



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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The People's and Priests' Pope

The Holy Father was true to his name when he published a fatherly letter to priests on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the death of St. John Vianney, on August 4, 2019. The letter was remarkable in many ways, a most exemplary text in understanding how Pope Francis brings our tradition alive and uses it to face the challenges and opportunities of our day.

First, there is his brutal frankness. He begins by addressing the clergy sex abuse and its effects on the presbyterate. "As you know, we are firmly committed to carrying out the reforms needed to encourage from the outset a culture of pastoral care, so that the culture of abuse will have no room to develop, much less continue," he writes. "This task is neither quick nor easy: it demands commitment on the part of all. If in the past, omission may itself have been a kind of response, today we desire conversion, transparency, sincerity and solidarity with victims to become our concrete way of moving forward. This in turn will help make us all the more attentive to every form of human suffering."

The direct acknowledgement of both the scourge and the challenges they face is followed by a deeply spiritual insight: Accompanying the victims of abuse will "make us all the more attentive to every form of human suffering," comments Michael Sean Winters in *The National Catholic Reporter*.

Second, there is the deeply traditional understanding of sin and grace at work in the life of the church. "Let us not grow discouraged! The Lord is purifying his Bride and converting all of us to himself. He is letting us be put to the test in order to make us realize that without him we are simply dust," Francis writes, quoting from a talk he gave to the presbyterate of Rome earlier this year. "He is rescuing us from hypocrisy, from the spirituality of appearances. He is breathing forth his Spirit in order to restore the beauty of his Bride, caught in adultery. We can benefit from rereading the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. It is the history of the Church, and each of us can say it is our history too. In the end, through your sense of shame, you will continue to act as a shepherd. Our humble repentance, expressed in silent tears before these atrocious sins and the unfathomable grandeur of God's forgiveness, is the beginning of a renewal of our holiness."

How different his words are from the programmatic, managerial understanding of the life of the church we encounter so often in this country, so focused on who has power.

Francis' spirituality is also very traditional and very vibrant: No flashy new lights for him. In the section on praise, he begins by recalling the Magnificat, and how when he visits a Marian shrine "I like to spend time looking at the Blessed Mother and letting her look at me." He continues, "Perhaps at times our gaze can begin to harden, or we can feel that the seductive power of apathy or self-pity is about to take root in our heart. Or our sense of being a living and integral part of God's People begins to weary us, and we feel tempted to a certain elitism. At those times, let us not be afraid to turn to Mary and to take up her song of praise."

In keeping with this letter, this issue of AJRS takes up some articles on priesthood and its relevance.

The Editorial team wishes the readers the hope and joy of the coming Christmas! May it be a truly blessed Christmas for all of us!

-The Editor



The Pastor: A Man of Frailty and Virtues

VM Jose SJ

Papal Seminary, Pune

“A good shepherd, a shepherd according to the heart of God, is the greatest treasure that the good God can give to a parish, and one of the most precious gifts of the divine mercy.”

Introduction

Pope Francis addressed his brother priests on St. John Vianney’s 160th death anniversary. He found in St. Vianney a model for priests of today. The church considers his heart to be a symbol of love, commitment and a sign of great holiness. Saint John Vianney, the French parish priest, is venerated in the Catholic Church as a saint and as the patron saint of parish priests. He is often referred to as the “Curé d’Ars” or the parish priest of Ars. He is internationally known for his priestly and pastoral work in his parish in Ars, France. He was able to transform his community and surroundings radically. This was possible, as many Catholics believe, because of his saintly life, mortification, persevering ministry in the sacrament of confession, and ardent devotion to the Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

J M Vianney: A Model for Pastors

Pope Francis wrote the pastoral letter on the Feast of Vianney in order to support and encourage the priests so that they do great work in the midst of trials and temptations. He is aware of the fact that the world we are living in is a world full of difficulties and at the same time having many opportunities for tremendous work in the vineyard of the Lord. To carry on with this task one needs tremendous courage and constant encouragement, appreciation and commitment. Saint John Mary Vianney taught his parishioners primarily by the witness of his life. It was from his example that they learned to pray, halting frequently before the tabernacle for a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The dedication and holiness with which Vianney humbly served the tiny village of Ars, France not only transformed the lives of its 230 residents, but also began to affect the lives of Catholics throughout France and across Europe. Thousands of people began traveling to Ars to hear Vianney's powerful homilies and many people wanted him to hear their confessions. It was usual for him to spend up to sixteen hours a day in the confessional. He strongly believed that at the foundation of his pastoral commitment, the priest must have an intimate personal union with Christ, which he must cultivate and allow growing day by day. It is only if he is in love with Christ that the priest can teach others about this union, this intimate friendship with the Divine Master. He can touch the heart of people and open them up to the merciful love of the Lord. St. John Vianney exemplifies a life of sacrificial love, holy boldness and courageous perseverance. His example is relevant to our time.

There is no doubt that St. John Vianney was an extraordinary priest; but can he be a realistic model for the priests of today, many of whom have multiple parishes and diocesan responsibilities? The saints are always there to be a source of encouragement; to show us that someone just as human as us, struggling with many of the same temptations and vices we struggle with, has, through their openness to God's grace, attained eternal happiness in the beatific vision. Today's priests, then, should not look to St. John Vianney and think that they could never be like him; rather, they are invited to look to his pastoral zeal and prayerful dedication as a way to approach the pastoral situation particular to their own parish and diocese. We do not have to be like him; his time, people and place are different; moreover, each context is different, and person is unique. The laity are also invited and encouraged to pray to St. John Vianney, that he may intercede for their priests. As lay pastoral ministers become more of an integral part of every parish team, the life and holiness of St. John Vianney should encourage all to work tirelessly for the Gospel so that all may have a chance to dwell in the love of the heart of Christ.

Four Virtues by Pope Francis

Pope Francis makes use of four different perspectives to address the priests. It is insightful to deal with each of these.

1. Pain

The pope is aware of the fact that there are some priests who leave everything behind to engage themselves in the daily life of the people of the parish. These priests are ready to endure the difficulties with patience, commitment and courage. There are some good priests who suffer for the

mistakes of other priests. Even Church superiors and other priests misunderstand them. In spite of such difficulties, there are priests who generously persevere in their mission. Pope Francis understands them as brother priests, who have quietly “left all behind” in order to immerse themselves in the daily life of their communities. Like the Curé of Ars, they serve “in the trenches”, bearing the burden of the day and the heat, confronting an endless variety of situations in their effort to care for and accompany God’s people. Many of the priests, often without fanfare and at personal cost, amid weariness, infirmity and sorrow, carry out their mission of service to God and to the people. In some places, some priests feel themselves attacked and blamed for crimes they did not commit. The pope feels one with them in such situations. “Instead, I have called you friends” (John 15: 15).

If in the past, omission may itself have been a kind of response, today we desire conversion, transparency, sincerity and solidarity with victims to become our concrete way of moving forward. Pope Francis acknowledges and appreciates the courageous and steadfast example; in the times of turbulence, shame and pain, they demonstrate that they have joyfully put their lives on the line for the sake of the Gospel. I am convinced that, to the extent that we remain faithful to God’s will, these present times of ecclesial purification will make us more joyful and humble, and prove, in the not distant future, very fruitful. “Let us not grow discouraged! The Lord is purifying his Bride and converting all of us to himself. He is rescuing us from hypocrisy, from the spirituality of appearances. He is breathing forth his Spirit in order to restore the beauty of his Bride, caught in adultery”. If we go through the history of the church, we know that similar

things have happened before; and each of us can say it is our history too. In the end, through the sense of shame, we will continue to act as shepherds. Our humble repentance, expressed in silent tears before these atrocious sins and the unfathomable grandeur of God's forgiveness, is the beginning of a renewal of our holiness.

2. Gratitude

Our vocation to priesthood, more than our own choice, is a response to the Lord's unmerited call. We do well to return constantly to those passages of the Gospel where we see Jesus praying, choosing and calling others to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message (Mk 3:14). If we can trust the words of Jesus then from that flame, we can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to our brothers and sisters. "That flame ignites a humble joy, a joy which sorrow and distress cannot dismay, a good and gentle joy." One of the bad temptations that we can have is to keep brooding over our troubles, for then we lose our perspective, our good judgement and our courage. It is often said that gratitude is the best attitude and can become a powerful way of dealing with life. Only if we are able to contemplate and feel genuine gratitude for all those ways we have experienced God's love, generosity, solidarity and trust, as well as his forgiveness, patience, forbearance and compassion, will we allow the Spirit to grant us the freshness that can renew our life and mission. Once it is done then we can hear the Lord repeat his summons: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men" (Lk 5:10). "For his mercy endures forever." We need to understand that the Lord triumphs through weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). He continues to sustain us and to renew his call and thus we are

“capable of warming people’s hearts, walking at their side in the dark, talking with them and even entering into their night and their darkness, without losing our way”. Something we need to be happy that there were times when, with great emotion, we have embraced sinners, healed wounds, warmed hearts and showed the tenderness and compassion of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25 ff). If we can reach out to people who are in need, in other words our accessibility, closeness, readiness to draw near to the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters then we become good Samaritans. This in turn will lead to adopting a simple and austere way of life, rejecting privileges that have nothing to do with the Gospel. He blesses us with the gift of contemplating that faithful People “in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance, I see the holiness of the Church militant”.

3. Encouragement

When we feel confused or in difficulty or when we are faced with an unprecedented challenge, it is often helpful to read a few words of encouragement to not only encourage ourselves, but to inspire us to be an encouraging force for others. Faced with painful experiences, all of us need to be comforted and encouraged. One good way of testing our hearts as pastors is to ask how we confront suffering. We can often act like the Levite or the priest in the parable, stepping aside and ignoring the injured man (cf. Lk 10:31-32). We have the case of Prophet Jonah in the OT and we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. In different ways, we experience them in our day-to-day life, namely,

individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world. All of us are aware of a sadness that can turn into a habit and lead us slowly to accept evil and injustice by quietly telling us: “It has always been like this”. Gradually in the midst of pain, we have been transformed and transfigured by the Lord and, like Job, we can exclaim: “I knew you then only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes” (Job 42:2). If we do not have this foundational experience, all the hard work that we do will only lead to frustration and disappointment. In this prayer, we know that we are never alone. The genuine prayer of a pastor embraces both the Spirit who cries out “Abba, Father!” (cf. Gal 4:6), and the people who have been entrusted to his care.

4. Praise

The fourth perspective that Pope Francis speaks of is, Praise. He begins with the acclamation of Mary’s magnificat, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (Lk 1:46). To contemplate Mary is to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. We need to affirm that God takes away even the hardest obstacles against which our hopes and expectations crash: death, sin, fear, worldliness. Human history does not end before a tombstone, because today it encounters the “living stone”.

Conclusion

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (late Superior General of the SJ) once said, nothing is more practical than finding God, i.e., than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you

are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Many of us are aware of the challenge that priests face as they strive toward the goal of living like Christ. They acknowledge their individual powerlessness but say yes to God's power working in them. They become burden-bearers for Christ and His people. In presenting themselves for the sacrament of Holy Orders, they step out in faith and into something much greater than themselves. Their good example helps the people of God to do the same. Jesus made it clear that an identifying factor of a true shepherd is that they defend the flock against wolves (John 10:12-13). moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture."



St. John Marie Vianney: The Voice of God

Malcolm Sequeira

Vicar General, Diocese of Poona

With great joy today we celebrate the feast of St. John Marie Vianney, the patron of clergy. The theme chosen for this Holy Eucharist is : The Voice of God. This theme arises strongly from both the Mass readings as well as through the life of St. John Vianney.

The first thought came to my mind was, “does God have a voice?” followed by another question, “Do I hear the voice of God?” immediately I remembered what the Psalmist wrote 4,000 years ago, “The voice of God is powerful, the voice of God is full of majesty”.

The scripture writers saw God’s active voice in everything ... metaphorically in wonders of creation; echoing over the ocean, God’s voice in thundering and lightening, in earthquakes and even in falling of leaves. And literally speaking, God’s voice is in conversation with Noah about the ark, to Abraham telling him that he will be the father of many nations, to Moses in the burning bush, voice of God to Samuel inviting him to be his priest. The first reading from prophet Jeremiah becomes the voice of God, warning them to mend

their ways and turn back to God.

In the New Testament, Mary and Joseph heard the voice of God through the angel, the voice of God was heard at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. “He is my beloved Son...”, and at the time of transfiguration..., Paul heard the voice of God on the way to Damascus “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?” There are 100s of examples where people heard the voice of God in the Bible. One fact is that those who heard the voice of God changed their ways, their life was filled with God’s grace and blessings.

Yes, God does speak to us but in His own ways... I would have not been a priest if I had not to hear the voice of God nor you would have been here. each one of us has heard God’s voice in some way or other and therefore we made this radical decision of leaving our family and surrendering our lives in the hands of God and for the service of God’s people.

Unfortunately the voice of God in many instances is being lost in the noise of this modern world. The voice of materialism, consumerism to possess more and more... the voice of hedonism beckoning us to pleasure for the sake of pleasure.. voice of me..me..ism, selfishness, egoism. In today’s Gospel, Herod had a choice either to listen to the voice of God or man’s voice. John the Baptist was God’s voice and Herodias was the voice of the world. For reasons he knew best, he chose to listen to the worldly voice. We know the consequences he had to face in his life because he refused to hear the voice of God.

There are many voices crying around us today, drowning out the God’s voice. The hard fact is that it is not enough to hear God’s voice just once but we need to hear it constantly, every moment of our lives. The second hard fact is that the

voice of God can be listened only by those willing to listen. When the king of France complained to Joan of Arc; “Oh, God’s voice, your voices.. why can’t I hear any voices?” The condemned woman replied, “You would if you listen”. Unless I have a disposition to listen, I will not listen God’s voice.

Let us look at the life of St. John Marie Vianney. I think he did just 3 things in his life as a priest: praying, preaching and listening to confessions. In praying he listened to the voice of God. In preaching and confessions he became the voice of God to others.

When he was appointed as a chaplain at Ars, on the first day of his arrival, he was almost alone in the church celebrating the Holy Mass. No parishioners were interested in participating in the Eucharist. But a few days later some of his parishioners came out of curiosity to see what this priest is here to do in their parish; people found him on his knees in prayer before the tabernacle as though he truly saw someone. They found him in the same posture, morning, afternoon and evening. In deep prayer, he was listening to the voice of God who guided him to radically change the lives of people.

After hearing the voice, he became the voice of God to his people. In confessional, where he is supposed to have spent 11 to 16 hours a day, he became God’s voice by opening the treasure of forgiveness to every person. By being the voice of God, he brought even the worst sinner to be embraced by God’s love and mercy. He became a man consumed by the confessional.

By becoming a voice of God through preaching, Fr. Vianney’s words were simple, but words with fire, unforgettable words that won the heartfelt admiration of the people.

The people of Ars were busy in drinking and dancing, and

some in illicit activities; St. John Marie Vianney by becoming the voice of God changed their lives completely.

As we celebrate the feast, let us ask ourselves, do we hear God's voice constantly? Or are we busy in listening to the voices of this world? Do I spend enough time in prayer? Do I respect and visit the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist with great devotion?

Let us ask St. John Marie Vianney to pray and intercede for us that we may always listen to the voice of God and be that voice to everyone around us. Amen

(Redacted from the homily based on
Jer 26:11-16, 24 and Mt 14:1-12.)



Weakness, Brokenness and Fear to become PRIESTS?

+Bp Ephrem Nariculam

Bishop of Chanda

The three dispositions that assist us to yield good fruit (Mt.12:33) may be expressed in three questions:

Are we *weak enough* to be priests/to become priests?

Are we *broken enough* to be priests/to become priests?

Are we *afraid enough* to be priests/to become priests?

Weak Enough to be Priests?

You need to be weak in order to be priests? It sounds very intimidating! But it requires for the betterment? Sometimes our own strengths become obstacles to manifest the grace of God in our life. Are we weak enough so that the power of Christ can shine through us. St. Paul reminds us ‘when I am weak I am strong’ (2 Cor. 12:9). He claims that in his weakness God shines better! We are not to be supermen in skills and talents. We need to be simple and normal so that God can work wonders through us. Our ‘weakness’ can be lovable before God. Through Beatitudes Jesus presents before us the weaknesses in human terms become strength in the divine realms (Mt. 5:1-12). Are we weak enough solely to rely on the grace of God? Are we weak enough to depend

on the mercy of God? We need to acknowledge our weaknesses. They are totally ours. We shall offer them to the Lord. Are we men and women of character and integrity? Are our private life and public life in proper unity and harmony? We are not angels. We are human. What is human is weak. Recognise our weakness, accept it and learn to overcome it by the blessings of God's power and benevolence. God can work wonders through weak and fragile human submissions.

Broken Enough to be Priests?

The body-broken and the blood-shed by Christ our Lord, brought eternal life to the world. As Christians and consecrated persons, if there is not enough 'brokenness' and participation in the passion and dying of Christ, we cannot be true missionaries. Our priestly/religious formation is meant to 'break' us until we are crushed fully! When you are crushed, God will put you back to be a beautiful mosaic. 'Unless the grain of wheat falls and die, it cannot sprout to new life (Jn 12:24) grow and yield. We have to be crucified with Christ to be born again new, to be new creation (Gal. 2:20). We have to be broken and dead, to be born again new (Cf. Jn. 3:1-10). As the bread is broken at the Holy Eucharist, so too we are crushed in life circumstances. Our most beautiful prayer in the Eucharistic participation is 'Lord break me to be parted, so as to be united by you - a beautiful re-formulation as per divine plan. We may be/have to be broken by others constantly - our superiors, our co-missionaries/workers, our subjects, our family members, our friends, our well wishers etc. We will be hurt by others, thus we will be refined - become finer in shape and beauty. There is no holiness without willingness to be broken like the body of the Lord. When others gossip about us, ignore us, take us for granted or calumnise us - thank God for the same because when others break us

then we partake in the passion of Christ. For it is by leaving his body to be broken that Christ redeemed the world.

Afraid Enough to be Priests?

A bit confusing to pose such a question, but the reflection is endearing solace to heart and mind. Are we afraid enough to be priests so that we can be good missionaries/religious? We must be courageous against erroneous teachings of others about the Church and Christian doctrines. But, we have to be afraid of sacrilege, amassing wealth for oneself, insincerity, gluttony, ambition, money-mindedness, comfort, seeking after name and fame, hypocrisy etc. In short be afraid of sin and turn to virtue. The sin and all its 'business' distance us from God, distract us from our spiritual/religious commitment and disgust with our earnings and learnings. God knows us more than we know ourselves. Fear of sin never fails!

So, Dear Friends - the great beauty is that even we are weak, broken and afraid - God wants to continue loving us. God bless you all.

(Based on the Homily delivered by **Bp. Ephrem Nariculam** of Chanda Diocese at Papal Seminary, Pune
on 11 July 2019)

On Priests

- “The end for which God has instituted the priesthood has been to appoint on earth public persons to watch over the honor of his divine majesty, and to procure the salvation of souls.” – St. Alphonsus Liguori
- “He made them, the vicars of his love.” – St. Ambrose
- “What tongue, human or angelic, may ever describe a power so immeasurable as that exercised by the simplest priest in Mass? Who could ever have imagined that the voice of man, which by nature hath not the power even to raise a straw from the ground, should obtain through grace a power so stupendous as to bring from Heaven to earth the Son of God?” – St. Leonard of Port Maurice
- “O my child, bethink you that just as the bee, having gathered heaven's dew and earth's sweetest juices from amid the flowers, carries it to her hive; so the Priest, having taken the Saviour, God's Own Son, Who came down from Heaven, the Son of Mary, Who sprang up as earth's choicest flower, from the Altar, feeds you with that Bread of Sweetness and of all delight.” – St. Francis de Sales
- “The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus. When you see a priest, think of our Lord Jesus Christ.” – St. John Vianney, patron saint of parish priests
- “For when you see the Lord sacrificed, and laid upon the altar, and the priest standing and praying over the victim, and all the worshippers empurpled with that precious blood, can you then think that you are still among men, and standing upon the earth? Are you not, on the contrary, straightway translated to Heaven, and casting out every carnal thought from the soul, do you not with disembodied spirit and pure reason contemplate the things which are in Heaven?” – St. John Chrysostom



Personal Integrity in Religious Life

Sebastian Vazhapilly SJ

Papal Semianry, Pune

Introduction

Dr. Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, narrates one incident about his father when they were living in Durban South Africa. They were living in an isolated place, far away from the town and this isolation made him look forward with eagerness any trip to the city. One day Arun's father Manilal asked him to drive him to the town for a conference. His mother gave a long list of groceries she needed. His father asked Arun to get the car serviced during the same trip. When he dropped his father he said: "I will meet you here at 5.00 pm and we shall go home together." Arun completed all the buying for his mother and went for a movie. He got so engrossed in a movie of John Wayne and he forgot the time. When he remembered about the time of meeting his father, it was already late. It was already 5.30 and half an hour late. He ran to the garage and got the car and rushed to his father who was waiting for him, and it was almost 6.00. "Why were you late?" his father asked Arun. He could not tell his father that he was watching John Wayne film and so he said: 'The car was not ready, so I had to wait.' He did not realize that his father had already called the garage. So Arun was caught by his father. His father said: 'There is something

wrong in the way I brought you up that did not give you the confidence to tell me the truth.’ In order to figure out where he went wrong with you, Manilal walked home 18 miles. He began walking, dressed in his suit and dress shoe, through the unpaved and unlit roads. Arun could not leave him, so for five hours he drove behind him, watching his father go through this agony for a silly lie that he uttered. Arun decided then that he will never lie again.¹

This incident narrated by Arun Gandhi reveals personal integrity of his father. Persons of integrity leave a mark by their lives, deeds and words. In a broad sense we can say that integrity means a sense of soundness and a sense of harmony by integrating various qualities such as honesty, truthfulness, fairness, standing for certain principles. Integrity is reflected in a person’s life and character. Some of us are blessed with such nature and character mainly because of our personal makeup, and our upbringing. But most of us struggle to achieve some degree of personal integrity. At a very simple level, integrity means matching our words and actions. But there are several other aspects to the notion of integrity. So, there is moral integrity, intellectual integrity, emotional integrity, and spiritual integrity.

Becoming Integrated

Becoming a person of integrity is a long process. And we do not become persons of integrity all of a sudden. It is not the same as becoming a perfect person. In old spirituality they spoke of perfection. What they meant by this, among other things, was becoming a virtuous person. Integration denotes the process of integrating or bringing together various parts

1 Nina L. Diamond, *Voices of Truth: Conversations with Scientists, Thinkers and Healers* (Wisconsin: Lotus Press, 2000) pp. 178-179.

to a whole. It is bringing together various aspects of our life into a more or less stable or harmonious pattern. Becoming integrated persons means becoming authentic persons. Becoming authentic persons and integrated persons involve two basic aspects: (1) Becoming integrated is related to one's self, and (2) Becoming integrated is related to the way we relate to people and situations around us. What are the usual signs of an integrated person?

(1) Integrated persons tend to have a reasonably good sense of their identity: Usually, integrated persons will have a sense of their identity. Here by identity, we mean the sense of who we are. Being aware of who are requires recognizing our sense of worth. It involves recognizing our strengths. It also involves our limitations. On the other hand, those who have a very weak sense of identity or a confused sense of identity usually will find it difficult to accept their self-worth. They will find it difficult to accept their own strengths and good qualities. There will be a secret fear and doubt lurking at the back of their minds. I say this or do that what others will think of me? If I do not have a sense of reasonable sense of identity, then I will be living and fulfilling other people's expectations and realities. Having a sense of identity brings stability to our lives. A sense of identity gives us a sense of direction in our lives. Having a strong sense of identity is not the same as being arrogant. In fact, arrogant people have a sense of insecurity. I need to ask: Am I able to affirm my identity? Am I able to affirm it reasonably? This is an important step in becoming an integrated person.

(2) Integrated persons tend to be discerning persons: Usually integrated or authentic persons tend to be discerning persons. By this we mean a sense of 'sifting through' our experiences and separating good from the bad. But to be a

discerning person, I need to create a space for my self. I need to take some time out for prayer and reflection. I need time and space for solitude. I need time and space to discover myself. This is not the same as getting locked up in one's self. A sense of discernment helps us discover the direction of our desires and basic orientations. What are my basic orientations? What am I looking for in my life? Have I found something worthwhile in my religious life? Am I making my choices in a reasonable way? Socrates: 'An unexamined life is not worth living.'

(3) Integrated persons tend to stand up for principles: Standing up for principles is one of the characteristic features of an integrated person. Here principles mean a set of convictions based on some values. So often what comes into our way of thinking honestly is our insecurities, fears, need for approval, and our prejudices. Suppose I want the approval of others and want to be popular, then, I begin to compromise on certain principles. Then I will not speak out fearing that I will lose popularity. Indeed, there are many ways of standing up for one's principles. We need to stand for principles in ways that are gentle. Persons of integrity tend to be also courageous. Courage is not the foolhardy recklessness. It is the ability to face adversity, pain, fear and uncertainty with a sense of peace. We can stand up for principles. It is not so much doing brave things. Being courageous is basically a state of mind. We are not intimidated by others. When we are courageous, we function from a sense of inner security. Then, others will not be a threat or source of fear for you.

(4) Integrated persons tend to reflect a sense of inner freedom: Integrated persons tend to reflect a sense of inner freedom. It is freedom from irrational fears. It is freedom from excessive attachment to people and things. It is the

freedom from the compulsion to please others. It is the freedom from being too much depending on others. It is also the courage to do things what you think is right. It is also being comfortable with oneself. When you have inner freedom, you are excessively anxious about what others think of you. When you have inner freedom, you can take the criticism of others without losing your sense of peace. When you have inner freedom you do not seek other's approval.

(5) Integrated persons tend to communicate what they are thinking: Many of us tend to take our emotions as facts. It is good to remember that much of our emotional responses and reactions are the result of our thinking. There are certain thought patterns behind our emotions and feelings. And these emotions are not facts. Our feelings and emotions do not really tell us about reality and facts. There can be different interpretations about the same thing. What we need to communicate is our thoughts and not our conclusions. An example of such conclusion would be the labelling of Br. x: "You are lazy. You never help in the community." Now that is the conclusion. What is required is the communication of our thoughts and feelings. What is required is the communication that when some people help the burden falls on a few people. Or that it is a shared responsibility. Communicating with integrity requires describing my thoughts and feelings. I should not rush to conclusions about what's really going on.

(6) Integrated persons tend to take responsibility for their actions: An integrated person would take responsibility for their actions. They will stand by it. They will not easily blame others. They will not blame the situations and circumstances. Perhaps blaming and making excuses could be signs that we are not willing to take responsibility for our life. In fact constant blaming others reflect a view that

‘I am a victim.’ This view expresses the view that others are causing all your hardships. Such attitude somehow gives the idea that we are not in charge of our lives. When I have this attitude, I tend to surround myself with resentment, anger and frustration. Integrated persons will take responsibility for their actions and for their life. They will prefer to suffer the consequences of their principles and actions rather than making a compromise on these.

(7) Integrated persons tend to admit when they are wrong:

Apologizing has never been easy. Admitting that I am wrong can be one of the most difficult things. Some of us tend to think that apologizing is a sign of weakness. Apologizing when you’re wrong is a powerful way to show your inner strength. A sincere apology for what we have done or not done can be a powerful way of expressing our integrity. It shows that you care for the truth. It shows that you care about the other person. But do not use apology to show that you are better than the other. Be sincere in your apology. Do not apologize if you do not mean it. Do not apologize out of guilt feeling. There is something called bad apology. Apology is one of the skills we need to learn in our lives. A sincere apology can make us feel better and improve relationships.

(8) Integrated persons tend to be honest: To act honestly, we need to think honestly. We need to have some basic principles to think honestly and act honestly. Honesty is difficult because it can make us vulnerable. On the other hand, reckless and ruthless honesty can break relationships. We need to cultivate a way to be honest in a gentle and compassionate way. Being honest, courageous, and standing up for principles are very important. But truly integrated persons also tend to be compassionate.

Conclusion

These are some indicators of an integrated person. Obviously, this is not a comprehensive list. It does not mean that a person of integrity tends to display all these features. It need not be. Most integrated persons will have some aspects present in them in a greater degree in them and some other aspects in a lesser degree.

On Priests

- "People who say that we priests are lonely are either lying or have got it all wrong. We are far less lonely than anyone else, for we can count on the constant company of the Lord, with whom we should be conversing without interruption. We are in love with Love, with the Author of Love!" – St. Josemaria Escriva
- "Each priest is a man with a body of soft clay. To keep that treasure pure, he has to be stretched out on a cross of fire. Our fall can be greater than the fall of anyone else because of the height from which we tumble. Of all the bad men, bad religious men are the worst, because they were called to be closer to Christ." –Ven. Fulton J. Sheen
- "A priest is one who makes Christ visible. The people see Christ in the saintly priests and they seek even to touch his robes as they did the robes of Christ. Children come to him without fear; non-Catholics give to them a reverence which they rarely give to others. The sure measure by which a priest draws souls to Christ is also the means by which he can drive souls from Christ." –Ven. Fulton J. Sheen



Private Devotional Worlds

Joby Tharamangalam OP

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Hope is the sign of a true Christian. If we are able to live our life in hope, we can also find joy though we walk through difficult times. Our life as a community, and our prayers and pious practices are to share our joys and pains, and make the encounter with God a living reality. Devotions use different things, postures, colours, times, fragrance where by our touch of the sacred can be more sensible and meaningful. Something that is very important is the interaction through which our life receives new hope and strength.

Often there is a risk that the whole life and its value may be defined as being within a number of pious practices. We may be creating a devotional world for ourselves. We cannot practice Christian hope being in a private devotional world. Christ himself lived prayerfully, but never closing himself in a devotional world. Present day spiritual leaders seem to encourage people to bind themselves to such private devotional worlds both as an individual and as a particular community. They remain with fixed believes, ideas, perspectives and are somehow not 'permitted' to dare for an encounter with a different idea, belief or perspective. Attempting that

would be seen as being dishonest with their own devotional patterns. In fact, only in such encounters they get a context of modification and correction if needed.

One loses oneself by submerging oneself into some given patterns of practices within a closed devotional world. What do these private devotional worlds have to offer to the struggles and conflicts of the generation of today? Do these devotions have rooms to place these struggles? They do not formulate constructive symbols to involve the lives of this generation, instead, suggest myths and symbols that do not encounter their lives. As a result, their life and devotion/spirituality go in diverse paths and that in itself remains a conflict within; a spirituality or devotional life one follows which does not know the real concerns of one's life.

Instead of a formulation of meaningful devotion, the closed private devotional world takes up a moralising (and often condemning) mode to meet the issues. Practices and customs become something meaningful and fruitful only when one can find oneself in a life path. Devotional worlds remain external to oneself seemingly offering some comfort and consolation whereby one nails oneself to beliefs and practices that makes oneself in line with the devotional world. Many of the empty and sterile forms of devotional practices simply deny reality whether it be personal realities of oneself, of the community, or social or cultural phenomena. Instead they tend to promote self-righteousness and condemn others.

They learn to be happy in a comfort within the smoky shades which they learned to call as piety. It is really alarming about a generation when they are deeply interested in religious activities and pious practices, but are struck down

when faced with a struggle whether spiritual, emotional, or social. In fact, people in a devotional world encourages to deny or neglect the real conflicts. Having Christ in our hearts, we are to walk through the struggles and conflicts, with truth and humility, and courage and compassion. Christ should be there as the interior strength instead of being an ideal, principle, or an object of devotional practice.

We need to be enabled to understand the truth within the struggles and conflicts and dialogue with them. The symbols and myths within devotions that become easy solutions, interpretations, and part of religious imaginations do not provide such apt realisation or proper understanding. Conflicts and challenges are not something that should be denied or neglected. They are the real crosses that are to be embraced with responsibility. Only there we can find Christian hope, and offer Christian hope to the world.

Real devotions would seek truth of the living situations, and might reformulate practices that can bring transformation in our attitudes and responses. It is very crucial to reflect whether our devotional practices and religious imaginations (the way we imagine about God, heaven, blessing, life...) intent to make a Christ-formation happen in our person and communities, or, rather, we simply look for pleasing God expect favours for our private world. The answer may show why people are often in a 'worry and hurry' within devotional practices; which novena/Bible verse to be said for 'this particular purpose, which saint to be prayed to, which Our Lady to be visited, how much money to be given in donation, how many masses I must offer... They are found within their devotional bubble-world which are not devotions at all. To safeguard one's own devotional wall itself becomes a serious

concern. It does bring about an absence of Christ-presence and so a timely Christian presence.

Perhaps it is in one's helplessness one seeks any ways to get out of it. Sometimes this helplessness is seen being exploited. For some, creation of a devotional world is an easy shelter to escape from commitments. Life demands commitment to oneself to understand one's own life and its struggles, and similarly about one's community and the society at large. Since one is 'busy' with pious duties (which are thought to be the only works of God) one also excuses oneself from interactions in social responsibilities.

Today we may be influenced by the media and corporate world where performance is very much important. What God asks of us is not a perfect performance, but a responsible belonging. It is that relationship that heals, strengthens and gives us growth. If we can bring the very life of 'ours' with all its stress, uncertainties, and challenges, we will find grace meeting these situations. It is easy to create a devotional world, because it is about performance. But a pious and loyal heart cannot limit to performances. It does not see the need for worried doings to please God, ensure protection, cause blessings etc, because it has known Christ. Though it takes up crosses it has hope – devotion is to be the reflection of that relationship and hope.



Prof Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ: Committed to the Country and Church

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ

Papal Seminary, Pune

A special volume has been brought out in honour, **Prof Dr Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ**, Professor (Emeritus), Systematic Theology, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. He was the pioneer of Vatican II reforms in India and the editor of *Asian Journal for Religious Studies*.

After having specialised in Vatican II, he has been teaching various subjects like Theological Anthropology, Ecclesiology and Priesthood for more than thirty years. After his retirement, he has been editing two journals, *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* and *Asian Journal of Religious Studies*.

Dr Kunnumpuram is a versatile personality: a committed professor of theology, creative thinker, prolific writer, gentle mentor and compassionate guide to many people. As a professor of theology, he has been the pioneer to introduce and enable the vision of Vatican II to the Indian Church. As a thinker, he has contributed significantly to an Indian theology that is both contextual and relevant. As a writer, he

has founded *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* and edited *Asian Journal for Religious Studies*, besides his own numerous books. As a mentor, he has been inspiring a countless number of students in their academic and affective progress. As a guide, he has been accompanying numerous persons in their intellectual and spiritual journey. In short, he has been a critical, creative and gentle personality who has touched the lives of many people respectfully and reverentially! He cherished freedom, affirmed the dignity and accepted others as they are and rejoiced in the happiness of others!

Coming to the academic part: as a theologian and teacher, he has been pleading for a Church that is more human and promoting human persons who are more liberated and liberating. He has been consistently pleading for a spirituality that is rooted in a personal encounter with God and in the deepest human values! One of his last contributions to theology has been single-handedly editing the collected works of Samuel Rayan, a six-volume work. A remarkable contribution to the Indian Church!

Considering his invaluable contribution to Indian Christian Theology, we are planning to bring out a compilation of articles in book form in his honour. The articles are related to the themes that have been dear to Kurien: Church, human beings and spirituality. Some articles are based on his chosen writings and are meant to continue the path of theological reflection on the Indian soil.

After elaborate planning and exchange of views, the seminar was organised at Kozhikode (Calicut), Kerala, on October 17-18, 2018, with the wholehearted support of the Jesuit Province of Kerala. Eighteen theological papers were presented during these two days. Kurien had a stroke on 17

Nov 2017, and he was bedridden, and so he could not take part in this Seminar which he was eagerly preparing for. Unfortunately, just five days after the seminar, on Sunday, October 23, 2018, Kurien passed away peacefully and joyfully!

After the seminar, some more papers were added to explore Kurien's contribution to Indian Christian theology from various angles. Thus, this volume has thirty-four articles – all being expressions of love and gratitude to Kurien for what he has been personally and professionally. The introductory article by MK George SJ, Provincial, Kerala Province of the Society of Jesus, is adapted from his inaugural address at the seminar. It gives an overview of Kurien as a person and a theologian who has contributed significantly to the Indian Church. The other articles are organized into five broad sections. The first section is on Commitment to the Indian Church. Francis X D'Sa SJ, a colleague and friend of Kurien, explores the need to return to the original charism of the Church based on the cosmotheandric vision of Raimon Panikkar. The next article by Isaac Padinjarekuttu dwells on the spirit of Vatican II as the impetus for Church renewal, a theme close to the heart of Kurien. This is followed by a critical study of Onesimus in Philemon by Arul Samy ALCP/OSS, a renowned scripture scholar. Sr Shalini Mulackal PBVM challenges the Church to reclaim its prophetic mission for the poor. Paul Thelakat, reflects on the repeatable tragedy that Church at all times is confronted with. Thomas Karimundackal studies a new way of being a prophetic priest in India based on the Prophet Amos. This is followed by an article by Evelyn Montero, who pleads for a renewed participation of the poor and underprivileged in the life and spirituality of the Indian Church. This is followed by a fervent plea for radical change in the Church, by Kochurani Abraham, a

feminist theologian. Denis Rodrigues, a lay thinker and close associate of Kurien, concludes this section by pleading for a mystical Church, inspired by Karl Rahner.

The second section deals with the Church's basic openness to the world. Two American biologists discuss the future of evolution and evolutionary biology, leading us to encounter the possible collective destiny of the human family. Christian Bauer from the University of Innsbruck and a close admirer of Kurien, focuses on Church's interaction with the social media through "*Inter mirifica* heute: Eine Relecture im digitalen Zeitalter." The issue of dialoguing with other religions is further reflected on by Andreas Vonach, Old Testament scholar, University of Innsbruck, when reflects on the relevance of *Nostra Aetate* with special reference to Hinduism and Buddhism. The next two articles pay attention to the theme of ecology. The first one by Isaac Parackal relates ecology to the Eucharist, and the other by A.L. Christopher Roach, a systematic theologian, dwells on the anthropology and ecology in *Laudato Si'*, topics close to the heart of Kurien. The final article in this section is by Job Kozhamthadam who deals with the Church's openness to the world in general and science in particular.

Dialoguing with other religions is the theme of the next section. The article by Joseph Mattam explores the general principles in dialoguing with other religions. Anoop Antom SM, inspired by Kurien, studies the salvific significance of other faiths in the teachings of post-conciliar documents. Mathew Chandrankunnel CMI tries to draw the wisdom from Christian, Buddhist and Hindu religious practices. James Ponniah dwells on shared religious spaces in different religions that can promote mutually beneficial encounter among religions. Sebastian Painadath SJ, a close colleague of

Kurien, compares the spiritual experiences of the Upanishads (*advaita*) and the early Christian fathers (*theosis*). The final article by VM Jose investigates the liberative and societal dimension of authentic religious experiences.

The fundamental human search for truth and quest for dignity is the theme of the next section. As a basic condition for this search, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap raises some fundamental questions on theological truths. The article by Nishant A. Irudayadason explores the relationship between theory and praxis with special reference to theology. M.D. Joseph reflects on our collective search for truth, based on the philosopher-saint, Edith Stein. The last two articles of this section deal with human dignity, a major theme in Kurien's thought. Bishop (Emeritus) Thomas Menampampil, reflects on the meaning of human rights in a globalised world, while J. Charles Davis, discusses the two faces of dignity in terms of "Secured Worth" and "Required Recognition."

The last section of the book deals with spirituality that humanises, a theme to which Kurien devoted his entire life. Stephen Chundanthadam SJ tries to understand Kurien's own spirituality in terms of "fullness of life." Dr Victor Ferrao dwells on carnal hermeneutics and the dynamics of divine-human love. This is followed by an article by P.T. Mathew, SJ, co-organiser of the Seminar and co-editor of the book, on "formation of the heart" that is badly missing in the training of priestly candidates today. The article of Surekha Lobo focuses specifically on spirituality that humanises, drawing inspiration from Kurien himself. Paulraj Mariapusham dwells on the love commandments in St. Paul's letters, a theme personally encouraged by Kurien.

The concluding article is by Kuruvilla Pandikattu, co-editor of the book. It draws on hope, joy and freedom, which

remain the core values Kurien nourished, both as a Christian and as an author, as elaborated in his last book. It visualises a Christian living that is rooted in Christ joyfully and lovingly and at the same time affirms the freedom, dignity and worth of fellow human beings!

As for the title of this edited work: *Committed to the Church and the Country: Exploring the Theological Contributions of Prof. Dr Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ*. As we know, Kunnumpuram has been a person passionately devoted to the Church and the Nation. He was rooted in the rich heritage of India and that of the Church. He embraced the values, vision and ethos of India and the Church. He felt entirely at home in the Indian culture and Christian fellowship. His was truly a life of devotion to the country and commitment to the Church. We hope that the readers of this book will be good citizens and committed Christians!

May this volume be a modest contribution, inspired by the life of Prof Kurien Kunnupuram, SJ, to foster a shared and collective life of love, joy, peace and freedom for every individual in our vast human family! May this book further the vision of Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ who accepts, affirms and respects every individual! The book is edited by Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ and PT Mathew, SJ and published commonly by Christian World Imprints, New Delhi and Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.



Litany for Priests

Let us pray for the Holy Father: fill him with courage and grace, O Lord.

Cardinals, archbishops, and bishops: give them a shepherd's heart, O Lord.

Diocesan priests: fill them with your Spirit, Lord.

Priests in religious orders: perfect them in their calling, Lord.

Priests who are ill: heal them, Lord.

Priests who are in danger: deliver them, Lord.

Priests who are weak: strengthen them, Lord.

Priests who are poor: relieve them, Lord.

Priests who have lost their zeal: renew them, Lord.

Priests who are sad: console them, Lord.

Priests who are worried: give them peace, Lord.

Priest who are old: sustain them, Lord.

Priests who are alone: accompany them, Lord.

Missionary priests: protect them, Lord.

Priests who are preachers: enlighten them, Lord.

Priest who direct souls: instruct them, Lord.

Priests and religious who have died: bring them to glory,
Lord.

For all priests: give them Your wisdom and knowledge.

For all priests: give them Your understanding and counsel.

For all priests: give them reverence and awe of You.

For all priests: give them patience and love.

For all priests: give them obedience and kindness.

For all priests: give them a burning zeal for souls.

For all priests: give them virtues of faith, hope and love.

For all priests: give them an intense love for the Eucharist.

For all priests: give them loyalty to the Holy Father and
their Bishops.

For all priests: give them respect for life and human dig-
nity.

For all priests: give them integrity and justice.

For all priests: give them humility and generosity.

For all priests: give them strength in their labors.

For all priests: give them peace in their sufferings.
For all priests: give them great love for the Trinity.
For all priests: give them great love for Mary.
For all priests: let them be the light of Christ.
For all priests: let them be the salt of the earth.
For all priests: let them practice sacrifice and self-denial.
For all priests: let them be holy in body, mind and spirit.
For all priests: let them be men of prayer.
For all priests: may faith shine forth in them.
For all priests: may they be concerned for our salvation.
For all priests: may they be faithful to their priestly vocation.
For all priests: may their hands bless and heal.
For all priests: may they burn with love for you.
For all priests: may all their steps be for the glory of God.
For all priests: may the Holy Spirit fill them, and give them His gifts in abundance.

Anonymous