-tu sarvadâ ||**

*because of salvific liberation who is praiseworthy surely forever.*

**Taru-baddho vyathâm bhuktvâ**

**paritrâṇâya no Prabhuḥ |**

*Tree-fixed agony he suffered for our redemption, he the Lord.*

**Iti šûlâ-šilâ-sâkṣyam**

**Sumukund-ânuḡâminâm ||**

*Such is the cross-rock-testimony of Sumukunda (=Jesus) followers.*

There is perfect similarity between the Pahlavi inscriptions on the “Persian Cross” at St Thomas Mount Church, Chennai and at St Mary’s Knanaya Church, Kottayam. Therefore, an identical reading can be established for the Phalavi cross-inscription at Kottayam, as seen in the following parallel four-line presentation:

- (1) word by word pronunciation in Persian language
- (2) original inscribed text in Pahlavi script
- (3) transcription with framed Aramaeograms
- (4) word by word literal translation





## **The Pope on Big Bang and Evolution**

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The Catholic Church has been generally supportive of science. In spite of the popular idea that the Church is opposed to science the fact is that the Church has been cultivating science right from the beginning. In the background of the Pope's statement on Big Bang and evolution, this article wants to show that the Church's position has remained consistent.

Scientific theories including the "Big Bang" believed to have brought the universe into being 13.7 billion years ago and the idea that life developed through a process of evolution do not conflict with Catholic teaching, Pope Francis said on October 27, 2014.

Addressing a meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, an independent body housed in the Vatican and financed largely by the Holy See, Francis said scientific explanations for the world did not exclude the role of God in creation.

"The beginning of the world is not the work of chaos that owes its origin to something else, but it derives directly

from a supreme principle that creates out of love,” he said. He added: ”The ‘Big Bang’, that today is considered to be the origin of the world, does not contradict the creative intervention of God, on the contrary it requires it.”

“Evolution in nature is not in contrast with the notion of (divine) creation because evolution requires the creation of the beings that evolve,” the pope said during an unveiling of a bust of Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

“The scientist,” he continued, “must [nevertheless] be moved by a trust in the idea that nature hides, within her evolutionary mechanisms, potentialities that it is the task of intellect and freedom to discover and actuate, in order to achieve the [kind of] development that is in the design of the Creator.”

In related reflections Francis also said that the big bang theory of the origins of the universe does not contradict God. He explained that “when we read about Creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so ... God is not a divine being or a magician, but the Creator who brought everything to life. ... Evolution in nature is not inconsistent with the notion of creation, because evolution requires the creation of beings that evolve.”

It may be noted that Pope Francis has reiterated that the Catholic Church sees no conflict between science and religion, accepting the universe was created in the Big Bang, rather than insisting on a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis.

This position is not really new. The present pope's comments largely echoed statements from his predecessors. More conservative Popes have, in recent decades, endorsed scientific ideas that are anathema to some fundamentalist Christians, particularly that humans descended from other species. However, it may be noted that the first acknowledgment of this possibility the Church's position has evolved.

When Pope Pius XII first acknowledged the possibility of evolution in 1950 his position was extremely guarded. His encyclical *Humani Generis* holds: "the teaching authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions... take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter – for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God".

Pope John Paul reiterated this open position in 1996. By the time Pope John Paul II addressed the topic, there had been a shift. In 1996, the then Pope said, "This theory [evolution] has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favour of this theory."

In 2011, the former Pope Benedict said scientific theories on the origin and development of the universe and humans, while not in conflict with faith, left many questions unanswered. Earlier as Cardinal Ratzinger he had written: "We cannot say: creation or evolution,

inasmuch as these two things respond to two different realities. The story of the dust of the earth and the breath of God, which we just heard, does not in fact explain how human persons come to be but rather what they are. It explains their inmost origin and casts light on the project that they are. And, vice versa, the theory of evolution seeks to understand and describe biological developments. But in so doing it cannot explain where the ‘project’ of human persons comes from, nor their inner origin, nor their particular nature. To that extent we are faced here with two complementary—rather than mutually exclusive—realities.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, as part of a wider move to pull the Church into the 21st Century while also restoring its prouder traditions, Pope Francis has used language that carries the message more clearly still.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences is a Vatican body designed to promote the mathematical and physical sciences. Among the nearly 50 Nobel Prize winners who have been members are such scientific giants as Ernest Rutherford, Max Plank and Niels Bohr.

This indicates that in spite of some frictions, by and large, the Church has always been supportive of scientific development, including the theories on the origin of the world and of life. The absence of any protest from the Catholics also indicate strongly that the Pope’s statements are consistent with the Church’s commitments to scientific progress. 🌱

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Eerdmans, 1995), 50.



## Homily Notes

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Jan 4, 2014: Feast of Epiphany  
Is. 60:1-6; Eph.3: 2-6; Mt. 2: 1-12

### **Our Pilgrimage to Christ**

The word Epiphany, which means *appearance* or *manifestation*, marks Jesus' first appearance to the Gentiles. "Epiphany" refers to God's self-revelation as well as the revelation of Jesus as His Son. It is a celebration older than the feast of Christmas, having originated in the East in the late second century. The feast commemorates the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, in the Western Church. In the Eastern Church, it is also the commemoration of the baptism of Christ.

The angels revealed Jesus to the shepherds, and the star revealed him to the Magi, who had already received hints of Him from Jewish scriptures. Later, God the Father revealed Jesus' identity at His baptism in the Jordan. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus revealed himself as the promised Messiah. These multiple revelations are all suggested by the Feast of the Epiphany. Today's gospel teaches us how Christ enriches those who bring Him their hearts. Since the Magi came with joy in their hearts to visit the Christ child, God allowed them to see wondrous things.

Epiphany can be looked on as a symbol for our pilgrimage through life to Christ. The feast invites us to see ourselves as images of the Magi, a people on a journey to Christ. Today's gospel also tells us the story of the magi's encounter with the evil

King Herod. This encounter symbolizes three reactions to Jesus' birth: hatred, indifference, and adoration. a) A group of people headed by Herod plan to destroy Jesus. b) Another group composed of priests and scribes ignores Jesus. c) A third group, shepherds and the magi, adore Jesus and offer themselves to Him.

Let us worship Jesus every day at Mass with the gold of our love, the myrrh of our humility and the frankincense of our adoration. Let us offer our very selves, promising God that we will use His blessings by doing good to our fellow human beings. In the Christmas stable, the magi got transformed themselves. So too must we. What Christ wants from us is a reformation of ourselves. Just as the Wise Men returned home to begin the work of transforming their kingdoms, we too must go home and transform the world around us.

**Johnson Simon**

Jan 4, Feast of Baptism of Our Lord

Is. 12:1-6; 1 Jn. 5: 1-9; Mk. 1: 7-11

### **Inspired by God**

The year is young. The old year is gone together with its unfulfilled dreams, disappointments and failures. We have made resolutions and set goals and objectives for the New Year. But we are yet to start implementing them. In many ways we are in a similar position as Jesus was at the beginning of today's gospel story. Jesus was about to put private life behind him and embark on his public work. He knew what the needs were, he had his plans, and he was ready to start. But before throwing himself into the implementation of his plans and dreams he needed to do one more thing. He needed to get baptism. If the thirty years of private life he led in obedience to his parents was his remote preparation for his life's work, the baptism in the River Jordan was the immediate preparation. As we celebrate the baptism of Jesus today, it would be in order to ask ourselves: Why did Jesus submit to baptism before embarking on his life's work? And what can we learn from this on how to proceed with our own lives' ambitions and dreams?

Baptism is a ceremony that requires three principal parties: the individual to be baptized, God in whose name the individual is baptized, and the baptizer who acts in the name of the community of faith. Traditionally we have tended to see baptism mainly from the individual's point of view and so have stressed the aspect of cleansing from original sin and birth to new life. We have also somewhat stressed the community aspect of baptism as entrance into a community of faith, becoming a member of the visible church. What we have not stressed sufficiently is the divine aspect which, in fact, is what comes out so strongly in the story of Jesus' baptism. For Jesus who was about to begin his public work, baptism was primary a decision to unite himself with God, his purposes with God's purposes, his energies with God's energy.

The story of Jesus' baptism shows us that if we are to live out our baptism, the first thing we should do is to lay down at God's feet all our plans and ambitions, yes, and our whole lives as well. Often we are hindered not by a lack of idea of what we should be doing but a lack of strength to put it into practice. Living out our baptism means allowing the Holy Spirit whom we received to lead us and empower us to put into action the noble dreams that God Himself has inspired in us. The New Year is a good time to start. **Vibin Varghese**

Jan 18, 2014: Second Sunday of the Year  
I Sam 3: 3-10, 19; I Cor 6: 13-20; Jn 1: 35-42

### **Rebuilding Broken Lives**

Today's theme is divine vocation. Everyone is called by God to be something, to do something for others with his life and with his unique gifts. Hence today's readings remind us of our personal call to become a witness to the Lamb of God and to lead a life of holiness and purity. We are told that each of us as Christians is personally called to discipleship, which demands our ongoing response of commitment. The first reading describes how Yahweh called Samuel to His service. In the second reading St. Paul reminds us that we too have a divine call and it is a call to holiness. He argues that we have to keep our bodies pure and

our souls holy because in baptism we have become parts of Christ's body and the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel, John the Baptist introduces Jesus to two of his disciples as the "Lamb of God." They follow Jesus, accepting his call to "*come and see.*" They find out his residence, stay with him for a while and then bring Simon to Jesus, introducing Jesus to him as the Messiah. Thus today's gospel describes the call of the first apostles.

Our call is to rebuild broken lives. Like the missionary call of Samuel and the apostles, we too are called. Our call is to rebuild broken lives, reconciling them to God's love and justice through Christ Jesus our Lamb and Lord. Through baptism into the Body of Christ we are empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit to free the oppressed. Through the love of the Lamb of God, we are called to better the lot and improve the broken spirit of all who have been exiled from the possibility of hope, exiled from God's righteousness, burdened by the yoke of spiritual, social, economic, and political dislocation. In other words, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the glorified Lamb, we are called to empower the human spirit with a sense of identity and purpose.

**Jesuraja Fernando**

Jan 25, 2015: Third Sunday of the Year  
Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; I Cor 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20  
**Being Shining Lights in the World**

God's call and the response expected from each of us is the main theme of today's readings. No matter to what life, work or ministry God calls us, God first calls us to convert, to reform, to repent -- to continually become new people. Those who constantly reform will be able to follow where God leads. All the three readings today underline the absolute necessity of such repentance and ready response to God's call. The first reading tells us how the prophet Jonah did not respond quickly when God called him because he hated the gentile people of Nineveh and

thought that they were not worthy of God's gracious mercy. God had to punish him to make him properly respond to His call a second time to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh promptly responded to God's word preached by His prophet. In the second reading Paul urges the community in Corinth to lose no time accepting the message of the gospel because Jesus' second coming can occur at any time. The gospel also describes the call of the first disciples and their ready response. Jesus' call to the people is described as a call to repentance and belief in the "good news" he preached. In describing the call of Jesus' first disciples, today's Gospel emphasizes how we sinners are to respond with total commitment, even by abandoning our accustomed style of life and family.

Every one of us is called by God, both individually and collectively. The mission of preaching, teaching and healing which Jesus began in Galilee is now the responsibility of the Church. Our own unique vocation and relationship with the risen Lord are the same as that of the universal Church. Be we monk, priest, married or single laity, we are all called, and in this call we become what God wants us to be. The call, of course, began with our baptism and the other sacraments of initiation; it is strengthened throughout the years with the Eucharist and reconciliation, healed and consoled by anointing, made manifest by matrimony or holy orders. God is relentless in calling us back to Himself even when we stray away from Him. Let us be thankful to God for His Divine grace of calling us to be members of the true Church, the one and only Catholic, Holy and Apostolic Church. Let us make personal efforts to see the light of Christ and to grow in holiness by learning the truths that are revealed through the Holy Catholic Church and by using its Sacraments. Let us be shining lights in the world as Christ was and make a personal effort to bring others to the truth and the light so that they may rejoice with us in the mystical Body of Christ, the invisible Kingdom of God.

**Arun Vincent**

Feb 1, 2014: IV Sunday of the Year  
Deut 18:15-20; I Cor 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28

### **Authority that Liberates**

The common theme of today's readings is divine authority reflected by the prophets of the Old Testament in their messages, by the apostles including St. Paul in the New Testament in their writings and teaching, and by Jesus in his teaching and healing ministry. In today's gospel Mark describes one sample Sabbath day of Jesus' public life. He joins in public worship in the synagogue as a practicing Jew, heals the sick, he drives out evil spirits -- and he prays privately. Since anyone could be invited to explain the Holy Scripture in synagogue worship, Jesus was invited. People immediately noticed that Jesus spoke with authority and healed with divine power.

This passage begins and ends with comments about Jesus' authority as a teacher (1:21-22 and 1:27-28). In between is an exorcism (1:23-26), pointing out to a connection between Jesus' teachings and his supernatural authority. Moreover, this is the first episode in Jesus' ministry which Mark recounts after the call of the disciples. Jesus' authority is also the main theme in the collection of stories in 2:1 and 3:6. Verse 2:10 refers to the authority of Jesus to declare to people God's compassion in forgiving their sins (2:10). Mark in his gospel repeatedly returns to the theme that Jesus' teaching with authority gave him followers, and healing with divine power liberated people from illness and demoniac possession. The Catholic and apostolic Church derives her teaching authority from her founder Jesus.

**Use Your God given authority for liberation and service:** Genuine authority is an ability and awesome responsibility that enables people to transcend themselves and use their innate gifts for the welfare of others. Jesus did not come to rule and control people, "*not to be served but to serve.*" He came to make people free. Jesus frees us from the evil spirits that keep us from praying, loving and sharing our blessings with others. He frees us from all the 'evil spirits' of fear, compulsions, selfishness, anger, resentment and hostility. "*I have come that they may have life,*

*life in abundance.*” So Jesus should be a source of liberation for us. May he free us from all those spirits which make us deaf, dumb, blind, lame and paralyzed, physically and spiritually!

**Arun Vincent**

Feb 8, 2015: V Sunday of the Year

Job 7:1-4, 6-7; I Cor 9: 16-19, 22-23; Mk 1: 29-39

**Bring Healing and Wholeness**

The readings today challenge us to go courageously beyond people’s expectations by doing good as Jesus did instead of brooding over pain and suffering in the world. Today’s gospel describes how Jesus had just finished the first day of his public ministry at Capernaum on a Sabbath day. Before noon, he took part in the synagogue worship, taught with authority, exorcised a demon, healed Simon’s mother-in-law and in the evening he “*cured many who were sick with various diseases, and drove out many demons.*” Instead of reveling in the glory he attained, Jesus rose early next morning and went off “to a deserted place” to pray in order to recharge his spiritual batteries. While the gospel presents Jesus enthusiastically preparing for his second day’s missionary work, the first reading details Job’s attitude in striking contrast to Jesus.’ In the midst of his long suffering, Job is speaking of the tedium and futility of life. Job’s words describe the miseries of human existence. The second reading, on the other hand, presents Paul as a true and dynamic follower of Jesus, ready to do something extra for his Lord. Knowing that he is called to do more than just preach the Gospel, he resolves to preach without recompense. Pointing out the spontaneous response of Peter’s mother-in-law after she had been healed by Jesus -- namely, “*waiting on them at table*”-- today’s gospel teaches us that true discipleship means getting involved in selfless service of others.

Bringing *healing and wholeness* is Jesus’ ministry even today. The words “healing,” “health,” “wholeness,” “wellness,” and “holiness” all share the same etymological root, meaning “full” or “complete.” At whatever stage of life we may be -- whether child, adolescent, middle-aged, or older -- we recognize

implicitly our own deficiencies. Hence we need the Lord's strength not only to make us well, but to make us whole. This means that we are all in need of healing. We all need healing of our minds, our memories and our broken relationships. Jesus now uses counselors, doctors, friends or even strangers in His healing ministry. Let us look at today's Gospel and identify with the mother-in-law of Peter. Let us ask for the ordinary healing we need in our own lives. When we are healed let us not forget to thank Jesus for his goodness, mercy, and compassion by serving others. Our own healing process is completed only when we are ready to help others in their needs and focus on things outside ourselves. Let us also be instruments of Jesus' healing by visiting the sick and praying for their healing.

**Dino Varghese**

Feb 15, 2015: VI Sunday of the Year

Lev 13: 1-2, 44-46; 1Cor 10:31-11:1; Mk 1: 40-45

### **Making Us Clean**

Purity or holiness of soul coming from God and cleansing our lives is the main theme of today's readings. The first reading and the gospel story teach the theme of liberation from bodily and ritual impurity as a sign of internal holiness. This liberation is symbolized by the precautions against contracting leprosy given in the first reading and the healing of the leper described in the gospel. The first reading shows the ancient Jewish attitude toward leprosy and the rules for quarantining lepers. All this comes as a background to Jesus' healing of a leper. In fact, all three readings contain reflections on the notion of "social acceptability" even when people are different from us. In today's responsorial psalm, the psalmist exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord because He purifies us from our sins: "*I confessed my faults to the LORD, and you took away my guilt.*" The psalm serves as a mini-treatise on reconciliation - the meaning of the spiritual leprosy of sin and how we are forgiven by a sacramental encounter with God. "*I turn to you, Lord, in times of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.*" In today's epistle, St.

Paul exhorts us to testify to our healing from the leprosy of sin by living changed lives, expressed by our doing “*everything for the glory of God*” and for the salvation of others.

Trust in the mercy of a forgiving God who assures us that our sins are forgiven and that we are clean. We are forgiven and made spiritually clean if we repent of our sins. This is because God is a God of love who waits patiently for us. No matter how many sins we have committed or how badly we have behaved, we know God forgives us. We do not have to bribe God to forgive us. His forgiveness is offered freely--all we have to do is ask for it. The only condition required of us is that we ask for forgiveness with a repentant heart. We need only kneel before him and ask him, “*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean*” We are sure to hear his words of absolution, “*Very well-- your sins are forgiven and you are clean.*” This is what the sacrament of reconciliation is all about. **Albert A C**

Feb 22, 2015: I Sunday of Lent  
Gen 9: 8-15; I Peter 3: 18-22; Mark 1: 12-15  
**Radical Dependence on God**

The primary purpose of Lent is to lead us to “*repentance*” in the sense of conversion - change of values, ideals and ambitions through fasting, prayer and mortification. Lenten observances are intended to lead us to our annual solemn renewal of baptismal vows on Holy Saturday, the day of our recommitment to our baptismal vows. We are called by our baptisms to live justly, to love our neighbor as our God, and to build the kingdom by our acts of goodness. That is why all the three readings chosen as today’s scripture refer to baptism directly or indirectly. The first reading describes how Noah’s family is saved from the deluge waters by God’s special providence and how renewed his ‘friendship covenant’ with mankind. It symbolizes how we are saved through the water of baptism which cleanses us of sin and makes us one with Christ. In the second reading Peter tells us how Noah’s episode prefigured baptism. In the Gospel we are told how Jesus faced and defeated the tempter by his forty days

of prayer and penance in the desert immediately after his baptism. Today's psalm is an exquisite penitential prayer, humbly acknowledging human insufficiency and our radical dependence upon God and His mercy and forgiveness.

Lent is the time of renewal of life by penance and prayer. Formerly the six weeks of Lent meant a time of severe penance as a way of purifying ourselves from our sinful habits and getting ready to celebrate the *Paschal mystery* (the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) with a renewed commitment to follow Christ. Now the Church leaves the Lenten practice of penance to the good will and generosity of individual Christians. However, Lent should be a time for personal reflection on where we stand as Christians accepting the gospel challenges in thoughts, words and deeds. It is also a time to assess our relation to our family, friends, working colleagues and other people we come in contact with, especially those of our parish. We should examine whether we are able to give any positive contribution to other people's lives and to eradicate the abuses which are part of our society.

**Vanathu Antony**

AJRS and the Staff and Students of Papal  
Seminary, Pune, India, are glad to wish the readers  
Merry Christms and Happy New Year!



## Book Reviews

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Koteswara Raju Penmetsa, *Resilient Social Work The Gracious Way*, New Delhi: Anne Books Pvt. Ltd. 2014, pp. 250 + x. ISBN: 978-93-8365-685-1 Price: Not given

As one turns the pages of this above book one finds the personal admiration articulated by the author about versatile and veteran personality of Professor Dr. Gracious Thomas the founder and the Director of School of Social Work (SOSW), IGNOU with whom the author works at INGOU. The book has fifteen chapters with further subtopics which uncovers the service-minded, inspiring, committed, innovating, collaborating, delicate, novel, pioneering, synergetic works and activities of Professor Dr. Gracious Thomas. It records the bounteous and building contributions of Professor.Dr. Gracious Thomas, to the field of Social work. The author calls Professor Dr. Gracious Thomas as “Messiah of Knowledge” (p. 8) for his unique contribution in bringing about e-GyanKosh of IGNOU, spiritual person, (p. 12), builder of teams (p.17), far sighted enigma (p. 20).The book contains tow interviews with Professor.Dr. Gracious Thomas in one of which he shares with us about the secret of success in all his initiatives which is, “Prayer and Total surrender to God’s will.” The book contains the foreword written by His Holiness Dali Lama, which adds credibility to the book. It ends with an exhaustive list of publication of Professor Dr. Gracious Thomas numbering around 500 books and articles.

As one reads this book one can’t but wonder at the tremendous potential of Professor.Dr. Gracious Thomas and in

each one of us which goes untapped. If only it gets ignited by prayer and concerns for others it can have infinite consequences making the lives of million others a little better. That's why it is rightly said when love and skill work together expect a Masterpiece and no doubt that the contributions of Professor.Dr. Gracious Thomas to humanity through his academic and social services ventures he stands as 'Master's Master piece'.

**Bala Francis**

Kuruvilla Pandikattu (ed) *Pope Francis on Creation and Evolution*, Pune: Association of Science, Society and Religion (ASSR), 2014. Pp. 48+iv ISBN: 978-81-88864-24-9, Price: Not given.

Scientific theories including the “Big Bang” believed to have brought the universe into being 13.7 billion years ago and the idea that life developed through a process of evolution do not conflict with Catholic teaching, Pope Francis affirmed on October 27, 2014.

Fifteen reactions to this Papal affirmation of both of big bang and evolution have been compiled and edited by Dr Pandikattu. No claim of originality is made in this booklet. Various articles from different internet sources are collected so that the educated reader can gather differing perspectives on the comment of the Pope.

The editor hopes to show that as such for a believing Christian there cannot be – and is – no conflict between scientific theories and religious beliefs. We also realise that both scientific theories and religious beliefs are open to new and creative interpretations. So he believes that both science and religion can go hand in hand, criticising and enriching each other. In the process humanity will be enriched by both. 🌱

**VM Jose SJ**

PHILOSOPHY FACULTY  
JNANA-DEEPA VIDYAPEETH, PUNE

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Following Vatican's *Decree on the Reform on the Ecclesiastical Studies of Philosophy* (2011), Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, has some changes in our Philosophy Programme. Accordingly, these are some of the Programmes the Faculty of Philosophy offers:

***a. Two Year Certificate Programme in Philosophy***

Since the *Decree* demands two years of Philosophy for priestly students to pursue their theology studies, we offer two years of Philosophy without any degree. Normally they will not be able to do higher studies in Philosophy, but can study Theology (including Bachelor's Programme in Theology). The minimum requirement: +2 or equivalent .

***b. Three Year Bachelors Programme in Philosophy***

As per the guidelines of the *Decree*, the Bachelors Programme in Philosophy is a three year programme which we are happy to offer. The minimum requirement: +2 or equivalent.

**However, with the approval of Rome, we may be able to grant the BPh Degree in *two years time*, if the candidate has already obtained any Bachelors's Degree from any recognized university.**

Along with their Philosophy Programme, BPh students are highly encouraged to do a UGC recognized BA or MA degree in Philosophy from a university in Pune.

We are sorry to inform that ***Rev. Fr. Alex Dassanayake***, a long time collaborator of AJRS, has gone to his eternal rest. Funeral Mass at Dummalakotuwa, Sri Lanka on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2014 at 3.00 p.m.