



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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Asian Journal for Religious Studies

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Editorial

A Message of Peace

Pope Francis celebrated a historic Catholic mass in the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, February 5, 2019 is part of a landmark trip that saw the first-ever papal visit to the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam.

UAE officials say that Francis's public mass in the capital city of Abu Dhabi drew about 4,000 Muslims and about 135,000 people total – many of them Catholic migrants from places such as the Philippines and South America. They're part of a large migrant community in the oil-rich country that works building gleaming new towers or as domestic help, often under harsh or discriminatory conditions.

Pope Francis, who has been under pressure over priest sexual-abuse scandals in the Catholic Church, delivered a message of humility and faith to the crowds that came to hear his mass (delivered in Italian and translated to Arabic and English) or to cheer on the pontiff as he made the rounds in his Popemobile, writes Jen Kirby in Vox

“Let us look at how Jesus lived: poor in respect to things, but wealthy in love; he healed so many lives, but did not spare his own,” Pope Francis said in his homily. “He came to serve and not to be served; he taught us that greatness is not found in having but rather in giving.”

Pope Francis's visit and his mass were a remarkable and very public show of Catholic faith in a region that is not particularly known for religious tolerance.

The UAE is more tolerant of different religions than some of its neighbors in the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia. Though the UAE's constitution establishes Islam as the country's official religion, it also "guarantees freedom of worship as long as it does not conflict with public policy or morals," according to a 2017 State Department report. Christian churches as well as Hindu and Sikh temples operate on land donated by the ruling family, the State Department report notes.

But the country is still far from a bastion of religious freedom. There are strict laws against proselytizing by non-Muslims; blasphemy and converting from Islam are strictly prohibited and those who do so face harsh punishments, potentially including the death penalty. Anti-Semitic literature and sentiment is prevalent, particularly on social media, and discrimination against followers of the minority Shi'a sect of Islam is not unheard of.

The UAE has dedicated this year to "tolerance," promoting openness to people and cultures from around the world. (There's even a Minister of Tolerance.) Pope Francis's visit seemed to fit squarely with this campaign, as well as within the pontiff's own outreach to the Muslim world.

Pope Francis spoke out against conflict in the region, including the war in Yemen, which is supported by UAE.. On Monday, in front of an audience of Emirati and other religious leaders, Pope Francis signed a statement on "human fraternity," promoting peace among nations, races, and religions, with the religious leaders of Islam.

In his remarks, the pontiff condemned violence, saying, "War cannot create anything but misery; weapons bring nothing but death." Can we not learn this lesson for India and promote peace and harmony between all religions?

At AJRS, we are delighted to welcome **Rev Fr Arturo Sosa SJ**, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, to Pune on March 5 2019. The next issue will cover his memorable visit.

The Editor



Foolish Bridesmaid or Wise Bridesmaid?

James B Dhabhi SJ

Prof. Biblical Studies, GVD, Gujarat

A parable constitutes a genre, which means a literary form. To communicate a complex concept, the parable is employed. Jesus intends to elucidate the concept of Kingdom of God. Kingdom of human king is expressed in terms of space and time. Had the Kingdom of God been on par with the kingdom of human king, Jesus would have utilized the same parameters. When the concept transcends the realm of human experience, it compels one to have recourse to the parable. The parables do not depict historical reports, though the parables are constructed based on mundane matters of life, concrete conventions of society, and routine rituals of community. Therefore, the hearer/reader could associate herself/himself conveniently with one of the characters portrayed in the parable and, while pronouncing verdict on that character, she/he condones or condemns the self unknowingly or knowingly. In the process, the concept is comprehended and the befitting comportment of the hearer/reader is ascertained. In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus offers the parable of the ten bridesmaids. Since Matthew 25:1-13 is the parable, the reader must refrain researching answers to historical questions such as who was marrying, to whom was he marrying, when was the marriage, where was the marriage, who were

the bridesmaids. The reader may intelligently inquire about the social custom of welcoming the bridegroom in the Israelite Society at the time of Jesus. Jesus may have had relied on the prevailing ceremony of welcoming the bridegroom.¹

The Context

As a child, I witnessed the prolonged program of welcoming the bridegroom and his wedding guests of my Catholic Society in Central Gujarat of India. The bridegroom, along with his wedding guests, arrived after sunset. The date and day of his arrival were prearranged, but not the time. His arrival to the village was announced by bursting a cracker. The family members and relatives of the bride waited and remained ready to hear that bursting any time after the sunset on that appointed day. The bridegroom was escorted by a few elders of the bride's party to a common plot of the locality, from where he would be ushered into the bride's home eventually. Then, playing music, singing, and dancing, the bride's party brought bride's mother from bride's home to welcome the bridegroom. Her mother carried a burning lamp on plater along with other symbolic materials. She came to that spot, where the bridegroom was, and invited him to the bride's home. Only the bride did not participate in the welcome ceremony of the bridegroom. She remained indoors. The mother of the bride was the welcoming personage.

In Israelite Culture, ten bridesmaids constituted the welcoming personages.² Jesus has identified Himself, on occasions, with bridegroom. For example, in responding to the query made by the disciples of John the Baptist apropos of fasting, Jesus equated His disciples with the wedding guests and Himself with the bridegroom (see Matthew 9:14-15). In the parable of wedding banquet, Jesus is the son for whom

the king gives the wedding banquet (see Matthew 22:1-14). In the parable of ten bridesmaids, Jesus is the bridegroom. According to the appraisal done by Jesus, fifty percent of welcoming bridesmaids forfeited their privilege par excellence of ushering the bridegroom on account of their nil preparedness or ill preparedness. The bride is not mentioned at all in this parable. Therefore, it can be easily inferred that Jesus intends His audience to identify themselves with bridesmaids and to evaluate themselves as ill prepared or well prepared to usher Jesus into the wedding banquet, where the bride may be waiting.

My Interpretation

I interpret this parable in this way. The bridegroom is Jesus. The bride in absentia represents those human beings who do not know Jesus as yet. The bridegroom aspires to go to this bride. Jesus longs to embrace every single human being living on this planet. Jesus desires to be proposed to each individual. With this motive, Jesus iterated the mission command at the culmination of His life on earth, "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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20a). The bridesmaids are the baptized Christians, half of whom are ill prepared for this assignment (foolish) and half of whom are well prepared (wise). Where do I stand? Let me examine myself.

I need to become cognizant of the crucial role that I am assigned in God's Project, namely, to introduce Jesus to those who do not know Him. There are hoards of people around me, who have not even heard the name of Jesus. If the bridesmaid does not bring the bridegroom to the wedding

banquet, the bride may remain waiting the rest of her life. I cannot afford to be ignorant of my expected contribution in spreading the Kingdom of God.

I have my lamp burning that indicates that I am on my mission. However, being foolish, I have not taken oil in a flask that evinces that I lack perseverance in my task. I become impatient. I want to bear witness to Jesus in front of others on my terms. When I have leisure, I want to be with my neighbors who do not know Jesus. I am reluctant to be with them, when they need me. When I have found time, my neighbors are occupied. Hence, I have a handy excuse to slumber. The opportunities come on my way to accompany my neighbors. However, these opportunities cost me my comfort. The best opportunities are when someone feels lonely and isolated, when someone is old and infirm, when someone faces tragedy and calamity, when someone is taken to the police station and prison, when someone is victimized and dying. In such circumstances, do I have oil of self-sacrifice and service-mindedness to be by the side of my suffering neighbor? In the unique parable of Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus demonstrates that the Priest and the Levite had the lamps, but no oil. They could not spare time for the helpless wounded wayfarer. Good Samaritan, too, was on his business, but he had the oil of compassion. He put his own business on hold and prioritized the life of this almost-dead stranger. In my conversation with one Catholic Priest, I was informed that he has donated his kidney to an unknown laborer. While browsing through his Face book, that priest came across an appeal for kidney transplantation. His lamp was burning. He had the oil of self-sacrifice, too. I have observed Scholastics and Seminarians enthusiastically donating blood either in the Blood Donation Drive or

for the neighborhood hospitalized patients. All these make me assess myself that I am ill prepared to introduce Jesus to my neighbors.

As the adage, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words,” exhorts, I have to live like Jesus amidst my neighbors to introduce Jesus to them. I have to forgive them when they hurt me, I have to bring reconciliation when they litigate, I have to share in their joys when they celebrate, I have to participate in their sorrows when they mourn, I have to confront them when they violate human rights, I have to dialogue with them when I am with them. Even if I had been foolish bridesmaid hitherto, I have potency to be transformed into wise bridesmaid henceforth.

Conclusion

The parable concludes with the foolish bridesmaids being deprived of the honor of welcoming bridegroom. Such a tragic end is intended to induce the urgency in me, had I been an ill-prepared usher of Jesus. Coming to those who do not know Him is the decision of Jesus. Becoming the harbinger of Jesus to them is my mission. My neighbor may be well disposed to receive Jesus at God’s appointed time. Meanwhile, I need to communicate Jesus to my neighbor continuously and constantly through my works and, if need be, words. Silence speaks louder than sentences. Life speaks louder than lectures. May the Lord make us the wise bridesmaids with our lamps burning (works) and our flasks (lives) replenished with oil (virtues)!

Notes

- 1 Harrington expounds engagement and marriage. Israelites of Jesus' time understood marriage more in terms of a civil contract than as a religious ritual. Engagement was taken very seriously and acknowledged to have legal consequences (see Deuteronomy 20:7; 22:23-27). The engagement seems to have been arranged through elders in the family. In rabbinic times (i.e., first century A.D.), minimum ages were set for the male at thirteen and for the female at twelve. Apart from the forbidden degrees of kinship (see Leviticus 18), it was customary to marry within tribes. The engagement took place at the home of the father of the bride, where she was to stay after the engagement. At the engagement, the bridegroom presented the bride and her father with the marriage contract and the so-called bride-price. One or several years might separate the engagement from the marriage. The marriage consisted in the transfer of the bride from her father's home to that of the bridegroom's home or that of his father. See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series, Volume 1, edited by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 36-37.
- 2 According to Harrington, the scene of the parable is the bridegroom's home. Ten bridesmaids await bridegroom's return from the bride's home to which he has gone to determine and sign the marriage contract with the bride's father, and to bring the bride to his own home or that of his father. Since negotiations about the terms of the marriage contract could get involved, perhaps the bridegroom's delay should not be considered unusual. At any rate, his return after dark is assumed since all the bridesmaids took lamps along with them. At his return with his bride, the wedding feast could begin at his own home. See Harrington, 349.

In the Matthean context, this parable is comment on the relation between the Matthean community with its attitude of constant watchfulness in light of the uncertain coming of the Son of Man and their Israelite opponents with their suspicion about apocalyptic and their disinterest in talk about the Son of Man's coming. See Harrington, 351.



A Historical Perspective on Jesuits' Contribution to Astronomy: From Rachol and Beyond

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“True faith is not hostile to science, but both are like two rays coming from the same Sun which should illuminate our mind by the way of truth” (Angelo Secchi)¹

“Although the spread of the Christian faith was the most important plan of the Jesuits, their activities had a scientific dimension about them also, being the first European men of learning in India” (R. Kochhar)²

Introduction

Humans, from time immemorial have marveled at and tried to comprehend the mystery of the vast celestial cosmos. Even the cosmic elements were put in his own service such as to predict weather for cultivation purpose, for navigational needs or even to know his own relation with the cosmos. This relentless effort to unravel and understand the ‘book of nature’ over the years evolved into a scientific discipline called astronomy. The invention of telescope in 1609 by Galileo Galilei brought revolutionary changes in our understanding

of the universe. College of Rachol, the Rachol Seminary of today, St. Paul's College (Old Goa) and the island of Divar played very important role in the birth of the telescopic astronomy in India. Hence, the first use of this telescope in India is credited to Goa. Thanks to Ramesh Kapoor for bringing to light the importance of this event.³ To understand this unique contribution we will first consider Indian astronomy in antiquity. Next, we shall study Jesuit engagement with science and its first use of telescope in Goa. Following we shall try to understand the revolution it produced in India through Jesuit engagement with astronomy and close with some remarks about faith and astronomy.

1. Indian Astronomy in Antiquity

India has a rich and long tradition of astronomy. It was influenced by Greek and Arab astronomy. The mathematical, or Siddhantic astronomy came with the interaction with Greeks in post-Alexandrian period. This kind of astronomy was concerned with calculation of geocentric planetary orbits and developing algorithms for the solution of the mathematical equations that arose in the process.⁴

Another was, the Zij astronomy. This period was known for the preparation of astronomical tables which can be categorized into three: (i) "*Zij-e-Rashadi* (direct tables) based on actual observations; (ii) *Zij-e-Hisabi* (calculated tables) obtained by correcting observational tables for errors, precession, etc.; and (iii) *Zij-e-Tas'hil* (simplified tables) which were simplified versions of other tables, for example, for the moon alone." It developed in 9th century in Baghdad⁵ and made its debut in India in 14th century.⁶

There were also books on astronomy. The oldest known text is *Vedanga Jyotisha*, dated about 1400 BC.⁷ Other

treatise on astronomy were *Siddhantas* and *Karanas*. Some of the astronomical instruments were *Yasti Yantra*, *Ghatti Yantra*, and *Gola Yantra*. Some of the well-known Indian astronomers of antiquity are Aryabhata I, Latadeva (505), Varahamihira (c.505), Bhaskara I (c.574), Bharmagupta (b.598), Lalla (c.638 or c.768), Manjula or Munjala (932), Shripati (1039) and Bhaskara II (b.1114).⁸

Ancient Indian astronomy laid more stress on computational than observational aspect. There were also a few observational instruments. It was a mixture of astrology and astronomy, which was generally used to know the auspiciousness of events and their timings. However the modern science was introduced in India by the Europeans and in particular the Jesuits.

2. European Engagement: Jesuits as Men of Science

The engagement of Jesuits in scientific activities is to be understood in the historical, social and religious context.

a. Historical Factor: The maritime powers, Portugal and Spain, were on mission of discovering sea-routes, an alternate to the East. The discovery of sea route to India in 1498 started to navigate the European powers to the shores of India. As the navigational needs aroused, it spurred development in science. Beginning from 15th century, astronomy started to develop more on practical lines than pure science in Europe. The overseas expeditions had to meet navigational and geographical requirements, as a result new instruments were invented to aid the mariners and cartographers which resulted in the discovery of astronomical quadrants, sextants, telescopes and chronometers.⁹ Maps became crucial which had to be drawn based on astronomical observations.¹⁰ Therefore, observatories came to be patronized by governments.

b. Social Factor: During this period of the modern science, the Jesuit Society was born in 1534. Therefore, disciplines like mathematics and astronomy became part of Jesuit training, knowing the social demands and importance in apostolic work.¹¹ The *Constitutions* and the *Ratio Studiorum* mentions the benefit of studying the liberal arts and the natural sciences as intellectual preparation for the study of theology,¹² to teach philosophy, as apologetic argument for those seeing Church as against science, to counter superstitious practices, etc.

c. Religious Factor: Steven J. Harris explains the involvement of Jesuits in scientific endeavors as an “apostolic spirituality”. The Jesuits see scientific activities as service to God through the apostolic ministry to men and knowledge leading to the path of salvation. They hold learning in esteem, believing that it leads to sanctification.¹³ Jesuits believe “finding God in all things” therefore whether observing galaxy or drawing maps all such profane activities is form of spirituality to Jesuits. Therefore, when science was considered alien to religion, Jesuits ventured in this field to show its compatibility with science as a vehicle to find God. And observatories became their ‘parishes’¹⁴

The Jesuits who came to India were astronomers, cartographers, geographers, and architects. They engaged in science in many ways such teaching scientific disciplines, involving in public debates and carrying out astronomical observations, etc.

3. Tryst with Telescope in Goa: Birth of Telescopic Astronomy in India

The men of cloth being men of science would carry not just Gospel but also European science. In a similar fashion, a Jesuit priest from Kadan, Wenceslaus Pantaleon Kirwitzer

(ca. 1589–1626), a member of the *Collegium Romanum*, was in Goa while on his sojourn to China.¹⁵ Kirwitzer who was part of the mission destined for China was one among the group of 22 missionaries, who had set sail from Lisbon on April 1618 led by Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628) which included some priest-astronomers Giacomo Rho (1592–1638), Johannes Schreck-Terrentius (also Terrenz; 1576–1630) and Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666). They had carried with them a few telescopes, some measuring instruments, and a large number of books. They entered Goa on 4 October 1618. While this halt was made, two great comets appeared in the morning skies of November in quick succession. Since this would require joint efforts and astronomical instruments, Kirwitzer wrote to his fellow Jesuits: Fr. Jacobus Rho at Goa and Fr. Antonius Rubinus at Cochin. Hence, in Goa, the observations were done at *Collegio Rachol*, Insula Ivari (Divar) and at St. Paul College (Old Goa). Kirwitzer mentions that he made use of the telescope to observe the comets but the type of telescope used is not known. It could have been Galilean telescope with a mount or hand-held one with draw-out tubes. These Jesuits also made use of other astronomical instruments namely astrolabe and astronomical radius, i.e., cross-staff.¹⁶

The first comet was observed from 10th to 30th November. However, on certain days it was not possible due to the cloudy sky. Kirwitzer made the observation from Divar and Old Goa while Fr. Jacobus Rho observed it from Rachol and Old Goa. The second comet was seen on 24th November. On the same day it was observed by Fr. Johannes Terrentius from the fields of Rachol College. This particular comet was observed till 12th January 1619.¹⁷

What did the observers saw and measured? Namely, the altitudes and azimuths, angular distance from stars like Spica etc. in grad (degrees), and the observers' visual impressions, including difficulty from illumination due to the moon and sunlight. Later, these observations were collated and published in a monograph titled *Observationes Cometarvm Anni 1618. In India Orientali Factae a Societatis iesv Mathematicis in Sinese Regnum Nauigantibus ex Itinere eo Delatis*.¹⁸ This was published by Schönwetter in Ursellis, in the year 1620.¹⁹

These comets were also independently observed by the fourth Mughal Emperor of India Jahāngīr (1569–1627) with the use of astronomical instruments namely astrolabes, accurate water-driven clocks (clepsydras), sundials and sand-glasses.²⁰

The significance of this event is twofold: firstly, it was the first modern astronomical observation in India and secondly, the first use of optical device (telescope) for astronomical observation in India, dated November 10th 1618 – this makes Goa the birth place of telescopic observation in India and not Surat as was previously believed.²¹

This has put Goa and Rachol Seminary in particular on the world map for its scientific contribution. What is more interesting is that if Fr. Kirwitzer, a Jesuit priest from Europe came and contributed to the Indian astronomy in the past; today we have our very own Goan Jesuit priest Fr. Richard D'Souza working at the Vatican observatory and contributing at a universal level. He had stormed the headlines last year by discovering a long-lost sibling galaxy of the Milky Way.

Rachol Seminary, continues to promote science through various ways such as seminars, publications and has even

produced stalwarts in the field of science like late Fr. Antonio Francisco Souza. Fr. Victor Ferrão, former student and currently a professor in the Rachol Seminary became the first person in India to do his doctorate in the field of science and religion.

4. Astronomical Principles in Religious Architecture of Goa

As part of broader evangelization mission, Jesuits raised religious architecture. Sarvesh Sinai Borkar, a local archo-astronomy enthusiast and researcher opines that those Churches that are east-west facing, constructed between 16-17th centuries has made use of astronomical principles in their architecture in various ways. For instance, use of controlled light to illumine certain portions, on specific days of the year, at a particular time.²² This type of astronomical marvel was witnessed in the Holy Spirit Church, Margão which is a Jesuit construction. A beam of light was shining before sunset on equinox, on the image of Holy Spirit on the main altar and two other side altars.

Some of the Churches even served as practical observatories that based on the rising and setting of the sun aligned on the equinox and solstice day with the western and eastern entrance.²³ Many Churches even had astronomical instruments like sun-dial watches. Such watches are seen in Jesuit built Churches even today such as Lotoulim and Verna. Rachol Seminary which is also a Jesuit architecture has two such sun-dials one painted on the seminary courtyard and another made of stone.

The reasons for incorporating such astronomical principles probably was to show relation of human activities to

the cosmos, to maintain time, to determine the day of the equinox and for other religious purpose.

5. India as an Observatory: Involvement of Jesuits in India

As we have seen, Jesuits who came to the “mission fields” were trained in practical astronomy²⁴ and considered India as “theater for their apostolic work”.²⁵ Known for their scientific scholarship, Jesuits soon found favour with the Mughal emperors and local rulers in their courts such as Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) and king-astronomer of Ajmer, Raja Jai Singh II. By 17th cent. telescopes were available in India. Jesuits were involved in exploring the hinterland as they had expertise, time and opportunity, unlike the European traders.²⁶ Jesuits had to explore local astronomical traditions, document their methods and search sightings of historical astronomical events. Reports of all their activities and observations had to be sent to the *Padroado* authorities²⁷ which are known as *Annual Reports and Edifying Letters*, which became a mine of information for the scientist and academies of sciences.²⁸ The missionaries who provided the knowledge of Asian world was benefited by the Europeans in several ways irrespective of the Jesuit intention. The French Jesuits were involved more in astronomical observation than the Portuguese Jesuits due to their intellectual traditions and social orderings.²⁹ Many were members of the *Academia des Sciences*.

It is also to be noted that the Jesuits were constrained or could not bring to India all the advanced knowledge of science due to the certain Church ideologies it held on to.³⁰ Therefore, the knowledge of Copernican heliocentrism was not introduced.³¹ It is also said that with the exception of few like Boudier and Tieffenthaler, Jesuits in India were not so

great astronomers. Historian of science S.N. Sen states that the contribution of Jesuits in modern astronomy to China is comparatively more than India. However, Dhruv Raina, is of the opinion that these hypothesis needs revision. He says that though it was on grand scale in China, French Jesuits in India provided impetus and historical inquiry into ancient Indian astronomy. Also the efforts of Jesuits, in China and India, complemented each other.³² Dhruv, also says that, the critique that Jesuits of India were not the best scientists and were not in contact with the leading scientists of Europe comparatively to Chinese counterparts is an overstatement. The reports of French Jesuit scientist in India became a source material for the French astronomers for three generations.

I would like to highlight some of the contribution of the Jesuit priests. Fr. Anthony Monserrate (1536-1600), was a first Jesuit geographer in India. Based on his astronomical observations, he formed a partial map of India.³³ Fr. Jean-Venant Bouchet (1655-1732) surveyed the peninsula, and his interior map is considered as “the first map of any merit”, dated 1722.³⁴ Fr. Jean Richaud is credited for the first astronomical discovery from India. He discovered in 1689 the bright southern star Alpha Centauri. Fr. Claude Stanislaus Boudier (1686-1757) was a “skilled telescopic observer”³⁵ determined latitudes and longitudes of around 60 Indian cities.³⁶ Fr. Joseph Tieffenthaler (1710-1785), carried out astronomical observations in different part of India including Goa.³⁷ He observed the transit of Mercury in Goa on 4 November, 1743.³⁸

Jesuits made important contribution in the field of positional astronomy and cartography. As a result of Jesuits introduction of telescopic astronomy many observatories

came up in India, which was later institutionalized by East India Company. It also gave rise to photographic and spectroscopic astronomy attracting European solar physicist.³⁹ Based on the contribution of Jesuits India has made great progress in the field of astronomy.

6. Engagement or Estrangement: Importance of Astronomy in Religion

The Church Fathers were against astronomy for the reasons that it does not benefit one's salvation but rather limits God's omnipotence and hence the knowledge should be reserved only to God.⁴⁰ However, the Jesuit astronomers proved it to be beneficial as it gives the knowledge of God. Some Jesuit-astronomers like Christopher Clavius says astronomy leads men to God. Giovanni Battista Riccioli states it is a noble science that leads to the habitation of God while Franciscus Levera says it strengthens love of God as well as abolishes idolatry.⁴¹ Johannes Kepler concurs with similar thoughts that astronomy gives 'knowledge, admiration and worship of the omniscient God'⁴² also, exploring heavens leads man to his original mission that is *imago dei*. Philosopher Francis Bacon is of the opinion that studying the cosmos is a recovery of power and sovereignty man once possessed in the paradise.⁴³

What does the contribution of the Jesuit missionaries in astronomy suggest? That faith and science can harmoniously exist together and both can enrich each other in the understanding of God and cosmos. It is often portrayed that there is a warfare between religion and science. Infact, modern science is an invention of medieval Christianity. In his speech in Regensburg, Germany on September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI said that it was due to Christianity's emphasis on the importance of reason that science developed in

Europe, in the civilization then called as Christendom. Many of the scientists were clergymen like Georges Lemaitre, a priest-astronomer from Belgium who first proposed the “Big Bang Theory” for the origin of universe and Gregor Mendel an Augustinian monk who is considered as “father of modern genetics”. Similarly many of the towering figures of science such as Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, Tycho Brahe and others were Christians. Scholar Dinesh D’Souza in his work *What’s So Great About Christianity* poses for us a question: “Where would modern science be without these men?”⁴⁴

Church still engages and promotes science, hence we have ‘Pontifical Academy of Sciences’ and the ‘Vatican Observatory’ at Holy See, established to promote true science. Therefore, what biologist Joshua Lederberg said is true “what is incontrovertible is that a religious impulse guides our motive in sustaining scientific inquiry.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

Rachol Seminary has a distinct place for its contribution in the field of astronomy and an institution that has fostered scientific culture. It will be remembered in history as an institution that has endured exchange between Europe and India, the East and West. One cannot undermine the contribution of Jesuits in Goa and beyond who gave rise to the beginning of modern science in India. These men of cloth were not just proclaimers of the ‘book of scripture’ but unraveled the ‘book of nature’ too so that God may be known and glorified. Church, which considers ‘evangelization as its identity’ does not shun away from this scientific culture but continues to make best use of it for evangelization. Science therefore is

not just for scientists but for all of us to make use of, to know more about God and to proclaim His wonders by studying the colossal cosmos.

Notes

- 1 Agustín Udías, “Jesuit Scientific Tradition and Ignatian Spirituality,” *Lo Sguardo - Rivista di Filosofia*, vol. 10 (2012): 212-213.
- 2 R. K. Kochhar, “Secondary Tools of Empire: Jesuit Men of Science” in *Discoveries, Missionary Expansion an Asian Culture*, eds. Teotonio Souza and Gregory Naik (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1994), 175.
- 3 Ramesh Kapoor, “The First Astronomical Use of the Telescope in India,” in *Growth and Development of Astronomy and Astrophysics in India and the Asia-Pacific Region*, eds. W. Orchiston, A. Sule and M.N. Vahia, Mumbai, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 2018): 34-39.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid, 6.
- 6 Chander Mohan, *Story of Astronomy in India*, (Publisher author, 2016), 95.
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Serving the Nation as Serving the Church

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“By Blood, I’m Albanian. By Citizenship, I’m Indian. By Faith, I’m a Catholic Nun. As to My Calling, I Belong to the World. As to My Heart, I Belong Entirely to the Heart of Jesus.” - St. Mother Teresa

Introduction

‘Serving man is to serve God; Serving the Church is to serve the nation’. The preamble of the Indian constitution under Articles 25-28 denotes the objectives which secures to every citizen. They are justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Through these a human person is socially, economically and politically eligible to serve one another (Compendium of Social Doctrine 160). The social teaching of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, elucidates four similar principles: the dignity of the human person, common good, subsidiarity and finally, solidarity. Every human being is unique because he or she was formed willed by God as an unrepeatable person, created out of love, and redeemed with ever greater love. This shows us, what dignity the human person has

and how important it is to take everyone quite seriously as a person and to treat him or her with the greatest respect. The social order exists for the sake of human beings and must be guided by what a human being needs for a dignified life. The objectives of the principles of the Nation and principles of the Church are to serve the people to live dignified life. In this article I would like to reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities, while serving the nation and serving the Church.

To Serve the Nation is to Serve the Church

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 states that, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. It offers an opportunity and challenge to draw everyone into service/ministry on behalf of the Church and the Nation.

Every day we see different modes of violence: genocide, war and exile, hunger and exploitation. Children are recruited as soldiers and forced to kill. New forms of slavery like child labour are being promoted. Human trafficking, prostitution, and drugs, emergence of anti-life forces, discrimination against women, crores of rupees of business in which political parties and even government officials are involved. In such cases we must not insist on human rights only when it is a question of protecting our own: we must realize that we also have the task of defending and strengthening the fundamental rights of the people. This is the way the Church has made it her duty in all places and on every occasion to see to it that human rights are universally accepted and upheld and, above all, to respect them within the Church herself. Christian social doctrine is naturally tied to universal values that

logically precede it. The social principles are guidelines for shaping society. All values, in turn, are connected with the dignity of the human person. As a primary value this results from man's likeness to God. The Bishops of India, on lay participation made a statement, "The fact that each of us is a part of Christ's body (1 Cor 12,12-17) and it is necessary to bring about authentic communion (*Christifideles Laici* 20) to provide the foundation for such consistent service, our people need an initiation to daily contemplative prayer which alone can give us the required strength to empty ourselves and become servants as Jesus did" (Phil 2,1-11) (CBCI 1996, Trivandrum, no 3).

Prophetic Call for Transformation

The Church of India is exploited politically in various aspects while the church initiates herself in every field. All Christians do not agree that social involvement of the church which includes the possibility of social transformation, which is part of the Christian vocation. It has become a common understanding among Christians of many different traditions that the body of Christ and its members have something to contribute to matters of political and social concern. In this regard Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi Archdiocese called all Parish Priests and Religious institutions in his diocese on 8th May, 2018 to pray for the peace of our nation and the forth-coming General Elections in 2019. It became breaking news in television news channels, with reporters hovering around the cathedral and news anchors were screaming about "turbulent time", "a new government" and "fast and prayers" these words in the letter were an explosive combination in the eyes of the TV anchors. Since many of the political leaders opposing this letter, the ruling Bharatiya Janata

Party whose senior spokespersons saying this was proof of a Papal “regime change” conspiracy to eject Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi. It is a fact that such prayer letters and press statements are issued by many Bishops before local or general elections calling on people to fulfill their duty as citizen by coming out to vote, and to vote for good and honest people. In the past, the Goa Bishop’s appeal to elect honest people in fact produced a BJP government as local Catholics rejected Congressmen who were seen as corrupt. In many places in the 2014 general election, Catholic Bishops, clergy and congregations had resonated with Modi’s stirring call of good Governance and the sorely needed promise of jobs. Unemployment and underemployment are a major issue in the Christian community. An invitation for collective prayer indeed offers an opportunity for social awakening. In the short run, the TV storm kept the focus away from Tuticorin where the local people, many of them Catholics, have been protesting the expansion of the Sterlite plant owned by the UK-based corporate giant Vedanta. Many of the dead in police firing, in fact, are Catholic young men. Archbishop Oscar Romero was brutally gunned down by the brutal regime of his country *El Salvador* on 24th March 1980. The day before he was killed in his Sunday homily he called out to his government saying, “In the name of God, and in the name of his suffering people; those who have suffered so much and whose cry reach out to heaven with greater intensity each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression immediately”. So far as the Bible urges to ‘seek the welfare of the city’ (Jer 29,7), the Christians cannot but pray for the progress of the country. The present time is a great challenge for minority Christians who face the serious attacks on churches and peoples. There

were number of attacks in the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Delhi since 2015. The churches were attacked and the Holy Species were thrown down. The priest, nuns and lay faithful who gathered for peaceful protest, were pulled with brutal force and were taken to the police station.

Though the Church does not encourage party politics as well as partisan ideologies, she does not deter her children from participating in civil affairs with an intention to contribute to it. Discerning divine will from the Sacred Scriptures it has been the tradition of the Church to guide its faithful to meaningfully engage in the public life. Being a Christian does not mean to shrink into a spiritual cocoon praying for oneself, but envisages to actively participate in the social life by being the “Salt of the earth and light of the world” (Mt 5,13-14).

Theology of Mission

The missionary church exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is its goal and the church is a servant and sign of God’s kingdom in its community. She is active in calling people to faith in Jesus Christ, and equally committed to the development of a consistent Christian lifestyle appropriate to the cultures in which she operates. She engages with culture, but also presents a counter-cultural challenge as well as communities. The mission of God as creator, through Christ, in the spirit, is to bring into being, sustain and perfect the whole creation. The church is both the fruit and the agent of God’s mission. It is therefore of the essence of the Church to be a missionary community. To be very practical, the incident which happened in the life of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, our former Honorable President

of India, could be a great example. In 1960, Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, who was pioneer of space program in Kerala, was searching for a land to study for the electro jet properties of outer space. They searched the whole country. Finally, they landed in Kerala and located Thumba, Trivandrum as the right place to start the space programme. He found 200 acres of land where the life of thousands of families survived on fishing, then St. Mary's Church, Bishop's house and school in that land. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai approached all the politicians but they refused and we are helpless. At last, he approached Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira. On a Sunday when all the parishioners gathered for Holy Mass, Bishop introduced and addressed them regarding the problem of the great Scientist. He said, I pray to God, "God, forgive the sins of my people and give them peace". Likewise, the scientists pray by reasoning and give the benefits of the humanity. Both scientist and spiritualist seek happiness. Now, he wants God's abode, the church, the school and your abode. He promised us that he will give you everything new in a few months of time. Can you give my children? The people after pin drop silence for a moment, got up and said, "Amen". At that moment the Church has won, the nation also won. This is the true service that both Church and nation could do for the betterment of everyone's lives.

Mission Among the Poor and Marginalized

The church as the body of Christ is called to be in the midst, that is, a living presence of God among all of God's people. From the perspective of the marginalized however this is above all a call to a life-giving and life-transforming presence among and alongside people in struggle and in pain. The Indian situation is characterized mainly by poverty,

inequality, injustice and oppression which caused an Adivasi tribal man beaten to death in Attappady. Many people lack the necessities of life; food, clothing, shelter, hygienic conditions and even minimum education. During the massive flood and heavy rainfall in Kerala, which took hundreds of people's lives and their shelter, people from all over the country helped without considering the caste and religion to save their precious life. It was God-given opportunity to help each other, to show God's mercy towards them and serve the nation. Improving the healthcare facilities and literacy in the rural periphery of India, thereby promoting rural development is central to Christian contribution to the nation. Catholic social action is aimed at the integral development of the individual and an inclusive development of the country that doesn't deprive the poor and the marginalized. What motivates Catholic-Christians to reach out to the scum of society to serve them with love. What distinguishes the Christian -humanitarian service from all other altruistic service being done by groups other than Christians is that the force behind the former is not a thing but a person: Jesus Christ. It is the opportunity to imitate Jesus Christ our eternal Healer and Compassionate Saviour.

The Catholic Institutions

All over the country, there are thousands of medical establishments, educational institutions and charitable associations serving millions of people, particularly the poor, handicapped and the needy irrespective of gender, race, color, religion, culture, etc. Through such educational and social activities, Christian values are spread and the quality of our life of our tradition-bound society living in economic, social, cultural backwardness is improved. An ever-growing number

of Indians of all cultures and religions seek education in Church-run institutions. The educational institutions have been instrumental in spreading Christian influence and there are opportunities to the students to be honest, prayerful with faith in God, peace with disciplined, dedicated, integrated, service-minded, etc. The recent note on June 11, 2018 that the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) has instructed all catholic educational institutions in India to teach Indian constitutions in order to make the students aware of its beauty and richness.

Mission Among the Secular Nationalism

Serving the nation has to be an inclusive process involving all sections of the people. But large sections of the people have been left out while they start their service in India: the Adivasis, the Dalits and people in several of the Indian states bordering other countries. The issue related to serving the nation is the competing ideas of nationalism. The secular nationalism of our constitution represents the cultural aspects of Hindutva, the present scenario excludes sections and communities. Though a human person has the right to practice his belief by practical expression in any manner, the conversion by force is unlawful. The proclamation of the Church in the nation doesn't mean the conversion of people to the Christianity, rather it takes an opportunity of participating in the saving acts of Jesus. We have to examine closely the nature of the state that is evolving with challenges now. Under the impact of globalization, the state has abdicated many of its welfare responsibilities. We need to reconsider the theology on Church and State in the light of the transformation of the whole nation. Jesus says, "whatever you have done to the

least of these, you have done it to me. I was hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, a stranger and in prison” (Mt 25, 40-43).

Media Literacy

We live in a period where a significant number of people overtly think that our democracy is apparently supported by the fourth pillar-the media. Though there are benefits to be a part of the life of people and to become Jesus, there are lot of defects to the nation and Church by the advancement of media. In social media, many people do not consider verifying facts before forwarding a message. The advancement of media at present, using the features, that could make possible to trace even the source accounts very easily. The world of fact is that the users of social media, especially the youth are misled, influenced and forced to interpret about the Church leaders; Bishops, Priests and Religious, guided by Satan worshipers to acquire the souls into their community. It also indirectly violates them in an unsecure way by which the leaders are misidentified to do the same acts in their life. So that, personally, emotionally and behaviorally they are imbalanced while serving the nation and the Church. The so-called scandals paves way to lose the sense of sacredness of both Nation and the Church.

Political Efficacies

In our age and time being concerned for the ‘least of these’ means being active in the political processes with commitment to justice expressed through solidarity with those who struggle for justice. The Church must always emphasise the necessary and useful nature of politics while pointing out its temporal and relative character. Politics is decisive in the lives of people and it is one realm in which a Christian

can virtually express faith. It is an important vocation for the individual Christian and for the churches. We should not however underestimate the deep ethical ambiguities and strong tensions which may emerge for individual Christians and within the Christian community as a result of involvement in politics. St. Mother Teresa's personal conviction that her work was propelled by Christ, who she loved with her life, and who she saw in every human being, and more so those in suffering, was sought to being reduced to a political argument of destabilizing Indian or specifically Hindu society. The mission of the Catholic Missionaries of Charity is to serve the poorest of the poor, destitute, and those dying undignified deaths, irrespective of their religious beliefs. They do so without compromise, and with no strings attached.

Religious Pluralism

The Christian ratio in our country is 2.30 percentage while comparing to other religions. The contemporary anti-Christian attack in our nation has been on the increase. The example of religious violence in Kandhamal district at in Odisha where the whole Christian community was attacked for no reason. The sisters of the order, founded by Saint Mother Teresa, were providing primary medical care the people of the area, irrespective of caste or creed. A series of riots led by radical Hindus left roughly 100 people dead, thousands injured, 300 churches and 6000 homes destroyed and 50000 people displaced, many were forced to hide in nearby forests where many died of hunger and snakebites. While following the Gospel message by helping the people, the missionaries were especially targeted to be attacked from every corner of the nation. The challenge of Fr. Tom Uzhunnalil who was kidnapped and released recently is a committed missionary.

In these situations, the Christian experience of Jesus Christ as the fullness of life can challenge the dehumanizing elements of these cultures and religions.

Impacts of Globalization

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* criticizes globalization, and says, “while the poor of the world continue to knock on the doors of the rich, the world affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing these knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human” (CV 75). A major issue raised by globalization is that of dehumanization. The powers that rule the country are identified with the corporate mafias who care least about the rights of the poor or environmental safeguards. Demonetization has been a major heist on the country, favouring the rich and the ruling political parties. Through this the middle class of the country have been affected. The poor become poorer every day. Fuel prices have increased to an all-time high, with every day hikes. A year ago, when everything was brought under GST, five crucial petroleum products remain unaffected due to corruption. Suicide by farmers continue at alarming numbers all over the country. In a recent study by the world health organization (WHO) India is one among the fourteen of the most polluted cities in the world. Healthcare is still beyond the reach of the poor Indian.

The Family as the Foundation of Society

Human person is by nature designed for communion. This is clear in the Bible verses saying that, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2,18). The church in this regard consider family is the most important natural community. The family has special rights and is central to all social life.

So, the family is the foundation of society, for all social arrangements proceed from it. Every member of the family is recognized, accepted and respected by the others in his dignity, without having to do anything to deserve it. After all, the fact that individuals also learn in the family the meaning of social responsibility and solidarity likewise benefits society as a whole: someone who proves to be responsible and to practice solidarity in little things will be more likely to do so in big things, too. The habits of better understanding of people who are desperate, lonely or abandoned, devotion to the poor, caring for the sick or the elderly are driven from the family, in which it makes an irreplaceable contribution to the “Humanization of Society”.

In the present scenario, the family is primarily, the place where the continuation of society is ensured. Secondly, the family performs the specific task of socializing and raising children. Cultural, ethical, social, intellectual and religious values and traditions are handed down, and they are fundamental for every free and conscientious person. The parents also have the right and duty to raise their children themselves and to provide them with a comprehensive education. It seeks to help make children law-abiding, peaceful citizens who are capable of dialogue, encounter, and solidarity by teaching them practice the virtues of justice and love. The elderly people, in the family also, can make a decisive contribution toward the well-being of the family and society as a whole. They can transmit values and traditions and support the young. When elderly people are sick and needy, they need not only medical attention and appropriate care but above all loving treatment and surroundings. In the case of children in the family, they have to be strengthened and defended in every way. As St. Mother Teresa said, “a

child is God's greatest gift to the family, to the nation, to the world." Children are the true future of humanity. They are in a challenging world and need help. In many parts of the world there is lack of medical care, appropriate nutrition, elementary education, and even no place to live. Moreover, there are ongoing scandals such as trafficking of children, child labor, the street children, the deployment of children in wars, child marriage and (sexual) abuse of children. There must be a decisive campaign on national and international level against violation of the dignity of boys and girls that occur through sexual exploitation and all forms of violence against the dignity and right of every child.

The 8-year-old girl Asifa who was brutally raped and killed recently in Kathua, is an example and there are many more similar happenings in our country. There are also ritual practices in our nation and minor girls are victims of crude carnal pleasures while the adult women are often forced to believe that they are partners and co-beneficiaries of some spiritual and material benefits. As the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, "It is easier to rule a nation than raise four children". There is so much atrocity taking place in the country all the time but tragically a good section of our media hardly highlights these grim realities.

Conclusion

It is an honor for any Christian to serve the society through the service in the Church. In the course of Christian leadership, it is not something restricted to certain individuals or groups. Every disciple of Jesus and the whole community is called to do good to others. As a Christian, our greatest responsibility is to live the Gospel, which will help both others and ourselves. In the present context of India where

Christianity is being blackmailed and Christian holy places of worship are vandalized, we are called to imitate Christ's self-giving compassion even towards those who oppress us. As Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, states, "We can resist leaving behind a familiar and easy way of doing things. Yet the challenges involved can be like the storm, the whale, the worm that dried the gourd plant or the wind and sun. For us, they can serve to bring us back to the God of tenderness, who invites us to set out ever anew on our journey" (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 134). Even the Nation needs transformation of political, religious, family, cultural and linguistic aspects. On the other side, the Church continues to face the challenges making use of the opportunities providing everything to those in need. Through patience, justice, prudence, dialogue, integrity, solidarity, dedication, etc., the Nation and Church could be modified with love and peace. These can last only if both we and others recognize that all are responsible for a common life which is determined by God. Finally, as Christians, we are expected to accept the stormy events of the Nation and live for the common good. It is possible only by imitating Christ, like St. Mother Teresa dedicated her whole life to the Church and the Nation.

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Serving the Church and the Nation: Challenging Opportunities

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Introduction

The Second Vatican Council declared in its Pastoral Constitution, “The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1). Jesus Christ proclaimed the Kingdom of God (Mk 1: 14 -15), went about doing good (cf. Acts 10:38) and called upon his followers to pray and work (Mt 6: 9 -13) for the realization of the Kingdom of God. Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation (LG 48) tries to live that essential mission of Jesus in the human lives. In communion with the Universal Church, the Church in India, has reached out to the poor, the deprived, the sick and the suffering in India for many centuries.

Recent times have seen India and its Constitution being threatened by extremists. Importantly, the question ‘what it takes to be an Indian?’ has gained prominence for all Indians today especially for the Church in India as her identity and

loyalty are being challenged and questioned time and again and she can easily be implicated for lacking in nationalism and patriotism. Besides, the recent sex scandals rocking the Church in India, have also sent a wrong impression to the whole country. She is also being accused of favouring casteism, double standard, clericalism and of being patriarchal.

At this juncture, the Church needs to urgently clarify her relationship with the nation as well as to think of the measures to respond to the challenges both from within the Church and within the Country that are posed to her.

Foundational Basis for Church's Service

The church is called to be at the service of the nation drawing inspiration from her Lord who went about doing good; he healed the sick, forgave sinners and tax collectors, he drove out demons and paved out a new way of life for people to follow. The church strives to remain faithful to Jesus' way of life who came to serve and not to be served (cf. Mk 10:45).

Interestingly Jesus himself has defined the relationship between the Church and the nation in the following words, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22: 21). There is no distinction and partiality here. Everything is well distributed and Justice is established in the division. Thus, as members belonging to both the Country and the Church, every Christian is called to remain faithful to both the Church and the Country thus a missionary and a patriotic at the same time.

Prophetic Role is Equal to Patriotic Role

By baptism we are called to be prophets and by citizenship we are called to be patriots. But Prophetic role is in no way different from Patriotic role, because '*Constitutional con-*

cerns are Gospel concerns'. We in the Church are certainly committed to the values (*Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*) enshrined in the preamble of our Constitution. These two roles have to go hand in hand. In other words, Christians are called to internalise the Gospel values of justice, love and peace in the context of today's India. They have to practice the spirituality of Jesus as described in the Sermon on the Mount and promote pluralism: accepting, appreciating and celebrating diversity in every religion, culture and language etc.¹

In the recent times, three of the Bishops have exercised their prophetic role with great determination and without any fear. Thus it is time now for the leaders of the Church and laity to exercise this role effectively as Bishops Anil Couto, Thomas Macwan and Filipe Neri Ferrao did in their own dioceses.²

Is the Church in India Only for Conversion?

Very often the Church in India is accused of being anti-national, political, a foreigner (outsider), contract killers (spy) of Vatican Government³ and its missionary works are always directed towards the goal of conversion. Among all these accusations, what I find the most disheartening is the comment that Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS chief, made about the humanitarian works of Mother Teresa and her sisters. No doubt, these illogical accusations on the Church in India had been very much part of the agenda of RSS and the BJP Government and it is still going on. The one allegation that I wish to deal with here is the Patriotism of the Church in India.

At the time of Independence of India in 1947, only about 14% of the population were literate. If it has gone up to 55% of the population today, Christianity can be proud for having

played a role in it. The Catholic Church in India runs over 17,000 educational Institutions. What is impressive is that 70% of all these schools are in rural areas, serving the poor, especially the Dalits, the Adivasis and other disadvantaged groups. Nearly 50% of the Catholic institutions are only for the enlightenment of Indian women belonging to all religions, castes, tribes and different religions. It had also given its due attention to technical education, and runs today 1514 technical and vocational training institutions in the country. This made it possible for Dalits and Tribals not only to benefit by it but also to have social mobility in life.

Another significant field for which the Church has contributed is the healthcare system in India. Of the total, 85% of the healthcare institutions run by the Church in India are in remote villages which include - *Dispensaries, Rehabilitation Centres, Centres for Mental Health Care, Medical facility Centres, Leprosy Care Centres, Health care centres for the Aged, T. B., Terminally ill – HIV/AIDS Centres, Medical training Centres, Counselling Centres, Non – formal facility Centres*. The motive of this is to offer special attention to the poor and the downtrodden. Self-empowerment programmes are conducted by the Church to make the poor and marginalised stand on their feet.

With the accusation of being foreigners in our own Country, a Christian is forced to remind the accusers that Christianity has a long history of its presence in India. It took roots in India with the coming of St. Thomas to India in 52 AD, and it spread to a greater extent in India after St. Francis Xavier's arrival in the 16th century. However, Christians today form only 2.5% of the total population. This falsifies the claim that Church's sole motive of their presence is conversion. *(The statistics above were presented by Bishop. Ambrose of Tuticorin in the year 2008).*⁴

Patriotism and Nationalism in Today's India

The ideal meaning behind the terms 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' is being misinterpreted by fanatic organisations in today's India. They try to spread a culture of hatred, violence, discrimination and elimination of all those who refuse to accept their narrow world view and style of life. For them, being Indian means belonging to 'Hindutva' and being patriot or nationalist means mouthing slogans, hailing Mother India or shouting patriotic slogan. This misinterpretation of the term has been reflecting in the country for the past few decades.

When a group of nuns were gang-raped in Gajraula in 1990, the whole nation was shocked. All peace - loving citizens of their caste, colour and creed condemned the crime. But a prominent leader who belonged to a fanatic organisation proudly proclaimed: It was done by patriotic Hindu youths against anti-national activities of Christians.

On January 22, 1999, at midnight, Australian – born Graham Stewart Staines and his two sons, Philip and Timothy were burnt alive by a mob with shouts of "Zindabad!" It was a beastly act. Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee was sensitive to accept the shame: "My head hangs in shame". But some of the "responsible Union Ministers" were prompt to make irresponsible excuses saying, "It is an international conspiracy to destabilize the government"- Another expression of hypocrisy in the name of patriotism.⁵

I am also reminded of the violent attacks against the Christians in Kandhamal, Odisha 2008. And the recent one on 23rd December 2017 when two priests and 32 seminarians in Satna, Madhya Pradesh, were allegedly attacked under the pretext of forced conversion by the Bajrang Dal group.

Recently in Mumbai Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Gopal Shetty stoked up a controversy by saying that Christians are '*angrez*' (British) and did not contribute to the Indian freedom struggle - Another misunderstood version of Nationalism and Patriotism.⁶

The fanatic groups of today don't seem to understand that 'Lynching', 'Gau Rakshak', 'Love Jihad,' 'Cow Vigilantism', are not part of Indian nationalism but Hindutva nationalism. Indian Nationalism in its true sense refers to "An ideology based on the premise that an individual's loyalty and devotion to one's country should come above the interests and opinions of other citizens or the interests of a certain group of citizens".⁷ For example, today's present Government speaks of Digital India but there is no place for Dalit Reservation Policy only for the Dalit Christians.

Challenges within the Country

India is going through a crucial period perhaps a dark phase in its history after its independence. It has evolved into a great tourist place of lynching so much as it can be even addressed a nation of mob lynching. In this context, I have tried to point out a few challenges that the Church needs to look into.

- India presents a perpetual paradox where millions go to bed while the country has the third highest number of billionaires in the world. Presently, it looks like there is nothing to boast in her other than Corruption, illiteracy, child labour, increasing unemployment, rape, growing addiction to alcohol and drugs.

- People with narrow minded nationalism claim to be super nationalistic and condemn the others to be lacking in nationalism and patriotism.
- Unnecessary and petty news items are sensationalized by the media. This clearly shows the dictatorship of ruling party of a section of a media.
- Even the educational system is being manipulated by the political leaders of so called Hindutva philosophy.
- The Constitution of India (Article 25) provides the fundamental human right of every person to convert to whichever religion he/she wants, but the freedom is being solemnly violated.
- In recent times, India is also facing widespread intolerance, religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, attacks and atrocities against intellectuals, social activists, religious personnel and institutions.
- Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution are violated, esp. minority rights (*denial of SC status to Christian Dalits*).
- There are also many examples which indicate growing corruption, criminalization and terrorism. As said earlier, Mob lynching has become the order of the day in India. 80% of those killed in cow related lynching is Muslims.⁸

Challenges within the Church

In recent times, the Catholic Church in our country and elsewhere has been in the news for wrong reasons. The various news items have caused a lot of anguish, anxiety, disappointment and embarrassment to the faithful. Besides

this, the Church in India needs to look for challenges from within the Church in order to proclaim Christ truly in her words and deeds. Hence, I have tried to express a few challenges and possibilities to respond to them.

- *Lumen Gentium* describes the family as the ‘domestic Church’ because it is the first place where baptized Christians learn and practice their faith. Unfortunately, the families today are suffering from relationship break ups, increasing number of divorces, abortions and lack of understanding of marriage as a sacrament. All these hamper the essential mission of the Church.
- Materialism, consumerism and addiction to social media have crept into the families and have caused a great decline in spiritual and moral values of our Christian brothers and sisters.
- There is also growing indifference and lack of commitment to the Christian vocation. It is unfortunate that some of our Christians may not even know their essential role of being a Christian.
- There is also growing insensitivity from the part of the Church regarding caste, language, creed, status and religion. It is very sad that this caste factor is very much seen in religious congregations and dioceses.
- Across the world the Church has had to face a lot of sharp criticism regarding the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. In India quite a few priests have been accused of sexual harassment or misconduct.⁹ The recent case involving a bishop and a nun was quite shocking and has sent a bad impression about the Church.

- Very often allegations are heard regarding financial misappropriation and incompetent management of religious institutions. Recent allegation against a Cardinal and a group of priests received a lot of media attention.¹⁰
- Frankly speaking, the church in India has not really done anything seriously to Ecumenical unity.
- She seems to have become excessively preoccupied with institutionalization and clericalism.
- The members of the Church suffer from insufficient zeal and fear to proclaim Christ's universality and his uniqueness as the Saviour.

Opportunities for Various Ministries in the Church

The present day challenges in India offer a new set of opportunities for the Indian church to carry on various ministries. Therefore, the Church in India is called to exercise her prophetic role responding to the unjust situations, indicating that it is time to do something more than what we have always been doing. Most importantly, it is time for priests and the religious to venture into secular professions by becoming doctors, engineers, secular subject professors, scientists and Socio - Political analysts etc. so that we are able to respond to the call of our Divine master to serve everyone in his own example.

Simultaneously, the Church also needs to take some measures to make her mission clear to everyone. There needs to be lot of transparency from the part of the ecclesiastical authorities. It is time to go back to the fundamentals and root ourselves there. Here are a few practical suggestions for us to be more involved in the service of our nation.

Family Life

The well-being of the Church and the society at large are intimately linked with the nurturing of the family. Families are the fundamental ‘building block’ of society; similarly, families provide a foundation for the continuation and strength of the Church among the lay faithful. It is the life-line of the Church and society (*Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 32, 38). However, in recent times “married love is too often dishonoured by selfishness, hedonism and unlawful contraceptive practices” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no, 47).

- Thus the Church needs to encourage visiting of Parish Priests to the families. Organising Marriage Encounter and Marriage Enrich Programmes become a must in order to avoid future marital conflicts and to foster values of Christian Marriage amidst the couples.
- The families should be directed to live in unity and to reach out to others. Seminars could be held in order to give a wakeup call to the families of the challenges that the media and society pose for family life. e.g. prolife issues in human sexuality, pornography and marital infidelity. So that they are ready to face them effectively.
- The prime importance of the Church is also to stress upon family values and encourage family prayer, family meals, family outings and use of Bible sharing methods through Small Christian Communities.
- The Church needs to create facilities for the care of the elderly so that they are respected and well protected at home instead of being dumped in old age homes.

Renewal of Consecrated Persons

The Catholic Church in India is blessed with over one hundred and twenty-five thousand religious priests, religious brothers and religious sisters who serve the Church significantly through a large network of educational, health and social service institutions.¹¹ Even as I greatly appreciate the selfless and dedicated life of the consecrated persons, in recent times, there is a decrease in the number of candidates opting for consecrated life.

A fresh and creative and a self-critical approach is needed in order to make this gift of God more attractive and relevant. I am of the opinion that priestly life needs a thorough renewal and updating. When we talk about empowering women, Why don't we talk about sisters? We need to open up more responsibilities for the sisters otherwise many of their services will be limited to decorating the altar and lighting up the candles.

- Thus the Consecrated need to go back to the vision of their founders and rededicate themselves to pastoral ministry with a clear shift of emphasis from maintenance to mission. This consecrated life should be a combination of contemplation and active service as recommended by St. John Paul II.
- Consecrated life should be Christ centered, simple and commitment to the poor. This just can't happen in overnight, so focus should be laid on their training as well. For Pope Francis, Religious life is life of prophetic mission in the context of peripheries and a strong commitment to community life.¹²
- “*Peace and Reconciliation Committees*” need to be appointed in the various regions, together with the dioceses

of the region, so that we can settle matters amicably and justly without going to the courts unnecessarily.¹³

The Lay Faithful and the Mission of the Church

The lay faithful have a distinct role in the spreading of the Gospel, which the Church really needs them to carry out with the authority, creativity, and power that the Holy Spirit has given them in Baptism. *Lumen Gentium* no. 31 states: “the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in [all] secular professions and occupations.... They are called there by God that by exercising their function and led by the spirit of the Gospel that may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven”. The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2).

- The Church needs to accept the dignity, role and importance of the role of the lay faithful in the Church.
- The laity should be motivated to involve themselves in the Church through the Small Christian Communities.
- Some of the capable members in the Parish could be asked to undertake faith formation and professional training programmes.
- Our laity may be carefully encouraged to take up important leadership positions in the Parliament, Assemblies, Civil Services, Entrepreneurship in business and in the Judiciary.
- The dignity of labour should be manifested by the Church in terms of providing just wages and social security.

- The lay faithful in need of help are to be given sufficient help (both moral and financial) so that they are able to achieve their dreams and in turn contribute to the mission of the Church.
- We need Catechesis which will put Social Justice at center stage in our Christian communities. It is heartening to learn that all Catholic schools now educate their students on the Indian Constitution. Unfortunately, the laity is poorly informed of these important studies that reinforce Jesus's option for the Poor.
- The day to day struggles of the human community should be integrated into our religious service to make it more relevant and meaningful especially the Eucharist.

The Marginalised and Weaker Sections within the Christian Community

The Church commits herself to the liberation of the weaker sections like tribals, women and dalits. She wants to reach out more to unorganised groups like fisher-people, farmers, migrants, domestic workers, victims of trafficking through advocacy and networking with NGO's and other like-minded groups and individuals dedicated to the cause of the poor. Realizing that caste system is a reality, which has also crept in certain parts of the country, we need to pursue with the Government that Christian dalits be treated on par with other dalits professing Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Faiths. Thus,

- It is the need of the hour that the policy (*ref: CBCI website*) drafted by CBCI in empowering the Dalits should be powerfully implemented collectively and unitedly.

- The Church needs to urgently introduce positive measures to integrate Christians of Dalit origin along with others in the Church through education and employments.
- She needs to also strengthen advocacy on the socio-political, economic and cultural rights of Tribals enshrined in the Constitution of India. She should strive to foster advocacy and networking to address the issue of land alienation, induced displacement, human trafficking and migration. She is called to show sensitivity to the differently abled by providing facilities that suit their needs.
- A serious study needs to be done by the Church on how she can prevent suicide of our farmers as the suicide rates increase every year.
- The Church could foster gender equity and provide a greater role for women in our collaborative structures or institutions. She needs to also establish Cells to address women's issues to protect their rights.

Youth Apostolate

India is predominantly young. So is the Church in India. There is an urgent need to prepare tomorrow's leaders today. Thus,

- The Christian Youth are to be motivated and encouraged to enter into active politics and Civil Services in order to give a new phase of life for true leadership. They are to be trained to become leaders who are committed to safeguard the constitutional values and secular democracy.
- Today's youth seem to be lacking interest in religion. They are in the streets due to various reasons and the church needs to scout for them and bring them back to God.

- The Church should also initiate measures to promote youth apostolate at all levels, such as Jesus Youth in all the parishes and institutions. The priests should update themselves keeping in mind the current trends in India in order to understand the youth of the time better and thereby guide them effectively.
- In this modern world, Faith formation for youth through YOUCAT, DOCAT and Youth Bible is a must. The Church should guide the youth in Christian moral values.
- They should be taught to enhance critical thinking and problem solving in order to especially avoid suicide and other damage to their lives.

Ecumenism

Our common faith in God through Baptism is the foundation for us to overcome divisions among Christians and to promote mutual relations, friendship and collaboration. “The restoration is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.... However, many Christians.... differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 1). Therefore, the need of the hour is to take initiatives to foster better cooperation among Christians through dialogue and common ecumenical services.

- The Church needs to create ecumenical bodies such as Inter-Church Councils and United Christian Groups at Regional and National Level.¹⁴
- The church should make time to dialogue with ecumenical groups to study social and legal issues (such

as environmental issues, human rights and legal issues) becomes necessary so that we can work together for the betterment of the weaker sections of the country.

- The Church needs to organise special programmes for training seminarians, priests, religious and laity in Ecumenism.
- The church should reach out and dialogue with fundamentalist groups and sects.
- The Church should promote Spiritual Ecumenism – common prayers using common ecumenical Bibles and sharing spiritual riches.

Inter-Religious Dialogue

Inter-religious Dialogue has become an urgent priority today. The goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace, and harmony and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love. *Redemptoris Missio* clearly states that “inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelising mission”. “In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue...Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue. Dialogue is a path toward the Kingdom” (*Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 56, 57).

- Church as being called to a voice for the voiceless could also collaborate with the people of other faiths who are committed to the same ideals of a free, fraternal, secular non-exploitative society. The church, using the Catholic Guilds and Associations, can positively promote dialogue with businessman, politicians and journalists.¹⁵

- The Church needs to introduce Formation Programmes on inter-religious dialogue in our institutions, seminaries and formation houses. Catechism classes in schools and Parishes can incorporate Inter-Religious Dialogue as a subject matter.
- A collaborative organization comprising various religions and communities can be established as a means to work for peaceful existence of pluralistic religions.

Casteism and Gender Equality

The other area of concern is *casteism*. Sadly, though Christianity does not accept caste in principle, in practice it is rampant not only with the lay faithful but also with the ecclesiastical authorities. The Church in India should also strive for *gender equality*. Sadly, the Church within itself is fighting for the same. The recent sex scandals reveal the prevalence of gender difference in the Catholic Church. No doubt, the Church is both human and divine but that can't be taken as an excuse to such scandals. CBCI and CCBI should initiate necessary steps to prevent such happenings in future.

The recent petition made to the Government to do away with the sacrament of Reconciliation is against religious freedom in the Constitution. It is an indicator that the Church needs to be more careful. If the Church itself is busy fighting for her own cause, how can she remain faithful to her patriotic spirit?

Constitutional and Judicial Bodies

The law of the Constitution is being manipulated by the present Government which became vividly evident post the Press conference of three supreme Judges.¹⁶ When such

things occur, the Church should be the first one to step out in the streets to condemn and work towards it.

The Education Apostolate

The focus of the education ministry should be to inculcate in the students the values of an inclusive, pluralistic and harmonious India as envisaged in the Constitution for millions of children and young people who are brainwashed with an ideology of hatred and exclusion. If the Church does not act seriously, there is a grave danger in future for its own existence. With the current trends, Darwinian Theory may be replaced with an article of a particular faith. And the Ancient innovations might be attributed to Indians without any credible proof. In short, the dark age of India has dawned.

- Thus, education institutions need to rise above the maintenance mode to impart holistic education with a heart for the poor and the marginalised. The CBCI Education Policy clearly stated: “The Catholic educational institutions are to provide inclusive and holistic education for the marginalized and girls enabling them to live life to the full and responsibly, thus transforming the individual and society”
- The Church should have recourse to the legal action when Constitutional provisions are violated and the appointment\ approval of staff, issue of minority certificate, grant in aid, scholarships and other support systems are denied.
- It should promote Faith Formation of Christian students and value education. She needs to reach out to those living in “social and geographical periphery” and providing quality of education in the slums and rural areas especially to the back ward girl children.¹⁷

- She needs to positively promote higher education institutions, keeping in mind the goal to form persons of character and conviction who, in the future, will be capable of delivering quality leadership and administrative service upholding the constitutional values and socialistic, secular and democratic character of our country (*National Education Coordinators' Meet, 18 December 2015*).
- The main task of the Church is to maintain a great networking with local, district and state leaders and administrators and befriending people of the neighbourhood and all people of good will to ensure administrative autonomy proper to the Minority institutions.
- The church institutions really need to ensure administrative transparency, financial accountability to promote the kingdom values.

Threat to Freedom of Speech in Media

Another issue is that the space for freedom of speech in *media* is shrinking. M. M Kalburgi, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Parsekar, Gauri Lankesh have fallen to the bullets of right-wing Hindutva outfits. Since 1992, 47 journalists have been killed. Loyalties of many of the print and electronic media have been purchased.¹⁸ Can the Church in India do something about it?

Care of the Earth, Our Common Home

The ruthless exploitation of the earth's resources has adverse effects on humanity. Pope Francis affirmed: "As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that calling" (*Speech, Manila, Philippines, January 18, 2015*). In this

regard, we must go to the heart of the ecological degradation and advocate an education in ecological responsibility because “we are really responsible for all.”

- Every Diocese and Parish have to draw up an Environment (Green) Policy and organise programmes for protecting the environment and fostering love for nature. Christian institutions should facilitate Environmental Education at different levels and nurture students to plant trees and care for them. I would like to appreciate the initiative of Bombay Arch-diocese with its Green Diocese Initiative to take care of our Common Home.
- She needs to encourage the use of solar energy, rain water harvesting, and use of bio-gas plants for cooking. She should encourage organic farming and say no to plastic and pesticides as well as opt for recycling process.

Renewal of the Shepherds

Bishops and priests, while being administrators, should be first and foremost, shepherds of the flock, available and service minded. Their lifestyle should be an example of simplicity and spirituality that can be an inspiration to everyone and should reflect the life style of the Good Shepherd.

- They should rediscover the fundamentals of our Christian beginning and thereby give importance to the Word of God and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42).
- They have to shun excessive institutionalization, clericalism and extravaganza. The apostolates such as healthcare, social development and education are to be employed in the process of evangelization.

- The church should think about refashioning the formation of priests and religious which will enable them to respond to the challenges of our times with faith and courage. The recent sex scandal witnessed many priests representing the Church in media who, I believe personally could not reflect the genuine voice of the Church.
- There should be uncompromised transparency and accountability at all levels of Church's administration.

Conclusion

All the above stated challenges in the Indian Church are beckoning everyone to look forward to a new way of life in the Church. Both Mother Teresa and Pope Francis are exemplary models for living with such a vision and mission. Heeding to the call of God, Mother Teresa took up on a new way of life – for the poorest of the poor and made a radical decision for living her religious\ consecrated life in a thoroughly new way. So also, the life style of Pope Francis challenges us to be authentic in our Christian Vocation by freeing ourselves of traditional structures, institutionalism by shedding comforts, privileges of office and status, embodying the gracious mercifulness and love of Christ and bringing the joy of the Gospel to one and all.

“All of us are asked to obey his call (Lord's) to go forth from our own comfort zones in order to reach all the “peripheries” in the light of the Gospel” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 20). We are also challenged and inspired by the exemplary lives of Indian saints, namely, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Francis Xavier, St. Gonsalo Garcia, St. Alphonsa, St. Kuriakose, St. Euphrasia, St. Joseph Vaz, St. Mother Teresa and many others.

Notes

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Building New Humanity through Faith: Republic Day Message, 2019

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If I recall rightly, in 1974 or so, on Gandhi Jayanthi day, late Fr. Samuel Rayan in his homily in this very chapel said: Bapuji (Gandhi) and Ambedkar are symbols of new humanity. On hindsight today we could also say, Fr. Sam was one of them, showing traits of a new humanity.

Describing the evolutionary progression, Scientist Philip Clayton wrote: “Once there was no universe and then, after the Big Bang, there was an exploding world of stars and galaxies. Once the earth was unpopulated and later it was teeming with primitive life forms. Once there were apes living in trees and then there were Mozart, Einstein and Gandhi.

We have glimpses of a new humanity in people like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, Pope Francis or in millions of ordinary people who spent their lives in self-effacing love and sacrifice for others like Stan Lourdasamy. We have signs of new humanity all around us.

in spite of the many atrocities, violence, mob lynching and hate speeches.

Prophet Jeremiah's Promise

Jeremiah spoke of new law inscribed in the minds and hearts people, instilling the spirit of a new covenant relationship of YWH with Israel. For a people living in exile, this was hopeful promise. Justifiably the Israelites interpreted this newness as one-time event and only for themselves - the Jews the privileged of YWH = 'we are the privileged people of YWH and soon he will bring peace and prosperity'. We recognize today that what is promised in Jeremiah 31 is the constant nature of YWH and his relationship with people: continuous and on-going renewal and newness. YHW is ever new, ever creative and remains a creatively creating God bringing newness for all. In fact, the entire creation is groaning for newness and for full revelation as St. Paul says in Romans. Today science tells us that the universe is unfinished; we live in a still-becoming universe; that the world is new each day, that the cosmos may still be only at the dawn of its creation, and that a vast and indeterminate future may still lie open before it. We are in an unfinished universe, in a becoming universe. God is passionately busy in building and renewing a cosmos, a universe and humankind that is beyond our imagination.

What is promised in Jeremiah is not so much about the future event; nor is it a prosperity gospel, but it is the very creative substance of God, renewing the universe, with quality relationship of justice and peace. This desire and plan of a creative God shaping a new cosmos and humankind is thwarted by the humans as evidenced in the Gospel. The Israelites preferred to look back to Abraham rather than

looking at what was happening to them then and there. ‘We are Abraham’s seed’; we have everything – tradition, law and land. By clinging to ‘Abrahamic tradition’ and excluding ‘the present’, Israelites missed out the creative God and the becoming universe; they held themselves in bondage of blood, law and tradition. Because of their bondage they do not recognize the originality and newness in Jesus. Jesus is depicting for them a universality as big as God but they chose to belong to their clan, tradition, law and temple.

Republic of All Peoples

In this becoming universe, in this becoming God’s people, every believer is invited to grow into the vastness, newness, proximity and universality of God. To come out of narrow domestic walls that we create every day (as Tagore sang) around us. God is to be seen as the ultimate Center of convergence for an unfinished universe ever creating, ever new and yet ever the same. In other words, God is busy building a republic of all peoples with the entire creation.

On a day when we celebrate Republic Day in India, we should not mistake Republic for rigid nationalism; otherwise we would not have African friends singing for us in this liturgy; we should not mistake Republic for exclusive ideology that divests citizenship for many on the basis of religious identity; otherwise we cannot celebrate Eucharist with bread and wine – the fruit of our common labor; we should not mistake Republic for majoritarianism, otherwise we cannot worship the Lord with our sisters who have gathered in good numbers. God is busy building a republic of all peoples with the entire creation. We shall not substitute anything for God’s Republic: neither nationalism, nor religion nor ideology. We shall strive for a Republic of all peoples.

- We shall be a Republic on that day when sunshine and lilies of the field mean more to us than the acquisition of the tallest statue in the world;
- We shall become a Republic that day when we are able to feed and educate our children, rather than protecting cows in our schools and dispensaries;
- We shall become a Republic when children of our country, especially of Dalits and Adivasis, excite us more than our rulers.
- We shall become a Republic on that day when we use hearts to measure the worth of a citizen rather than their Certificates;
- We shall become a Republic not because greed, need, and pride unite us but only truth and non-violence form us into a nation;
- We shall become a Republic when we are joyful because so many are in love rather than initiate a juridical process against love-jihad.
- We shall become a Republic when the sight of our seas and mountains makes us dance more joyfully than the purchase of a Rafale.
- We shall become a Republic when we allow the sages and saints of our land to speak to us through their values than through hate-mongering politicians and their oratories;
- We shall become a Republic when we weep not because we lost an election but because we have such rich, diverse and varied peoples and cultures.

Conclusion

Jesus' offer of true inner freedom to the seed of Abraham provoked bitter hostility and misapprehension. Rather than embracing the freedom and joy offered by Jesus and thus grow into God's Republic, they clung to their tradition, law, nationality, land and clan and missed out the newness and universality of the Father offered to them in Jesus. On this day of India's Republic day, let us pledge to work for the Republic of God where God is laboring through an unfinished universe and a becoming people to realize his creative dreams fashioned for us by the founding Fathers and Mothers of our country. Let us dream with our creative God for the Republic that is beyond our imagination.

[Based on the homily delivered for the community of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeth, Pune, on 26 January 2019]



Book Review

Ramesh Pai, *Half a Book on God*, Published by the author, Bangalore, ISBN: 9879353 468972 pp 180, ₹ 250/-

This book is a creative and contemporary search for GOD in today's world. It carries an encouraging message from Swami Chidrupananda Saraswati, Bangalore, and is addressed to all the youth, especially of India.

Reason for writing the book is because the author's conscience was disturbed. "I felt that their claim about GOD and nature of GODHOOD to be irrational and flawed. I wanted to know the truth" (p. 9). He listened to spiritual discourse and familiarized himself with the Upanishads. Then, "I had to write down my thought process to know my thought processes" (p. 9)

He gives quite many warnings or "Before Reading Further." In fact 45 of them. The last one is interesting. He holds: Our varying descriptions of GOD, different religious view and conflicts are a result of such minds affected or enriched by: a. greed and awareness; b. Cultural and linguistic differences developed over the human history; c. intelligence and d. Limitations of intelligence (26).

Then he makes three distinctions: a. God, which indicates the general usages in monotheism and personalized faith; b. god, indicating the ultra human energies and mythological descriptions and c. GOD, the ultimate truth yet to be understood, which is the subject matter of this book.

The whole book takes on a dialogical style. The preface has

a dialogue with an atheist on the question, “Does GOD exist”? Then the books takes up various issues like life, prana, soul, religions, miracles, GOD realization, God and Upanishads, GOD in my view and some thoughts about Godhood.

The book is clear, precise and introductory. For example, it says. “BRAHMAN is beginningless and endless, hence hs no attributes like time and space. Experiments are claimed to reveal that the universe started with a big bang... But what was before Big Bang. The author quotes Stephen Hawking’s reply. It is like asking “What is beyond South Pole?”

Hindu philosophy has never been confronted with this question. But the author feels that their answer would have been “another big bang, another universe... reducing everything including time and space to a tiny speck. That tiny speck is BRAHMAN” (p 170).

Insightfully, the author claims that, unlike many other works, this book is written to claim, “I DO NOT KNOW.” When the world is appreciating the non-existent cloth of the emperor, “I have dared to call the emperor naked” (p. 179).

On the whole, I find the book insightful, straightforward and dialogical. It tries to answer the deep questions of life in simple and direct manner. It is a book meant for all those who seek GOD personally and directly in the modern times. It takes into consideration the latest scientific findings, the traditional religious teachings and the modern mentality. It is a book for the youth and for all those who are young at heart. That is why the author is willing to give the book free of cost “to any spiritual guru from any religious background” (p. 180).

I would recommend this book highly to all those who want to discover the meaning of their life: honestly and transparently! This book is an asset to all seekers of the truth! It is truly a relevant and priceless book!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ