



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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Editorial

Five Years of Pope Francis

“Hagan lio,” Pope Francis told a crowd of millions at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, “Make some noise,” and there is no question that this pontificate has done just that, notes *America: The Jesuit Review*.

Jorge Bergoglio’s own experiences have molded him to be “an outspoken pope of the poor, the marginalized and the victims of a throwaway culture. He has bluntly rejected the wealth and trappings of his office, and the simple gestures that have accompanied this conviction will be the enduring symbols of his pontificate.” Francis has intensified his predecessor Benedict XVI’s strong condemnations of war, an unfettered market and growing economic disparity; he has also offered a blunt but welcome prophetic voice to the world.

In five years, Francis has produced three landmark documents. First came his apostolic exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*,” 2013), in which he sketched out his vision of a church whose strengths and resources should “be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (No. 27). It was followed soon after by “*Laudato Si*” (2015). While widely received as a call for environmental protections and a critique of consumerism, the encyclical is also one of the most important social justice encyclicals in history. “Everything is related,” Pope Francis wrote. We cannot affirm the rights of humanity while denying the dignity of our environmental home; we cannot abort or euthanize or marginalize unwanted humans as if they were trash; and we cannot

trash the planet in the pursuit of wealth or ease or misbegotten notions of freedom, notes America.

More controversial was Francis' post-synodal exhortation on the family, "The Joy of Love" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 2016). That exhortation, which looked at a broad range of topics related to human love, also opened up the possibility for those who are divorced and remarried to return to the sacraments under certain conditions. That pastoral concession has drawn the loudest cries: affirmations from many living and ministering in difficult pastoral situations and vigorous criticism from those who charge that the pope is contradicting the doctrine of the church.

Pope Francis wowed the world but, five years on, is in troubled waters, writes *The Guardian*. It sums up: "He entered office on a wave of energy but, as discontent grows over his attitude to abuse scandals, Francis faces opposition on all sides."

This litany of lights and shadows speaks to a larger matter: the personal goal that Francis seems to have set for his papacy. His critics are certainly right about one thing: He does indeed seek "to change the church," in its orientation to the contemporary world. The church is "not a catalogue of prohibitions" to be enforced, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, nor is it an elite club for the saved. As Pope Francis said before the conclave in which he was elected, the church must go out of itself to proclaim fully the invitation to join in Christ's mission of salvation and redemption. Five years into this ground-breaking papacy, there is much more noise to be made.

We are happy to bring out two volumes to celebrate five years of Pope's joyful and challenging presence. The first one, "Pope Francis: Hi Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society," brings together 27 Indian thinkers to reflect on the Pope's message. The second one, "Francis Effect" includes 51 authors reflecting on Pope Francis' 51 insights. This Indian contribution contains appreciative messages from the Apostolic Nuncio and all the four cardinals and about 20 bishops.

The Editor

Call to Evangelise

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"Evangelizing, proclaiming Jesus, gives us joy. In contrast, egoism makes us bitter, sad and depresses us. Evangelizing uplifts us." – Pope Francis

Evangelization is a mandate received directly from Jesus as he exhorted "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit..." (Mat. 28:19). The Second Vatican Council affirmed this, declaring that the Church is "missionary by her very nature." This proclamation or evangelization gives us real joy. This uplifts us with personal and spiritual renewal, witnessing to others, and the transformation of society and culture, service to the poor and marginalized, and engagement in politics. The evangelization puts forward three basic questions:

What to Evangelize?

To evangelize is nothing but to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the good news of his Incarnation, life, Passion, death and Resurrection. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI says: "Thus it has been possible to define evangelization in terms of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him, of preaching, of catechetics, of conferring Baptism and the other sacraments." This goes hand-in-hand with the element of transmission of the Christian Faith which consists primarily in proclaiming

Jesus Christ in order to lead others to faith in him. From the beginning, the first disciples burned with the desire to proclaim Christ: ‘We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’ (1Jn 1:1-4). Thus, the proclamation of the Gospel finds joy in having a singular goal namely, to introduce people to the Person of Jesus Christ.

Who to Evangelize?

The responsibility of evangelization does not fall on only the consecrated persons. But the entire Church is called to evangelize, for the Church is “by her nature missionary since, according to the

Far from being a dreaded burden, evangelization should come from everyone as a desire for all to be saved, love for Christ and the recognition of the dignity and value of every person.

plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 33). As the Father sent the Son and the Son sent the Spirit, so, the Triune God sends the Church to “make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love” (CCC 850). This is a participation in the prophetic mission that each Catholic receives at baptism. It takes place in the ordinary activities and circumstances of life like at home, in the work place, at school, and everywhere. Far from being a dreaded burden, evangelization should come from everyone as a desire for all to be saved, love for Christ and the recognition of the dignity and value of every person.

How to Evangelize?

The third question recalls the words of St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel always; if necessary, use words”. Pope

Paul VI mentions that “this question of ‘how to evangelize’ is permanently relevant, because the methods of evangelizing vary according to the different circumstances of time, place and culture” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 40). An essential form of evangelization is witness in both words and deeds. As St John Paul II noted in *Redemptoris Missio* (No 42:1), “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and actions than in theories.” In addition, other means of evangelization include preaching (both within and outside of liturgical celebrations), which Paul VI says is “an important and very adaptable instrument of evangelization” (*EN* 43), catechesis, and mass media.

Ultimately, there must be a recognition that evangelization is a great responsibility that bears great rewards. “Woe to me,” St Paul lamented, “if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). “Faith is strengthened,” St John Paul II exclaimed, “when it is given to others” (*Redemptoris Missio* 2.3). We who have been given much by Jesus Christ are asked, in turn, to give the good news to others. Evangelization, thus, entails real joy and inner happiness. Evangelisation cannot be pursued by the persons who are obsessed with self and egoistic in tendency. Egoism cannot find a place in the process of evangelisation. Because, egoism makes us bitter, sad, and depresses us. Can we completely be relieved of egoistic tendency?

Transforming the Selfish Human Nature

Egoism is part and parcel of human nature. Anybody who is involved in the ministry of evangelisation is also infected with this human tendency. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), an English gentleman, philosopher, eccentric and social reformer holds that human is naturally selfish. According to