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Editor: Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ

Circulation: Stephen Jayard

Section Editors:

Pastoral Theology: V M Jose SJ

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Indian Religions: Prasad Lankapalli. SJ

Mysticism: George Karuvelil SJ

Administration: Francis Ezhakunnel SJ

Management: Karunaidass & Patras Kujur

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Address all correspondence (incl. DD) to:

The Editor, AUC, Papal Seminary, Pune 411014, India Email: kurusj@gmail.com

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Editorial

Opening Our Hearts

In a moment filled with powerful political symbolism, Pope Francis prayed on February 17, 2016 at Mexico's northern border for the thousands of migrants who have died trying to reach the United States and appealed for governments to open their hearts, if not their borders, to the “human tragedy that is forced migration.” “No more death! No more exploitation!” he implored.

It was the most poignant moment of Francis' five-day trip to Mexico and one of the most powerful images in recent times: History's first Latin American pope, who has demanded countries to welcome people fleeing persecution, war and poverty, praying at the border between Mexico and US.

In his homily, Francis called for “open hearts” and recognition of the problems facing humanity today. “We cannot deny the humanitarian crisis which in recent years has meant the migration of thousands of people, whether by train or highway or on foot, crossing hundreds of kilometers through mountains, deserts and inhospitable zones,” he said. “They are our brothers and sisters, who are being expelled by poverty and violence, drug trafficking and organized crime.”

And then, in a pointed message, Francis added a politically charged greeting to the 30,000 people gathered in the Sun Bowl to watch the simulcast on giant TV screens. “Thanks to the help of technology, we can pray, sing and celebrate together this merciful love which the Lord gives us, and which no frontier can prevent us from sharing.”

In a speech to workers and employers, Francis warned that without job opportunities, Mexico's youth risk being seduced into the drug trade. "Poverty becomes the best breeding ground for the young to fall into the cycle of drug-trafficking and violence," he said.

Do you want to leave them the memory of exploitation, of insufficient pay, of workplace harassment?" he asked the employers. "What air will they breathe? An air tainted by corruption, violence, insecurity and suspicion or, on the contrary, an air capable of generating alternatives, renewal and change?" Further, "God will hold today's slave-drivers accountable," he warned.

On the final day of his visit, Francis visited the Prison in Ciudad Juarez, a city that was once considered the murder capital of the world. Francis greeted a few dozen inmates clad in gray sweatsuits and white sneakers in a prison courtyard.

Francis told the 700 or so inmates gathered outside the prison's new chapel that they cannot undo the past. But he said they must believe that things can change, and that they have the possibility of "writing a new story and moving forward."

"You have known the power of sorrow and sin and have not forgotten that within your reach is the power of the resurrection, the power of divine mercy which makes all things new."

He urged the inmates to use their experience in prison for good, to help end the cycle of violence. "The one who has suffered the greatest pain, and we could say has experienced hell, can become a prophet in society," he said. "Work so that this society, which uses people and discards them, will not go on claiming victims."

Can we create a society with open hearts, that heals the wounds of victims? That is mercy in action!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor



Sannyasa and Consecrated Life

Stephen Chundamthadam S J

Director, JDV Centre for Spirituality, Pune-411-14

1. Introduction

Sannyasa in India and consecrated life in Christianity represent life of renunciation in two different traditions. Though both have a common aim that is liberation the ways and methods adopted are different. *Sannyasa* in the Indian tradition, in general, is a life of total renunciation after going through student life, householder's and life in the forest. These three stages of life are a preparation for *sannyasa*. Whereas consecrated life in the Christian tradition doesn't require these preparatory stages, because the seeker heavily depends on God's grace and it is a call. However, a Christian consecrated person in India may draw inspiration from *sannyasa* so that the consecrated life may become more relevant to the Indian context.

2. Origin of Asceticism in India

There are different opinions among scholars regarding the origin of asceticism in India, the earliest signs can be seen in the Indus Valley Civilization. The characteristics of the three faced deity and, the priest king concentrating on the tip of his nose and other miniature statues indicate the familiarity of the people of Indus Valley with ascetical practices and meditation as early as 2500 BC. Some other scholars suggest that the Rg Vedic *Munisukta* 10.136, as a reliable source of the origin of asceticism in India. Asceticism originated in India as an 'individual

phenomenon' and it consists of "a complex of a number of traits viz. celibacy, austerity, concentration and ecstasy." There are references to *muni*, *yogi*, *sannyasi*, *kesin*, etc., in the Vedas. *Vratyas* (wandering almsmen) in the Vedas could be the prototype of *sannyasa* of the later years.

3. *Sannyasa* in the Upanishad

A *sanyasin* or a monk is expected to reach perfection and total detachment in life. Austere life style has been the hallmark of *sannyasa*. This will enable the seeker to develop detachment to actions and result of actions. During the time of the major Upanishads (700-550 B C) renunciation (*tyaga*) became the focus of the Upanishadic search for the knowledge about Brahman. Seventeen out of the 108 Upanishads deal with the concept *sannyasa* in terms like *bhiksu* (one who lives on alms), *sannyasin* (one who has completely renounced the world), *parivrajaka* (one who wanders around without a home), *avadhuta* and *paramahansa*.

4. Asceticism in Buddhism

Bhikkhus, *Samanas*, *Yatis*, *Sannyasins* and *brahmanas* are the terms used in the Buddha and Jaina tradition for ascetics. For attaining the supreme goal, *Nibbana* 'family men go from home to homelessness.' The wandering almsmen (*bhikkhu*) of the early times of Buddhism started living in primitive settlements which were called *avasa* or *arama*. There is a reference to a wandering Ascetic Potthapada with a following of three thousand wandering ascetics in the *Potthapadasutta* of *Dighanikaya* (No.IX.406 p.125). Buddha, to a question by King Ajathasattu of Magadha, on the merit of being a *sramana* or *brahmana* said, "When he has thus become a *samana*, he practises self-restraint in accordance with the fundamental precepts. He attains mindfulness and clearness of comprehension (*Samannaphala Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya*. No. 193).

5. *Sannyasa* in the Hindu Literature

Family life, according to the *Dharmasastras* is the highest form of life. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* explains the four stages of life as eternally determined based on the three Vedas. Kautilya allows a man beyond the age of copulation after distributing the wealth he acquired among his sons and wife to become an ascetic (AS II. 30-31). According to *Vaikhanasadharmaprasna* Brahmins alone were allowed to become *sannyasi*, however Manu extended it to the twice born.

Vyasa in the *Mahabharata* refers to *varnasramadharma* in Ch. XIII. In the *Uma-Maheshwarasamvada* Siva tells Uma the characteristics of a *vanaprastha*, ‘yogic postures and penances, rituals and vows, shaving of the head, yellow robes, and adherence to the path of good’ (*Mbha* XIII. 141). Meditation is the highest power of yogins. Bhagavad Gita does not specifically speak about *sannyasa* as a state of life. Gita does not agree with various methods of self-torture as a means of liberation because they are demoniac practices.

In the **Ramayana** hermits, *munis* and *risis* through austere practices acquired yogic powers like intuition (Ram VII.9.19), seeing things in the faraway places (Ram I.84) sage Gautama, getting divine eye, ability to see past present and future, (Ram I.3.4.6.7) (Valmiki). *Virasana* was a common posture adopted for meditation (VII.10.4). **Manu** was of the opinion that one should enter *sannyasa* when one’s hair turned grey and that too having passed through the three stages or *ashramas* in their respective order (Manu VI.2, 33). Only a *brahmana* is entitled to enter the fourth *ashrama* i.e., *sannyasa*. A *sannyasi* is allowed to possess only three things i.e., a seven knotted bamboo stick, a gourd full of water, and an antelope’s skin. **Patanjali** systematized the science of yoga in eight steps based on ethical values, physical or mental discipline, and control of senses leading to concentration, meditation and finally *samadhi*. Yoga’s focus is on spiritual enlightenment and experience of

supreme bliss. *Tapas* is one of the means of knowing Brahman (*Br. Up.* IV.4.22).

Ramana Maharshi's message to Paul Brunton reveals the essence of *sannyasa* in Indian tradition, "The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds happiness which does not come to an end... know first that 'I' and then you shall know the truth. To know all except the knower is but ignorance."¹

6. Consecrated Life in India

Most of the Christian religious congregations both men and women, follow western model of religious life which is rather alien to Indian masses. Our life style, dress code and imposing institutional structures alienate the ordinary people from us. It is indeed a very encouraging sign that many of the religious congregations realizing these limitations are reinterpreting their constitutions and adapting themselves to Indian context. There are a number of consecrated people and ashrams following the Indian Christian *Sannyasa* tradition in India today.

Consecrated life as a form of ascetical life is the participation of the 'communion of life' in the church as a means to perfection following the example of Jesus who 'humbled himself, becoming obedient to death' to do the will of the Father. Throughout the history of consecrated life in the Church, the eremitical and coenobitical aspects were always present but in varying proportions. Voluntary celibacy was a clear sign of a person's being committed to an eremitical or a coenobitical way of life.

7. Origin of Monasticism in the Church

Antony of Egypt, a solitary monk (c 251-356), Athanassius, bishop and ascetic (c 295-373) and Pachomius, founder of organized monastic communities (292-346) were shining examples of ascetic life in the early centuries of Christianity. Basil the Great (c.330-79) the founder of Eastern Monasticism, provided the basis for the Rule still followed by religious in the

Eastern Church. This Rule is called Asceticon, and consists of questions asked by devout persons and answers given by Basil on monastic life during his travels. Monasticism in the west is inspired by St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.550). Monastic life is a search of God in the Church through the practise of charity, humility and hope experiencing the guidance of the spirit in prayer and self- sacrifice. Basil in his letters elaborately dealt with monastic life in solitude which became a source of inspiration for Benedict in his book, *Rule of Benedict*.²

8. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), reading the signs of the time responded by placing religious life outside the monastic mould. His attempt was how to further the Kingdom of God and assist in the mission of the Church in the world. The Council of Trent (1545-63) spoke of religious life as superior to marriage. The documents of Vatican II insist on the universal call to holiness. The *Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, call for a return to the sources or Christian life and to the original inspiration and an adjustment to the changed conditions of today.

9. The Desert Fathers living in solitude and prayer with total dependence on God play a vital role in the ‘wilderness spirituality’ in the Church. Consecrated life in the Church is a call into the wilderness and total dependence on God. The vast majority of the consecrated people live in the world actively involved in the struggles and problems of the people. But there is a small minority of consecrated people who follow the spirit of the desert, hermit, and wilderness traditions.

Swami Abhiksiktananda speaks bout *sannyasa* as the most precious treasure of Indian spiritual tradition from which the Christians in India learn a lot. Vatican Council II exhorted the members of the Church to “acknowledge, preserve and promote whatever good things, spiritual and moral as well as the socio-cultural values found among them’ (NA no 2). *Perfectae Caritatis* encouraged Christians in different countries to

integrate the ascetic and cultural aspects into Christian religious life.

10. Need for Integration

There was a felt need in the Indian Church to integrate the ideals of Indian *sannyasa* into the consecrated life in the Church. This desire of the church was clearly articulated in the national seminar on Church in India in 1969. During the inaugural address of the All India Seminar on Church in India Today, Cardinal Pignedoli, the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples stressed the need for Indian Christian *sannyasa*. We live among the Hindu Buddhist *sannyasa* tradition where the monks are respected as the embodiment of wisdom and detachment.

In 1950 Swami Parama-arupi Ananda and Abhikshiktananda started Saccidananda Ashram in Santivana, Trichy which encouraged others to start Christian ashrams in India. Abhikshiktananda was of the opinion that *sannyasa* and monasticism are the meeting point of the Church in India and the Indian religions. *Sannyasa* reveals the greatness and depth of India's spiritual heritage through men who renounced everything in search of God experience. He felt that *sannyasa* would be the appropriate starting point of inculturation and adaptation in India. The Women's section of the Catholic Religious of India in their annual meeting in Bangalore in 1976, advised its members in India to integrate the positive elements from *sannyasa*.

11. Insights from Sannyasa for Consecrated Life in India

a. Renunciation

Renunciation is the core of *sannyasa* in the Indian tradition. According to Ramana Maharshi, renunciation is not discarding the external things, but of ego. A *sannyasi* may experience equanimity of heart; dualities of life will not disturb his equilibrium any more. Jesus wanted his disciples to renounce everything and follow him. Our religious dress more than being a symbol of simplicity and renunciation functions as a sign of separation and superiority. Ordinary people feel distanced from the consecrated people.

b. Relevance of Religious Vows

Chastity enables a person to remain pure in mind and body, vow of obedience helps a person to completely empty one's ego and poverty increases the complete dependence on God. Whatever happens, a *sannyasi* is happy always. In Hinduism *brahmacharya* is the highest spiritual value, it is walking with *brahman*. Both in Hinduism and Christianity *brahmacharya* is union with god and love of humans.

c. Austere Life Style

Severe ascetical practices of unimaginable intensity have been associated with *sannyasa* in India. *Sannyasis* endure extreme ascetical practices in order to progress in spiritual life. "In summer let him expose himself to the heat of five fires, during the rainy season live under the open sky, and in winter be dressed in wet clothes, thus gradually increasing the rigour of his austerities" (Manu VI.23).

d. Meditation

Meditation is the foundation on which a *sannyasi* builds his spiritual life. Manu says, "By deep meditation let him recognise the subtle nature of the supreme Soul, and its presence in all organisms, both the highest and the lowest" (*Manu* VI.65). Through meditation one can attain indescribable benefits, VI.73.

Vatican II in its decree on the relationship with non-Christian religions, acknowledged the contemplative aspect of Hinduism, ascetical practices and deep meditation and loving trusting flight towards God (NA no. 2).

e. Role of a Guru

Guru is the one who dispels the darkness in the mind of the disciple. In the Indian tradition guru is equated with Brahman, one who has realized Brahman. He is an enlightened person like Buddha. An enlightened guru will practise whatever he/she teaches. We in the consecrated life need enlightened gurus who are capable of guiding others to God. A genuine teacher will easily know the inner life of the disciple and guide him/her accordingly.

Indian *sannyasa* is a great tradition which still continues to exercise tremendous influence on the life and values of the people in India. In spite of all the limitations, as Abhikshiktananda says, *sannyasa* is the appropriate partner to reinvent and reinvigorate consecrated life in India.

12. Conclusion

Consecrated life in India will undergo unprecedented changes in the future; already the process is going on. The economic prosperity in the country, influence of secular ideologies, availability of enormous opportunities outside for better life, absence of inspiring models in the religious life, reluctance of religious congregations to read the signs of time and translate them into practical life, unwillingness of young people to go through rigorous and austere life, intolerance towards being challenged, lack of credibility and will for formators to care-front those who are in formation are some of the factors that will impact consecrated life in the coming years. As a result houses that are built on solid foundation will survive and others will face turbulent times. In this struggle for survival some of the congregations and individuals will compromise with the core values which will be equally disastrous in the long run.

Alternate models of consecrated life will emerge. Indian *sannyasa* is a great tradition which still continues to exercise tremendous influence on the life and values of the people of India. In spite of all the limitations, as Abhikshiktananda says, *sannyasa* is the appropriate partner to reinvent and reinvigorate consecrated life in India.

Let me conclude with the words of Abhikshiktananda, a genuine seeker from Europe who integrated the Christian monastic ideals and Indian *sannyasa* in the right spirit, “By assuming this central institution of religious in India (sannyasa), purifying and transforming and in a way transubstantiating it, the church will realize the most important step towards the integration of India’s spiritual riches as a whole.”³ 🌸

“By assuming this central institution of religious in India, purifying and transforming and in a way transubstantiating it, the church will realize the most important step towards the integration of India’s spiritual riches as a whole.”

¹ Brunton, Paul. 1935. *A Search in Secret India*,. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., p. 146.

² See Benedict, and Carolinne White. 2008. *The rule of Benedict*. London; New York: Penguin.

³ Abhikshiktananda. “Christian sannyasis” *Clergy Monthly Supplement*. IV (1958) p. 107.



Religious Fundamentalism: A Challenge To Peace

Jose Thayil, SJ

Rector, Papal Seminary, Pune 411014

What Is Religious Fundamentalism?

Religious fundamentalists see themselves as the champions and faithful guardians of the ancient truths and moral commandments which constitute the essence of their particular faith. In other words, they claim to be the true exponents of the religious tradition they represent. Fundamentalism, while appealing to the past, is actually a new and modern religious phenomenon, and one that does not faithfully represent the faith in the way it claims to. It is new because it is a reaction to the advent of the modern secular world, and this is something which none of the great religious traditions had to encounter before. That is why the term “fundamentalism” is less than 100 years old.

Far from being the loyal defence of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism or Islam, fundamentalism is a religious aberration. For the fundamentalist Jew, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has been replaced by the Torah. For the fundamentalist Christian, God has been replaced by the Bible. For the fundamentalist Hindu, God has been replaced by the Vedas. For the fundamentalist Muslim, Allah has been replaced by the Qur'an. Their respective Holy Scripture has become the object of their faith – their God. This was not so in the pre-modern world.

So fundamentalism may be described as a modern religious disease, for it distorts genuine religious faith in the same way as cancer distorts and misdirects the natural capacity of body cells to grow. Instead of bringing spiritual freedom and the realisation of a spiritual goal, as all sound religions should, fundamentalism imprisons people into such a rigid system of belief that they find it difficult to free themselves. Fundamentalism takes possession of human minds and blinds them to the realities which most others accept as self-evident. Fundamentalism fosters a closed mind, restricts the sight to tunnel vision, hinders mental and spiritual growth, and prevents people from becoming the mature, balanced, self-critical persons they have the potential to become.

Deceptive Appeal to Scripture

The fact that fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon is not at all obvious at first, simply because it makes its claim on the basis of something which has long been central to the religious tradition in question: the appeal to Holy Scripture. This claim, by its very subtlety, often deceives even non-fundamentalists. They sometimes feel themselves at a disadvantage, for the fundamentalists appear to claim a high moral ground. They are able to claim support for their case from the very words found in the Torah, the Bible, the Vedas or the Qur'an. Hindu fundamentalists quote their scripture to justify the killing of anyone who kills a cow or eats beef. They believe that they have the duty to do moral policing by forcing people to close dance bars, stopping of Valentine's day celebrations, free movement of boys and girls in parks and public places, and forcing boys and girls found together in public places on Valentine's Day to go to the nearest temple and get married, etc.

What is novel about fundamentalism is not the honouring of Holy Scripture, but the way in which it is done. Fundamentalists treat Holy Scripture as the starting point of their faith tradition when in fact it is the product: it gathered its authority only after the tradition had started. This is especially so with Judaism,

Christianity and Hinduism, which existed long before they had Holy Scriptures. It is rather less so with Islam. But Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam each evolved out of an initially fluid faith tradition, in which there was still much freedom for creative change and development. As each produced its Holy Scripture, there certainly was a tendency for that creative spirit to diminish and for the living faith tradition to become frozen into a static and lifeless form. This was overcome, however, by devising a variety of methods of interpretation to accommodate the text to the changing circumstances in which people lived.

Up to the advent of the modern world, Jews, Christians, Hindus and Muslims certainly gave their respective Scriptures all due respect and honour – but they were not fundamentalists, even though there was the potential to become so. They felt free to interpret their scriptures in the light of new knowledge and fresh experience. Moreover, they were reading and interpreting their Scriptures in a cultural and religious context which, while not the same as that in which they were written, was at least in reasonable harmony with it.

A New World View

Till the advent of the modern world it was relatively easy for Jews, Christians, Hindus and Muslims to acknowledge the words of their respective Scriptures to be self-evidently true, as well as being divinely revealed. This is no longer the case. The advent of modern culture, with its accompanying knowledge explosion, has changed all that. The task of interpreting the Holy Scriptures in a way which is relevant to the changing cultural context and self-evidently true began to reach breaking point from the 19th century onwards. It was this that led to the modern religious aberration of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists reject much of the modern worldview and insist, somewhat blindly, on remaining within a world view consistent with their particular Holy Scriptures.

What all fundamentalists have in common is not a set of specific beliefs but an attitude of mind. It is the conviction that they possess the knowledge of absolute truth of which they have become the divinely ordained guardians. This conviction then gives them a feeling of extreme confidence and of inner power in relation to all who differ from them. They become crusaders, bent on defending and spreading the truth as they see it. Fundamentalism breeds intolerance for it makes people absolutely sure they know the mind and will of God on any subject which particularly concerns them. Fundamentalists see no value in tolerance because they regard tolerance as a form of moral weakness, an unjustifiable compromise with falsehood and evil. Intolerance, in turn, quickly leads to fanaticism. Fanatics are unreceptive to reasoning and will stop at nothing to achieve their ends, passionately believing them to be not their own ends but God's.

Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam have their histories which show how, at their best, they have accommodated themselves to changing circumstances. Each was a living, evolving tradition. Each can proudly point to its saints and stalwarts in the past – but these were not fundamentalists. By contrast, today's fundamentalists stifle religious creativity and deny their faith and the opportunity to continue on its evolving path as it responds to the challenges of newly emerging knowledge. Fundamentalists tend to have a static view of reality: they have not come to terms with the ever-changing and evolving character of culture, religion and life itself.

In the ancient world, people believed in many gods. So the founding Jewish, Christian and Islamic prophets were iconoclasts. They destroyed the idols or tangible things which people put their trust in. This iconoclasm stemmed from the second of the Jewish Ten Commandments: "You shall not make for yourself any graven image, or any likeness of anything which is in heaven, or earth or under the earth, you shall not bow down to it or serve it." When one gives unconditional worship to any visible, tangible thing, even though it is Holy

Scripture, it is this commandment which is disobeyed. Human mind is a real factory for the creation of idols. Fundamentalism is the modern phenomenon by which people, perhaps afraid of the uncertainties of the future, and certainly distrustful of the modern world, have raised their Holy Scripture into a tangible idol. They are doing what Aaron did by forging the golden calf when they were afraid. Moses was leading them to a disastrous unknown future and they longed to return to the fleshpots of Egypt.

The term
“fundamentalist” was
coined by a Baptist
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Origin of Religious Fundamentalism

The term ‘Fundamentalism’ derives from a series of 12 booklets titled *The Fundamentals*, which were published in America between 1909 and 1915. The booklets were intended to counter the spread of liberal religious thought in the churches of America, which the publishers believed to be undermining the eternal Christian truths – “the fundamentals”. The booklets reaffirmed what the writers took to be the fundamental and unchangeable doctrines of Christianity: the infallibility of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, historical reality of miracles, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, etc. However, they were chiefly concerned to condemn the new biblical criticism and the Darwinian theory of evolution, both of which had emerged in the 19th century. What received more publicity than the booklets was the infamous American trial in 1925 when a school teacher, John Scopes, was tried and convicted for teaching biological evolution in a Tennessee school.

The term “fundamentalist” was coined by a Baptist journalist in 1920. He thought the word “conservative” to be too weak. Thus, having started as the name of a Christian phenomenon in

America, the term “fundamentalist” began to spread throughout the world. Today we speak of Jewish fundamentalists, Islamic fundamentalists and Hindu fundamentalists.

The reason for this is that fundamentalists are rejecting what is common knowledge, based on scientific evidence.

According to *Wikipedia*, fundamentalism as a movement arose in the United States among conservative Presbyterian theologians in the late 19th century and soon spread to the Baptists and other denominations around 1910-20. The term “fundamentalist” is

used to describe those who invoke religion to indulge in acts of extremism and violence against followers of other faiths, and even against followers of their own faith. These fundamentalists demand strict adherence to certain aspects of their faiths or holy books, selected by them, in order to impose their worldview on the societies they live in.

Fundamentalism is characterised by profound dissatisfaction about the state of society and a strong preoccupation with fundamental religious beliefs. The extremity of action may be attributed to their unyielding belief that they are fighting a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil which justify their actions as claims of their divine authority.

Religious fundamentalism has generally five features, the first of which is *reactivity*, i.e. hostility to the secular modern world. From this basic feature follow four others: *dualism*, the tendency to evaluate in starkly binary terms, as good or bad: *authority*, the willingness to believe and obey the sacred book of their religion

The fundamental message of all faiths is the same: universal peace, brotherhood, compassion, tolerance, etc. Adhering to the fundamentals of one's own faith and practicing them is the key to combat fundamentalism.

and/or its leaders: *selectivity*, the choice from the sacred book of certain beliefs and practices in preference to others: and *millennialism*, the belief that God will triumph in the end and establish his kingdom on earth.

The fact that fundamentalism was not a short-lived reaction but, on the contrary, has continued to spread and is now manifesting itself in a wide variety of forms throughout the world, shows that fundamentalism is a powerful force which has deep roots. Fundamentalism is not one movement but a collection of movements like Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and so on. Fundamentalists often find themselves bitterly opposed to one another. But they do have one common enemy and it is that which leads us to the heart of all religious fundamentalism. It believes that the modern secular and humanistic world is the enemy of religion and hence harmful to humankind.

Scholars of inter-faith dialogue are unanimous in their opinion that the fundamental message of all faiths is the same: universal peace, brotherhood, compassion, tolerance, etc. Adhering to the fundamentals of one's own faith and practicing them is the key to combat fundamentalism. 🌸

[To be continued in the next issue]



I Desire Mercy, Not Sacrifice (Hos 6,6)

Henry Pattarumadathil S.J.
Biblicum, Rome

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”. This solemn declaration of Yahweh revealing his will (Hos 6,6) seems to be one of Jesus' favourite passages from the Old Testament. Jesus directly quotes it twice in the gospel of Matthew (Matt 9,13; 12,7).¹ There are five other verses in Hosea where the prophet speaks about God's desire for mercy (*hesed*) more than anything else from his people (Hos 2,19; 4,1; 6,4; 10,12; 12,6)². In this article we meditatively go through these prophetic verses aspiring to deepen our understanding of this divine desire and its implication for our lives.

Hosea and his Prophetic Ministry

Hosea carried out his prophetic ministry in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. According to the description given in the first verse of the book of Hosea, the prophet began his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE). There is no scholarly consensus regarding the date and duration of Hosea's ministry.³ However, as some scholars suggest the prophet must have appeared on the scene towards the end of Jeroboam's rule, and continued his mission until 722, one or two years before the fall of Samaria. Chapters 14 and 15 of the second book of Kings

give us some idea about the political and religious situation of Israel during this period.

Israel seems to have enjoyed political and economic stability during the reign of Jeroboam II, primarily because there was no threat from any foreign powers during that time. Both Egyptian and Assyrian powers were dormant and they did not launch many military invasions. For the rich of Israel, this was a period of unprecedented prosperity. They lived in the lap of luxury. However, the poor had a miserable existence. Exploited and ill-treated, they had to beg for the 'mercy' of the rich even for their survival. The prophet Amos who also ministered in Israel during this period vehemently condemned the oppressive system that existed there that “trampled the head of the poor into the dust” (Amos 2,7). The affluence also led them to arrogance and apostasy. They abandoned Yahweh and went after Baal indulging in fertility cult and idolatry.

Israel lost its economic and political stability especially after the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III as the emperor of Assyria (743). After Jeroboam II, Israel was ruled by six kings till it was conquered by Assyria in 721 BCE. Five of them met with a violent death. It is marked as a period of conspiracy, deceit, treachery and political intrigue. Israel's acts of moral turpitude continued even when all these political calamities befell them.

Hosea charged the people with their infidelity to Yahweh and their unjust treatment of the poor. Referring to the kindness that Yahweh had been showing them since the moment of their election as Yahweh's people, he exhorted them to be faithful to Yahweh and merciful to their brothers and sisters. The following verses draw attention to God's call for mercy in the book of Hosea.

1. God's Promise of Mercy to Unfaithful Israel (2: 19)

“And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in mercy, and in compassion”.⁴

The book of Hosea is unique in its content and message. The first three chapters of the book are presented in autobiographical form recounting the relationship of the prophet with his wife Gomer.

The prophet, obeying the command of God, marries Gomer, a prostitute, and lavishes love and affection on her. But she, playing the harlot, abandons him and goes after other men. The prophet strives to recover her, and finally succeeds in bringing her back. In the rest of the book God's relationship with Israel is portrayed by drawing an analogy with the prophet's life with Gomer. Like Gomer, Israel is an unfaithful wife. She forgets her Lord, God, who brought her out of Egypt and liberated her from the chains of slavery. But God does not forsake her, he sets out to redeem her. The present verse (2,19) announces God's salvific project for Israel: "And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in mercy and in compassion". God does not say that he is going to forgive her or accept her, rather he is going to betroth her to him for ever!

Israel's relationship with Yahweh is founded on the covenant that he has made with her. That covenantal relationship is restated here using the imagery of a marriage contract ("I will betroth you"). The relationship that God wants with Israel is not merely legal, but very personal and intimate, like the one between husband and wife. Now the betrothal that God is going to remake with his promiscuous bride is eternal ("I will betroth you to me for ever"), that means, even if Israel abandons her Lord, he will never cast her off (see Isa 54,10; Jer 31,35-37).

The prophet further shows four characteristics of God's betrothal to Israel: "I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, mercy, and in compassion". This is God's gift to his spouse. God will redeem Israel from her fallen status, and bless her land and people with righteousness, justice, mercy and compassion. Or in other words, "once Israel's relationship with Yahweh is re-established, then the nation will be characterised

by these qualities rather than by those deriving from idolatrous syncretism”.⁵

The prophet reveals here the nature of God's love and mercy. In fact, Israel does not deserve any sympathy from God. The story of her life, since the time of her election, has been a story of infidelity. Nevertheless, every time she strays, God pursues her and finds her. As the Psalmist sings, he forgives all her iniquity and heals all her diseases; he redeems her from the pit and crowns her again with mercy and compassion (Ps 103,3-4). That is God, he cannot be otherwise!

2. God's Case against Israel (Hos 4: 1)

“Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no truth or kindness or knowledge of God in the land.”

After presenting the story of the prophet and his unfaithful wife, the author turns to narrate the relationship between God and Israel in the second section of the book (chs. 4–14). This section begins with a call to the people of Israel to listen to God's case against them. The three qualities mentioned here – truth, kindness and knowledge of God – beautifully summarize what God expects from his people.

The Hebrew word *emeth* which is translated as truth can also mean “fidelity, honesty, constancy, trustworthiness in thought, word, and deed”.⁶ The nouns. kindness (*hesed*) and truth (*emeth*) as human qualities appear together four times in Proverbs (Prov 3,3; 14,22; 16,6; 20,28). These verses show how important are these qualities for a human person to live a meaningful life in this world. The sage of Prov 3,3 advises the believer, “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart”. Absence of truth in a person's life can be seen as a clear sign of lack of dignity and moral integrity in his/her life. In fact, absence of mercy is a natural consequence of such a state of being. If a person loses his sense of dignity and moral integrity how can he be kind towards

others! It is also impossible for such a person to know God. Reference to the non-existence of these qualities in Israel shows that the country and its people had lost its worth in every sense - personal, social and religious.

The moral anarchy that reigned in the land is described in the subsequent verses: it has become a place of swearing, deception, murder, stealing, adultery, violence and bloodshed. Such uncurbed immoral living of the people severely affects the environment too: "Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air; and even the fish of the sea are perishing" (Hos 4,2-3).

3. Mercy Not Sacrifice (Hos 6: 4,6)

"What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your mercy is like a morning cloud, and like the dew which goes away early" (Hos 6,4). "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6,6).

In these two verses from chapter 6, God expresses his disappointment with Israel (Ephraim) and Judah at their neglect of mercy. His questions, ("What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?... O Judah?) sound like that of a father who seems to be frustrated by his wayward children. Their disregard for mercy puts him in a difficult position. On the one hand they are his beloved children, but on the other hand he cannot tolerate their mercilessness. In fact, the struggle of the compassionate heart of God can be traced in these questions (see Hos 11,8ff). By likening their mercy to morning cloud and dew, the prophet exposes the superficiality of their mercy. If they have it at all, it is fleeting kindness, no one profits from it!

Hos 6,6 clearly states God's uncompromising stance regarding sacrifice and mercy. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings". God cannot be pleased by multiplying sacrifices. What he wants from his people is kindness. Even when they accumulated wickedness

Israel tried many a time to delight God with their offerings. The prophets vigorously attacked such cultic hypocrisy. “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5,21-24; see also Isa 1,12-17; Mic 6,6-8). Hosea describes God's disgust at their shallow offerings in 8,13: “They love sacrifice; they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but the Lord has no delight in them. Now he will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt.” He rebukes the priests who encourage people to offer such 'sinful sacrifices': “They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity”(Hos 4,8).

This declaration of God in Hos 6,6 reaffirms that mercy and knowledge of God are inextricably related (see 4,1). Without being merciful towards one's brothers and sisters one cannot know God. We can hear an echo of this prophetic teaching in 1 John 4,20, “If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

4. Sow Righteousness, Gather in Mercy (10,12)

“Sow for yourselves righteousness, gather in mercy⁷; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes to rain righteousness on you.”

In this exhortative oracle the prophet asks the people to make themselves worthy to seek the Lord. The three imperatives (sow, reap, till/break up), all related to husbandry, refer to the conversion that people have to undergo in their life. Though these imperatives are given independently, they are mutually related. Using the logic of farming we may put the last imperative first.⁸ To seek the Lord, Israel has to break up her

fallow ground, sow for herself righteousness and then gather in mercy.

It is significant that mercy is presented here as the fruit of the harvest. This shows that mercy is not merely a virtue like any other virtue in life, but it is the fruit, the end result of the whole process. In other words, 'gathering mercy' or being merciful is the true purpose of one's life. The people of Israel can not reap mercy by being idle allowing tares and thorns to continue growing. They have to make a decision, they have to till the ground and prepare it, and sow proper seeds and nurture the crop.

By exhorting the Israelites to sow righteousness and to gather mercy, the prophet presents righteousness as an intrinsic characteristic of mercy. It is the seed of righteousness that sprouts, develops and yields the fruit of mercy.

By exhorting the Israelites to sow righteousness and to gather mercy, the prophet presents righteousness as an intrinsic characteristic of mercy. It is the seed of righteousness that sprouts, develops and yields the fruit of mercy. It is such a mercy that is the essential prerequisite for seeking the Lord. And finally the Lord himself will rain 'righteousness' on those who seek him with a merciful life.

5. Return to Your God, Keep Mercy and Justice (Hos 12,6)

“Therefore, return to your God, keep mercy and justice, and wait for your God continually.”⁹

Having denounced the different kinds of sins of Israel, the prophet urges the people to return (*shub*) to their God whom they have abandoned (Hos 12,6)¹⁰. How can they return to their God? The prophet does not ask them to perform any offering or

sacrifice, nor does he suggest any penitential deed for the atonement of their sins, but he only exhorts them to keep mercy and justice¹¹ and wait for their God. Thus Hosea once again places mercy and justice as the most important qualities that God wants his people to possess. This implies that only by building a proper relationship with their brothers and sisters, treating them with mercy and justice can they turn to God.

The next imperative, “wait for your God continually” points to their relationship with God. They need to put an absolute trust in their God in all circumstances, and to believe that their God will be their safety and security (see Isa 40,31; Mic 7,7). The prayer of the psalmist in Ps 25,5.21 reflects such a faithful living and waiting: “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long”; “May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you”.

Conclusion

“The Name of God is Mercy” is the title of the new book of Pope Francis. The book of Hosea beautifully shows how apt is this appellation for God. It narrates the story of a God who is actively engaged in bringing his people back to him. Though through their infidelity and wickedness they abandoned him, he, like a compassionate husband and an affectionate mother (see Hos 11,1-11), forgives their iniquities, heals their infidelities. He sees people's infidelity and waywardness as the result of their lack of mercy and sets out to redeem them. We hear a prophetic cry in this book to be 'merciful as this merciful God', to share in his mercy as a sign of fidelity, and to extend this mercy as an expression of faith. Mercy, that is what God expects from his people! There is no sacrifice more acceptable than that! 🌿

¹ The only other passage cited by Jesus more than once in the gospel is Lev 19,18 (Matt 5,43; 19,19; 22,39). This text (Lev 19,18) which exhorts the Israelite to love his neighbour as himself is also very closely connected with the motif of mercy.

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- ² The Hebrew word *hesed* which we translate here as 'mercy' can also mean 'loyalty', 'steadfast love', 'goodness' etc. However, it is often translated as *eleos* (mercy or kindness) in the LXX.
- ³ See C.L. Seow, "Book of Hosea", in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York 1996) 3:291-292; D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31, Dallas 2002) 10, for different proposals regarding the time span of Hosea's prophetic ministry.
- ⁴ In the Hebrew and the Greek texts this verse comes as verse 21. This is because the translations, for thematic reasons, give the first two verses of the second chapter of the Hebrew and the Greek texts as the last two verses of the first chapter.
- ⁵ A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* (Edinburgh 1997) 83.
- ⁶ W.R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical commentary on Amos and Hosea* (New York 1905) 249.
- ⁷ The LXX uses the word *zoē* (life) here for the Hebrew *hesed*. We follow the Hebrew text and translate it as 'mercy' as in other places.
- ⁸ See the next verse: "You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruits of lies" (Hos 10,13; see also Hos 8,7)
- ⁹ As an introduction to this teaching the prophet reminds the people of their long history of rebellion against God (see Hos 12,2-6).
- ¹⁰ Hos 12,7, in the Hebrew text.
- ¹¹ The Hebrew word used here is *mishpat*. It can mean justice, good judgement, righteous decision etc.



Light Beyond Death: Luis Bermejo, S.J. (1929 – 2016)

Theodore Bowling
De Nobili College, Pune 411014

Fr. Luis Bermejo was born on 23rd March, 1929. He grew up in San Sebastian, Spain, and studied there in a school run by the Marianists. For his University studies he enrolled in Deusto University – Bilbao. During the first year, the students were taken as per custom, to the Castle of Loyola for a retreat. It was there that he experienced the call of God. So far he had never thought of becoming a Jesuit. But God has His own ways of touching a person. On the fifth day of the retreat, he went into the refectory for lunch. The reading at table was about the missions and listening to the heroic work of the missionaries he was irrevocably touched. The Luis who came out of the refectory that afternoon was a different man.

In September, 1947 he joined the novitiate and 4 years later was sent on a mission to India. First, however, he had to go to Kandy, Sri Lanka, to study philosophy for 3 years and theology for 1 year. Then when the Kandy Seminary was shifted to Pune in 1955, he came along with the crowd of other students. The staff of the Papal Athanaeum (now Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth) became aware of Fr. Bermejo's intellectual acumen and so invited him to become a professor of theology. After his ordination on 24th march, 1957, and final year of theology, he did his tertianship in Kodaikanal. After this he did his post-

graduate studies for one year at St. Mary's College, Kurseong, and one year in Rome at the Gregorian University which conferred on him his doctorate. Thus he started teaching systematic theology at JDV in 1961 and continued doing so for the next 30 years. He was also the Dean of Studies from 1965 to 1971 in Poona. About his teaching the present Bishop of Poona, Thomas Dabre, wrote: "He was my professor and I was proud to be his student. He was clear and pointed in his teaching. His theological books indicate that his theology was world class". Fr. Francis Parmar, Provincial of Gujarat wrote. "I am a witness to his popularity as a teacher and thinker. He was not afraid to perform his duties as a theologian, namely, to make the Church think and understand itself in newer ways."

What kind of person was Fr. Bermejo? He had a passion for truth, therefore his curiosity both about mundane things as well as theological questions was boundless. He was always asking questions. He was very fond of Church History to find out the Truth. In one of his early books, the questions he raised must have raised some ecclesiastical eyebrows with the result that the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome asked him to stop teaching. He obeyed.

The decision to remove Father Bermejo from the staff of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth in Pune was conveyed to Vidyapeeth in August 1987. The mass-circulated news magazine *Illustrated Weekly of India* said that Father Bermejo was "summarily debarred" and was denied an opportunity to be heard. The magazine ran a four-page article, which said the "verdict amounts to a reversal of the policies of Vatican II." This charge was denied by Vatican spokesperson.

He was then summoned to Rome by the then Fr. General to continue his research and writing there. The fruit of his writing over his life time was 19 or 20 books. Bishop emeritus of Pune, Vally D'Souza, wrote: "I am immensely indebted to Fr. Bermejo for my spiritual and theological growth through his books."

Fr. Bermejo was a scholar and therefore a loner so that he could read, think, and write. He was not afraid to criticize opinions of others or situations which he perceived as weak or down right wrong. Sometimes, however, his own criticism of theological opinions could be and were itself be called into question.

Being a loner did not imply being aloof. He had warm friendships with a number of the staff members who comforted him when he was obliged to stop teaching. In his spiritual life he was not attracted to a Rosary or Litany devotion, but never missed a daily mass unless he was sick. He always made his own annual retreat even if he had given a retreat of 30 days to others in the same year. In fact, throughout his whole life he gave about 60 thirty day retreats.

Around 2002 Fr. Bermejo longed to come back to India from Rome. He wrote to the Rector of De Nobili about his desire to settle down there. Fr. Rector wrote back “Come”. And so he was back here for 13 more years giving retreats or writing books until he felt that he could no longer write effectively. He was happy here and the students enjoyed his presence.

During the course of last year he began to lose his short term memory. More recently he appeared to be confused on occasions. His appetite declined. However his death in the early hours of 30th January was still unexpected. Fr. George Pattery (POSA) wrote: “He died as he lived”. Though he was alone in his room at the moment of his death he was really ‘Alone with God Alone’ – the title of one of his books. The staff and students made his funeral mass beautiful and meaningful. 🌹



Homily Notes

March 6· 2016: Fourth Sunday of Lent

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12/ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21/ Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

God the Liberator

The story of the Prodigal Son in today's gospel is narrated in response to the Scribes and Pharisees who brought charges against Jesus saying that a man of God cannot be with the sinners and tax collectors. The leaders of the time were short-sighted according to Jesus. They were meticulous about the inherited and added laws. Their hearts were filled with self-righteous attitude and condemning nature. They were particular in their vertical relation but their horizontal relation was often overlooked. St John would rightly address this kind of people when he said, those who say they love God but hates their brother or sister is a liar (cf. 1Jn 4:20).

Through this parable, Jesus shows the way of God to us. We sometimes are very particular about the observances while our own neighbours are side-lined. God's ways are very different from human categories. The first reading of today is also a liberation story of how God liberated the people of Israel from the bondage of slavery. God provided them food to eat in their helplessness. This was continued till people themselves found a way to cultivate and live by themselves. This does not mean that God gave up journeying. He continued!

Jesus came to give us a new identity as God's own children. This is a free gift for all those who believe in him. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. God made the sinless a victim so that we might be saved through Him as we hear in the second reading of today. We are partakers in this great economy of salvation! God does not look at our failures rather God is interested in us. The father in the parable of the gospel does not ask how his son squandered with his wealth, instead, he rejoices at his return. The parable presents two brothers one went astray and the other remained with the father. Through his obedience the younger son was reconciled. Similarly the sinless Christ bore our iniquities so that we might all be reconciled with the Father. Amen. **-Dn. Vekupa Rhakho George**

March 13, 2016: Fifth Sunday of Lent

Is 43:16-21, Phil 3:8-14, Jn 8:1-11

The Merciful Face of Jesus

The liturgy of the word invites us to see the merciful face of Jesus. There are many people in our society who are always ready to help others like a Good Samaritan. There are also many institutions to look after the handicapped, orphans and the widows. While talking to these people one of them said that the God is merciful and He strengthens others to show mercy to the sick and the weak.

In our worldly life due to greed we fall into temptations, and we go astray from God. Sometimes we lose everything that we have. In this pathetic situation God looks upon us with his mercy. He feels empathy for us and he forgives us. He embraces us. In this line if we have to show mercy towards others then we need to have the heart of Jesus in us.

The first reading tells us that the God is merciful and He doesn't remember our iniquities. Today's word of God strengthens the blind, deaf, weak, hopeless and frustrated. It tells that God is merciful and whatever happened in the past, He is not going to remember them. Through the prophet Isaiah, God is going to give hope to the people

through a new miracle. And this miracle would illumine the life of all people.

St Paul narrates his past life in the second reading. He tells that he had suffered a lot in the past life. His encounter with the risen Christ had changed everything in his life. He says, "I want to know Christ... has made me his own". Hence St Paul exhorts the Philippians to go on with Christ who is merciful and forgives our past.

One who lives in truth
and honesty is crucified.
People need the merciful
face of Jesus to face their
hardships of their life and
not anything else.

All the gospels project Jesus' merciful face. He says, "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart". In today's gospel, Jesus forgives the woman who was caught in adultery completely. She might have thought that what's the use of living! But merciful Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again." Jesus sends her home with a new hope. He sends her to her own family, to her own people to live a new life with dignity. Thus that woman sees the merciful face of Jesus and experiences abundant love.

Today there are many people who are standing on the tip of their toe to judge others like the Pharisees and the Scribes. One who lives in truth and honesty is crucified. People need the merciful face of Jesus to face their hardships of their life and not anything else. Thus the liturgy of the word invites us and challenges us to go out and meet people in our neighborhood, sick, elderly, poor and orphans. We need to visit them and listen to them. This way, we can become 'light' to one person or one house a day.

-Dn. Vikas Jason Mathias

March 20, 2016 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion Sunday

Readings: Lk 19:28-40, Isa 50: 4-7, Phil 2: 8-9

Glory of the Suffering Servant

The readings today depict the plight of the one who prefers to do good to those around him, in spite the difficulties involved. First readings depicts to us the suffering servant of the Lord, who does not hide his face from insult and shame. Suffering means that a person is working towards something. No suffering would welcome a person who does nothing. But the uniqueness of the suffering servant of Yahweh is that is would not hide. If any person tries to hit an animal or even another human being, it contracts towards protecting itself. Therefore, not hiding his face from danger would mean perfect sacrifice and complete denial of self. To achieve a divine purpose, he does not mind being scorned and ridiculed. Further, in the second reading of today, St. Paul depicts Jesus who is obedient unto death. Jesus is exalted through suffering. He is the kind by being a servant. He wins death by dying. He is victorious by being obedient. He is exalted as king not on the throne but on the cross

We must realize also that the glory and fame are as fleeting as the majestic welcome of Jesus. The readings today, welcome us to reflect as to whether we are ready to face difficulties for those whom we say we love. Can we really be the disciples of Jesus not as a king but as a Suffering Servant?

On the other hand, we see Jesus's triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. People welcome him as they would welcome a King. They are stuck up with the idea of the Kingly Messiah while Jesus enters as a sacrificial lamb to be sacrificed symbolizing the Suffering Messiah who is the person depicted in the first reading. Not long from now, in

the readings of Good Friday, do we see the same people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, shouting to crucify Him. The kings those days, used two animals, horse and donkey. Horse symbolizes pride and majesty, whereas donkey symbolizes meekness and humility. Therefore it is through suffering and humility that we bring peace into the lives of those who are around us. We must realize also that the glory and fame are as fleeting as the majestic welcome of Jesus. The readings today, welcome us to reflect as to whether we are ready to face difficulties for those whom we say we love. Can we really be the disciples of Jesus not as a king but as a Suffering Servant?

-Bro. M. Bhanu

March 27, 2016: Easter Sunday

Acts 10: 34a, 37-43/ 1 Corinthians 5: 6b-8/ John 20:1-9

A New Identity

Every year we celebrate the feast Easter, but how good has this done to us as Christians? The same story is discussed and narrated year after year for the last two thousand years but it has never ceased to touch us. The same Christ who live two thousand years ago like any human is the same Christ present amidst us right here in this very place. The empty tomb that we read from the gospel in a way reminds us of our temporality here on this earth. Paul a staunch Jew making every attempt to destroy the followers of Christ would finally say in his letter to the Philippians 3:10; I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. This is the power of his resurrection! In fact, Jesus himself said in Jn 10:10 that he came to give us life, life in abundance. The resurrection is not just a story in the life of Jesus but our own story because anyone who follows Christ will also be raised up on the last day!

In the first reading, we see a different Peter after having encountered the resurrected Lord. In spite of his blunders and imperfections, he persistently followed Jesus. Any human would have abandoned Jesus if they were to be addressed; get behind me Satan! (cf. Mk 8:33).

Peter probably felt hurt but did not give up. In all his limitations he even said; to whom can we go Lord? You have the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68). The power of resurrection made Peter to cross the boundary drawn by the Jews from the gentiles. Peter at the instruction of the Lord without any fear went down to Cornelius, a gentile. He addressed the whole household and also the relatives about Jesus whom he initially denied!

The second reading of today invites us to abandon the old self and put on the new self because Christ through His death has defeated the evil one. He has given us a new identity and reconciled us back to the Father. -Dn. Vekupa Rhakho George

April 3, 2016: Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:12-16; Rv 1:9-19; Jn 20:19-31

Divine Mercy Sunday

An elderly pastor looks over his large congregation on Easter morning and startles them with this announcement: “My friends, realizing that I will not see many of you until next Easter, may I take this opportunity to wish all of you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!” The difference in the size of the congregation on Easter Sunday and on the other Sundays of the year is very noticeable. Many of our Christians, as far as church attendance is concerned, have indeed become Holy Week Christians: you see them in church only during the Holy Week. Like the man who was criticizing his pastor. “I have attended this church for three years,” he says, “and each time the homily is always on the same topic. Doesn’t he have something else to talk about?” Yes, this man has been attending the church for three years alright; but he only attends on Easter Sunday and he always hears a homily on the resurrection of Christ.

Why are many well-meaning Christians so uncommitted to attending regular, Sunday church services? The answer can be given in one word: doubt or crisis of faith. People today, like people of all times, do have a hunger for God. They are in search for the meaning of life.

But they doubt whether the answer to these existential questions can be found within the four walls of the church. For this reason they are more disposed to spend time in social action, in work, and in intellectual pursuit rather than in church worship. Today's gospel gives us an example of a man who felt exactly like that. His name is Thomas.

“In the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead, the first day of the week, ... the disciples had met ... Jesus came and stood among them (John 20:19).” The disciples gathered together on Sunday, the first day of the week. Since the disciples were Jews they would attend

synagogue services on the Sabbath (Saturday) and on Sunday they would assemble together as believers in Christ. Since they are gathered together in his name, Jesus would appear to them as he had earlier promised them: **“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”** (Matthew 18:20). In this way Sunday became known as the day of the Lord, the day Christ comes to meet and strengthen his people, the special day of Christian worship. So, in fact, today's gospel is describing the first Christian Sunday worship following the resurrection of the Lord. The services were usually held in the evening.

So all the disciples are gathered for Sunday service and what do we notice. Thomas is not there. Where is Thomas? You can see that Thomas is like one of these modern-day Christians who do not go to church regularly on Sundays. Such people are not there in church when Jesus comes to meet his people and to strengthen them in their faith. As a result, they remain with their doubts. Initially all the disciples had their doubts. But because of their encounter with the risen Lord in Sunday worship their doubt was turned into faith. Thomas missed that experience.

The answer to our religious questions and doubts is not out there. The answer is right in here. When you are in doubt, think of doubting Thomas and learn from his own experiences. Come and you will see.

But, being a wise man, Thomas resolves never again to miss the Sunday gathering of believers. The gospel reading continues, “**A week later** [i.e. the following Sunday] **his disciples were again in the house, and** [this time around] **Thomas was with them** [and as usual] **Jesus came and stood among them** (John 20:26). This time Thomas has his own share of the resurrection experience. Immediately his doubt changes into faith and he falls down and worships, saying, “**My Lord and my God!**” (v. 28). Now ask yourself, What if Thomas had stayed away from church saying, “Prove it! Prove it to me that Jesus is risen and then I will come,” would it be possible to prove it to him by arguments alone? Sometimes the best argument you can give to someone out there who is in doubt and does not believe is a sentence in three words: “Come and see.”

Come in and let the risen Lord who is here with us in Sunday worship, the Lord who is here in his word and in the Eucharist, let him, himself, speak to you and touch your heart and then you will doubt no longer but believe. The answer to our religious questions and doubts is not out there. The answer is right in here. When you are in doubt, think of doubting Thomas and learn from his own experiences. Come and you will see. - **Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp**

April 10, 2016: Third Sunday of Easter

Acts: 5:27-32, 40b-41, Rev: 5:11-14 John: 21:1-19

He Never Abandons Us

Through the centuries, Christians have seen in the Emmaus Story the theme of Jesus being present to us and walking with us in the times of our deepest trials and disappointments.

In the Emmaus Story we see the two disciples returning to their home village with heavy hearts.

Jesus, who had radically changed their lives, giving them new energy and meaning, was no longer with them.

They had followed Jesus thinking that he would be their source of everlasting joy and peace.

They had seen his extraordinary powers to heal the sick, to give life to the dead, etc. Yet he did nothing to save himself. It was confusing. The way he was tortured, killed, this disturbed them.

All their hopes and aspirations had come to an end, empty, without a future.

They decided to quit this once wonderful dream that Jesus was the Messiah, and even give up.

“I did not abandon you, the single footprints you see are not yours but mine. I am carrying you.” Jesus never abandons us, even in our confusion, doubts and sin.

As the story progresses, a stranger comes along and joins them. Jesus fitted right in with the two men, keeping walk with their movements and feelings. Jesus had become one with us in all ways except sin. He had felt the whole range of human feelings. It was not difficult for him to fit in.

Jesus first just listened to the two men at length so as to become thoroughly one with them. Jesus patiently listens to us as we go on and on speaking of our problems.

There is a note of impatience in Jesus’ first reply: “What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced.”

God, however, has long been patient with his confused and taken aback human family.

Jesus, therefore, began with Moses and proceeded thru the two major parts of the Hebrew Bible and showed them “how the Messiah had to experience all this so as to enter into his glory.” So dear friends in Christ the story of footprints in the sand goes like this,

There were two, then one when times got difficult. “Lord, why did you abandon me when things get bad?”

I did not abandon you, the single footprints you see are not yours but mine. I am carrying you. Jesus never abandons us, even in our confusion, doubts and sin.

-Dn. Vincent Nathan

April 17, 2016: Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 13: 14, 43-52, Jn 10:27-30

Personal Relationship

There was a constant faith crisis among the Jews with regard to the coming of messiah and the identity of Jesus. The demand for a public answer to the question about whether Jesus is “Messiah” or not brings us back to the disputes of John in chapter from 7-8. In John 7:4 we see that Jesus refused his brothers’ demand to do signs in Jerusalem that would show his messianic status publically. In John 7:13 people would not speak publicly about Jesus for fear of the Jews. But Jesus has told the Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah and the blind man that he is the Son of Man. Through today’s reading Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God. He says Father and I are one. Previous verses he explains that the sheep hear his voice and he knows them. So the people those who believed in Jesus accepted him as messiah and the son of God. As Christians we should not have the problem of identity of Jesus. When Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice” it is implied that as Christians we are all the sheep of Jesus. And we expected to listen to Jesus and his teachings. It is not merely enough to listen and understand the word of God. But as Christians believed to be the true disciples of Jesus should follow him as the sheep hear the voice of the shepherd and follow him.

Today, many homilies are given on this passage. Many examples are made out of this passage. It is being quoted in many speeches. But in the bargain we fail to listen to the inner meaning of the passage where every one of us are expected to imitate and follow Jesus as the sheep do. Secondly, the passage which is to be noted is that Jesus says, "I know them". Knowing has a deeper meaning in life. Knowing is to accept someone with his/her weaknesses, failures, inabilities and so on. God accepts us with all our

limitations and expect us to accept the other as he/she is. Knowing is to have deeper relationship, more kind of personal relationship. Jesus tells that he knows each and every one of us personally. He encourages us and expects us to have personal relationship with him and to have personal relationship with our neighbours as the Good Samaritan did.

Hence, as Christians we are expected to have a deeper personal relationship with God and through that personal relationship we are expected to hear the voice of God in our life and to live the way God expects us to live and to stand out as the sons/daughters of God becoming one with Him. **-Dn. Edwin Raj C**

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April 24, 2016: Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:21-27; Revelation 21:1-5; John 13:31-33, 34-35

Lokpal Bill and Love-pal Bill

Anna Hazare claimed that the proposed Lokpal Bill would be the solution to the corruption in the Government administration. But corruption has been only one of the many evils exists in the society. There are hundreds of other evils like sexual exploitation, poverty, oppression of poor, child labour, exploitation of the nature and many more. Anna Hazare and all other revolutionaries are silent in the face of these evils. But in today's Gospel, Jesus proposes a new rule that can remove all the evils in the society. We may call it Love-pal Bill. In today's Gospel passage Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment that you love one another." Loving one another just as Jesus loved us is the only solution for the evils spread in this society.

New Earth and Heaven: Jesus, through today's second reading promises 'a new heaven and new earth.' It is because as the reading continues, 'God has pitched his tent among us.' God

had earlier pitched his tent among the Israelites out of his love for the chosen people. The tent was the symbol of God's love, care and protection. This love of God became personified in the person of Jesus who was the tent of God in New Testament. For Jesus, love was the basis of every word he spoke and motivation behind every action he performed. When Jesus healed the leper and lame, they all experienced a new earth. When Jesus multiplied bread for the five thousand, the people experienced new heaven...The foundation for this new earth and new heaven is nothing but love. Jesus asks

The foundation for this new earth and new heaven is nothing but love. Jesus asks disciples to love one another just as he loved them. Because, only love can change the people.

disciples to love one another just as he loved them. Because, only love can change the people.

No law but love: No law could prevent the tax collector from exploiting the people, but the loving words from Jesus changed the tax collectors like Matthew and Zachaeus. The harsh law with death penalty could not prevent sexual immorality in the society, but the loving gesture of Jesus could convert the woman caught in adultery. No law by Moses prevented people from abandoning their parents in their old age (Mt 15:1-7) but love of Jesus could. And no Sabbath law could heal the crippled man but the love of Jesus. It was love of Jesus that changed the good thief on the cross, not the death penalty that he had received.

Love Revolution: Making this love as the ‘rule of our life’ is what we call the ‘Love-pal’ Bill. This is the love Revolution. Today’s world needs a revolution. Result of revolution is not the modification of existing structures, but all together new structures. That is what Jesus calls new heaven and new earth. Each of our acts must be motivated by this love. St. Paul beautifully says that, “let all that you do be done in love” (I Cor 16:14). This love must be the binding force in our families. All the words we speak and all the thoughts that arise in our mind too must be out of love, because St. Paul says “If there is no love we are nothing but noisy gongs” (I Cor 13). But if there is love, then people will know that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ.

-Dn. Vikas Jason Mathias



Book Reviews

A. Adapur S.J. *Ernest Turned Anos: Ernst Hanxleden: Linguist Par Excellence*, ATC Publications, Bengaluru, 2015. pp.172, ₹ 199. ISBN: 978817086-742-5.

Ernst Hanxleden (1681-1732), famously known today as Arnos Paathiri, a prodigiously talented young German Jesuit landed in Kerala at the dawn of the 18th century, mastered the difficult languages Malayalam and Sanskrit within a short span of time and excelled in them.

He composed top quality grammars and dictionaries which became the centre of much scholarly attention three centuries back. His poetic works, written tihti the same time-frame, are still being read or changed in thousands of households during the Holy Week, commemorating the passion, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ.

Ernst turned Arnos, written by the eminent literary critic, is the first ever attempt to bring out a complete biography of Hanxleden in English focusing on his unique position in cultural history as the linguist par excellence.

The book carries a foreward by C. Radhakrishnan, a renowned writer and film director and inspires the value of scholarship and committed work.

This thoroughly researched book is an asset for anyone interested in the academic study of linguistics in Indian language and for specialists in Malayalam.

Joseph Kavalakkatt VC. *Social Impact of Community Polytechnics in the Training of Youth*. Samaj Darshan Publications, Pune, 2015, pp. 228+12, ₹ 250.

This book is based on the author's doctoral thesis on "Social Impact of Community Polytechnics in the Training of Youth: A Study in Delhi Slum's," completed under the guidance of Prof AS Kohli, Department of Social Work, Jamia Milia Islamia.

There are 17 polytechnics and 10 community polytechnics in Delhi, which the author explores. Slum youth make use of the facilities for vocational training programmes provided in these community polytechnics. Because of the community polytechnics programmes the slum youth get ample opportunities for getting into various skills, finds the author. This factor has improved the life situation of the slum people. Their economic, social and educational growth has been impacted by these programmes.

The research was conducted by the author in 2008 with the objective of studying the general profile of youth undergoing vocational training programmes. The work aims to evaluate critically the vocational training programmes, offered in the community polytechnics, in the context of urban needs, to assess the response and participation of the slum youth. It studies the social impact of community polytechnic training programmes for the slum youth in Delhi and suggests suitable vocational training programmes to take care of the needs of the slum youth of Delhi.

This book is highly recommended for social workers and educational experts who are involved in uplifting the poor.

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“Every giant leap for mankind resulting from a technological advance requires a commensurate step in the opposite direction – a counterweight to ground us in humanity.” - Alex Morritt