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Editorial

The Poor in Democracy

When the poor are excluded and treated as though they are responsible for their situation, Pope Francis stated that “the fundamental concept of democracy is threatened” (Catholic News Agency, 2021).

The pope called for a new global response to poverty in his World Day of the Poor message, which was issued on June 14, 2021.

“This is a challenge that governments and international organizations must meet with a long-term social model capable of combating the new kinds of poverty that are now sweeping the globe and will have a significant impact in the coming decades,” he said.

“If the poor are ostracized, as if they are to fault for their predicament, democracy is imperiled, and all social policies will fail.”

You will Have the Poor with You

The theme of this year’s World Day of the Poor is Jesus’ comments in Mark 14:7 when a woman anointed him with valuable ointment, “The poor you will always have with you.”

While Judas and others were offended by the gesture, the pope explained that Jesus welcomed it because he understood it as a reference to the anointing of his body following his crucifixion.

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“Jesus was telling them that he is the poorest of the poor, since he symbolizes all of them.” “The Son of God welcomed the woman’s gift also for the sake of the impoverished, the lonely, the marginalized, and the victims of discrimination,” the pope wrote.

“Only a woman’s sensitivity allowed her to comprehend what the Lord was thinking. That anonymous woman became the first of those women who were significantly present during the highest events of Christ’s life: his crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection, possibly to represent all those women who would be silenced and endure violence over the centuries.”

“Women, who are frequently discriminated against and barred from positions of responsibility, are recognized in the Gospels to play a significant part in the history of revelation,” the pope stated.

“Jesus then goes on to link that woman to the great evangelizing effort, saying, ‘Amen, I say to you, wherever the Gospel is preached to the whole globe, what she has done will be told in memory of her’ (Mark 14:9).”

Propensity to Ignore the Poor

Against the backdrop of the coronavirus epidemic, the pope bemoaned what he called a growing propensity to ignore the poor.

“There appears to be a rising sense that the poor are not only to blame for their predicament, but also that they are an intolerable burden for an economic system that prioritizes the interests of a few privileged people,” he said.

“A market that rejects ethical norms or selectively applies them produces inhumane conditions for those who are already in desperate positions.” New traps of poverty and exclusion are being created by unscrupulous economic and financial actors who lack a humanitarian conscience and social responsibility.”

”Last year we experienced yet another scourge that multiplied the numbers of the poor: the pandemic, which continues to affect millions of people and, even when it does not bring suffering and death, is nonetheless a portent of poverty,” he continued, referring to COVID-19, which swept the world in 2020.

“Some nations are suffering exceptionally severe consequences from the pandemic, resulting in a lack of basic necessities among the most vulnerable of their people,” the pope wrote. Long lineups in front of soup kitchens are a visible indicator of this decline.”

“The poor have grown disproportionately, and they will continue to do so in the coming months,” says the report. According to a World Bank report released in October, the epidemic could push an additional 115 million people into poverty by 2021. It predicted that global extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day, would climb for the first time in more than two decades in 2020.

“Some nations are suffering exceptionally severe consequences from the pandemic, resulting in a lack of basic necessities among the most vulnerable of their people,” the pope wrote. Long lineups in front of soup kitchens are a visible indicator of this decline.”

“At the global level, there is an obvious need to discover the most appropriate measures of combatting the virus without supporting political objectives.” He added: “It is especially critical to provide real replies to the unemployed, who comprise a large number of fathers, mothers, and young people.”

The Poor as Means of Redemption

In his apostolic letter *Misericordia et misera*, delivered in 2016 at the end of the Church’s Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis founded the World Day of the Poor. He came up with the idea during the Jubilee for Socially Excluded People, he explained.

In 2017, the pope wrote in his first World Day of the Poor message, “At the conclusion of the Jubilee of Mercy, I wanted to offer the Church a World Day of the Poor, so that throughout the world Christian

communities can become an ever greater sign of Christ's charity for the least and those most in need."

Every year on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, a week before the Feast of Christ the King, the Day is commemorated. The Vatican was compelled to trim back its commemoration of World Day of the Poor in 2020 due to coronavirus limitations. As in past years, it was unable to host a "field hospital" for the destitute in St. Peter's Square. It did, however, provide 5,000 gifts to the destitute in Rome and 350,000 masks to schools.

Pope Francis kept his tradition of celebrating the day with a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. Archbishop Rino Fisichella, who delivered the papal message at a Vatican press conference on June 14, 2021 reported that the pope cited St. Damien of Molokai as an example. In Hawaii, the Belgian priest, who was canonized in 2009, ministered to leprosy patients.

"Pope Francis recalls this saint's witness as confirmation of so many men and women, including hundreds of priests, who have been willing to share completely in the suffering of millions of infected people in this COVID-19 drama," said the president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

The pope claimed in the message, which he signed on June 13, the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua, that people in rich countries are "less willing than in the past to address poverty."

"The relative wealth to which we have become used makes accepting sacrifices and adversity more difficult. People are willing to go to any length to avoid being deprived of the benefits of easy wealth," he claimed.

"As a result, they develop resentment, spasmodic uneasiness, and demands, which lead to fear, anxiety, and aggression in certain situations." This is not how we should build our future; those views are types of poverty in and of themselves, which we must not ignore."

"We must be alert to reading the signs of the times, which prompt us to seek for new methods to be evangelists in the modern world. Immediate aid in meeting the needs of the poor must not prohibit us from foresight in putting in place new expressions of Christian love

and charity in response to the new forms of poverty that mankind is experiencing today.”

The pope expressed his hope that World Day of the Poor observance will spark a fresh evangelization campaign aimed at helping the poor. “We cannot wait for the destitute to come knocking at our door; we must reach them in their homes, in hospitals and nursing homes, on the streets and in the dark corners where they often hide, in shelters and reception centers,” he wrote (Catholic News Agency, 2021).

The pope concluded his message by mentioning Fr. Primo Mazzolari, a prominent 20th-century Italian priest whom he honored in 2017. “Let us adopt Fr. Primo Mazzolari’s passionate plea: ‘I urge you not to ask me if there are impoverished people, who they are, or how many there are, because I feel that those questions are a distraction or an excuse for making a plain appeal to our consciences and emotions...’ I’ve never counted the poor because they can’t be counted; the poor should be embraced rather than counted.’

“We are surrounded by the destitute. How wonderful it would be if we could honestly declare, “We, too, are poor,” for only then will we be able to fully identify them, make them a part of our lives, and use them as a means of redemption” (Catholic News Agency, 2021).

From Partisanship to Participation

Pope Francis has issued a warning about countries abandoning democracy and asked citizens to transition from “partisanship to participation” in order to defend society’s most vulnerable members. On Saturday, December 4, 2021, the head of the Roman Catholic Church addressed political leaders in Athens, Greece, as part of a three-day visit to Greece.

Francis also warned against populism and chastised politicians who make false promises in their “obsessive search for popularity,” though he did not identify any specific person or country.

“We cannot avoid noting with concern how we are witnessing a retreat from democracy today, and not only in Europe,” the pontiff remarked at the country’s presidential palace.

“Democracy necessitates everyone’s engagement and involvement. As a result, it necessitates perseverance and hard work “Francis stated his opinion.

“It’s complicated, whereas authoritarianism is absolute, and populism’s simple solutions appear appealing,” he continued (Roche 2021).

Francis appeared to take aim at nationalism, saying that the European community is “prone to kinds of nationalistic self-interest, rather than being an engine of solidarity,” as he has been critical of former President Donald Trump’s policies.

”Europe appears at times obstructed and disjointed,” the pope observed. The Western society is “stuck” in a “frenzy of a thousand earthly concerns and the unquenchable hunger of a depersonalizing consumerism,” according to Francis.

He referenced to democracy’s history—Athens is widely regarded as the birthplace of the form of government—and called for a revival of “the art of the common good” and a shift from “partisanship to participation” that would focus on “the weaker strata of society” (Roche 2021).

The way the poor and the marginalised are respected in a country points to its democratic spirit. Inspired by enlightened and liberal education, as well as Christian vision, European countries had tried to establish a political system that was egalitarian, just and democratic. In such a system, each individual is treated with respect. There the dignity and worth of the individual can never be sacrificed.

Such an ideal is threatened today by the short-sighted vision of politicians who seeks partisan benefits and seek popularity and power at the larger expenses of the poor. The killing of so many migrants is a powerful but tragic reminder of this one-sided approach to human beings.

As the Pope reminds us, we need to understand that the poor are not to be blamed for their poverty. The larger system, of which each one of us is a member, is also at least partly responsible. We need to remind ourselves that we have created an economic, political and cultural system that seeks to devour itself! Putting the blame on the poor and the helpless is not going to solve the larger problem, of which we are all part of.

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Thus while we need to embrace the poor with compassion, we also need to set up and humane system that takes care of each individual and the larger eco-system. This is the challenge of being a Christian and being a human today!

What the father of the nation told us in 1948 is valid today also: “I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *swaraj* [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.”

May the new year be a blessed one for all of us, especially those affected with the pandemic!

The Editor

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Dying to Live

Victor Ferrao

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Abstract: Christians live the Easter every day. They are the Easter people. Therefore, dying to live has to be our discipleship. Nancy relates what is intact/ safe to what is dead. We cannot be choosing safety, security, stability ... but have the challenge to choose the resurrection that is lived in the emancipative dance of dying to live. Literally, when we die to live, we come close to the dynamic play of the rhythm of resurrection that is eventing in our world.

Keywords: Touch of Jesus, Dying to Death, Resurrection.

There is an untouchable section that is considered sacred in all religions. Derrida says that religion cannot be disassociated from its own discourse of salvation. That is to save, be safe and

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save oneself. To save itself is the thing of any religion. It becomes materialised as being uncontaminated or untainted or untouched and therefore holy, sacred and sound. Derrida sees that every organized religion has what he calls auto-immunity that keeps it intact or safe. Religion has a way of saving itself before saving its subjects. Actually, auto-immunity is only a phantasm. It is the diehard conservatives that conserve and keep safe and fight the vulnerable sides of religion from harming it and maintain its sacrosanctity. It is they who are dying (thirsting) to let their faith live untainted by anything that they deem as adulteration that poses the dangers of death of their religion. But from the Christian point of view, the sacred has to be protected from this drive for protection as it is only in dying that one saves oneself. Jesus taught that he who tries to save himself will lose his life (Mt. 16; 25). Unless a grain of wheat dies it cannot bear fruit (Jn. 12:24). This is why religion does have to protect itself from its own drive to security, protection and safety. We may have to think about how institutionalized religions/ faiths survive as untouchables, untouched and intact and therefore safe and therefore holy. Therefore, religions touch without letting be touched. Touch can be contaminating. hence, being untouched is a way of constructing sacrosanctity. This is why more often than not religion has become untouchable touching its subjects.

Touchable Touching of Jesus

Derrida writes about the touchable touching of Jesus. Derrida says, “salvation saves by touching, and saviour, the one who touches is touched: saved, safe, unscathed, touched by grace”. Jesus the saviour is not only touching but he is being touched too. To him to save/heal is to touch and be touched. He also touched without touching as in the case of the lady that touched him (Mk.5:21-34). This is not touching that is touching without letting be touched as we see in the case of institutionalised religions. It is touching without touching. Derrida thinks that often organized religions become touch-me-not like Jesus in the Gospel of John where for a moment Jesus became an untouchable (Jn 20:17). ‘The risen Jesus

says 'touch me not' to Mary Magdalene when she recognised him. Thus, what started as touching the untouchables for Derrida became frozen and transformed as untouchable touching without being touched. This is his deconstructive critique of Christianity.

There may be truth in what Derrida has to say about organized religions yet we have to pay attention to his friend and disciple Jean Luc Nancy who describes Derrida's position as rabbinical scepticism. While discussing Christ's relation to touching, Nancy arrives at a new interpretation of resurrection. Nancy states that Christianity is a religion of touch and the incident

What started as touching the untouchables for Derrida became frozen and transformed as untouchable touching without being touched. This is his deconstructive critique of Christianity.

that Derrida mentions is only an exception. He says it is the only time when Christ does not want to be touched or held back. This is because He says Christ does not cease to depart. Christ is not present in the usual sense but is now in a condition of departure and therefore has become untouchable and inaccessible to touch. This means Jesus Christ has assumed the state of being between and beyond this life. He is now in the mode of departure which is also a mode of arrival from another point of view. He is now of the order of arrival and departure. This is why there are the appearances of resurrection to the Disciple where he touches them and allows them to touch him. We are faced with a point where there is a demand to touch him is made by the absent Thomas who does not touch but bows down in faith when he gets his opportunity (Jn 20: 24-29).

Continuous Death to Death

Nancy sees another important side in Christ's request not to touch him. He holds that Christ says, 'don't touch me because I am touching you and this touch is such that it holds you at a distance. This is so in his view because resurrection is not a return to life. It is not a simple resuscitation. He thinks of resurrection as a reconfiguration of death and the dying. It is the continuous death of the powers of death. It is a continuous dying that becomes a living. This is how it is a continuous departure and also arrival. The resurrected Christ continues renewing the world by letting the forces of death die so that new life may come. It belongs to the logic of departure and arrival. To understand it we have to leave our habitual thinking through the dichotomy of death and life. We have to think both death and life together. Death continues in the risen Christ. It is only death that makes us understand what is resurrection. Outside death, there is no meaning of resurrection.

Conclusion

Resurrection in this way is a present and is a continuous event and not one spectacular onetime event of the past. The event of the past is still eventing and continues in the same power and intensity. Therefore, salvation is a dynamic and continuous event. It is not dead and belongs to the past. It is present and active. This is why

Death continues in the risen Christ. It is only death that makes us understand what is resurrection. Outside death, there is no meaning of resurrection.

Derrida is right in his critique of organized religion that in his opinion has become untouchable and wants to touch without letting be touched. Such a religion is outside the economy of dying to live. Such religions have become dead and do not allow the rhythm of dying to live to touch them but embrace what may be called protection from dying. This is why we have the challenge to embrace the dynamism of the Paschal Mystery. It is eventing with the same intensity and power today as on the first Easter day. We

live the Easter every day. St. Pope John Paul II taught us that we are the Easter people. Therefore, dying to live has to be our discipleship. Nancy relates what is intact/ safe to what is dead. We cannot be choosing safety, security, stability ... but have the challenge to choose the resurrection that is lived in the emancipative dance of dying to live. Literally, when we die to live, we come close to the dynamic play of the rhythm of resurrection that is eventing in our world.



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When *The Bible* Encounters *The Gateless Barrier*

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Abstract: There is a long way, annoying and wishing to avoid, but at the same time and unavoidable and fruitful, that might be leading the faithful from an anxiety for going astray on our own path of belief to hope for reciprocal learning that the mutual change and growth through dialogue with religious other can occur. How we can learn from the faith of the other, how both sides can change and grow mutually? We can get help from interreligious dialogue accompanying an intrareligious dialogue, being often reiterated by the “apostle of interreligious dialogue” Raimon Panikkar, which is inner dialogue within ourselves. However, we often hear more talk about controversy regarding interreligious dialogue itself than actual dialogue. Here I attempted to dialogue within myself by questioning myself and reflecting on my daily life, getting help through both the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and *The Gateless Barrier* of the Chinese Zen master Wumen Huikai: two

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different traditions have shed rays of new light on my daily life, and have helped me to arrive at a better understanding of the heart of both Jesus and the Buddha.

Keywords: Interreligious dialogue, Reciprocal illumination, Grammar of religions, Truth and daily life, The Gateless Barrier

“ Into the Narrow Gate ...” “ There Is No Gate...”

What distinguishes interreligious dialogue from interreligious debate is each party’s sincere effort not to detect the weak and potentially false points in the other’s belief and grammar of its expression, but to discover its strengths and truths in order to learn from them. In sincere dialogue the motivation of reciprocal learning is ideally found on both sides in accord with what Leonard Swidler long ago counted as the first commandment of “The Dialogue Decalogue” (Swidler 1983: 1-2). The aim of the interreligious dialogue is mutual change and growth through reciprocal learning. Be that as it may, no one can avoid the religious challenge in the dialogue: how we can learn from the faith of the other without going astray on our own path of belief? how both sides can change and grow mutually? how my faith can embrace another’s belief without being required to accept his or her faith or deny my own? We can get help from the notion of “intrareligious dialogue” which was often reiterated by the “apostle of interreligious dialogue” Raimon Panikkar. He stressed that if interreligious dialogue is to be real dialogue, an intrareligious dialogue must accompany it. By this he means inner dialogue within ourselves, an encounter in the depth of our personal religiousness after having met another religious experience on that very intimate level (Panikkar 1978: 40). This means that interreligious dialogue must begin by questioning myself; it requires a self-reflective attitude and so must start from the existential situation where I happen to be.

I begin this paper from my own personal situation as a Catholic priest and at the same time a student and professional teacher of Buddhist philosophy. I have done spiritual practices in accord with both the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and *The Gateless Barrier* of the Chinese Zen master Wumen Huikai (無門慧開) (Shibayama 2000), jotting down my feelings and insights little by little in the form of a diary. I would sometimes write once a day, sometimes once a week, other times once a month; and sometimes months passed by before I made further notes. The results became a sizable volume.

How fruitful it would be if the wisdom of silence manifested in *The Gateless Barrier* can provide a fresh ray of light on the words of the Bible and if the words of love expressed in the Bible can provide even a small amount of water of life to the forty-eight teachings (*koans*) of *The Gateless Barrier*? It is not religious belief, doctrine, or grammar of expression that connects people, but religious faith and experience. I here share some examples from my own experience of what Arvind Sharma has aptly called “reciprocal illumination” (Sharma 2005: ix-x). Two different traditions can reciprocally shed rays of new light on one’s daily life; and the Christian and Buddhist traditions have helped me to arrive at a deeper, wider and therefore better understanding of the life and mercy of both Jesus and the Buddha. The essence of the teachings of Jesus and Buddha points to the heart. The heart is something that cannot be conveyed grammatically, but I try here, rather light-heartedly in my everyday language, to write down the insights that I experienced in my personal journey to the heart. Since each of us has a different place in life with a different personal history, another person’s experience and language may be very different from mine; but please be generous in your judgment, taking my writings for light reading as you live your way. I frame each section with a pair of brief expressions from the Bible and *The Gateless Barrier*.

“Do You Not Know Where the Lord Was Placed?” “Nothing”

Whenever I moved from one place to another, I realized that I possess so many things that I don't necessarily need for my daily living. I usually move every four or five years to a different religious community. Each time I move to a new place, I try to sort out what to take, leave or throw away. When we move to the place of death, what will we take, leave behind and throw away? In fact, when we leave for our far-off destination of death, there is nothing we can take or throw away. We only leave something behind. The moment we leave a place never to return, what we will leave behind will clearly show what kind of life we lived.

In John's Gospel, Jesus's tomb is empty. The stone blocking the tomb has been removed, and the tomb is empty except for the coverings and linen that covered the dead body of Jesus. Seeing the empty tomb, Magdalene and Peter cannot accept Jesus's resurrection; but John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, sees, and believes. How could an empty tomb be a sign that Jesus has risen? The reason is that it is empty but full. The empty tomb is filled with the life of a man who has lived an empty life. Literally, it is “Empty fullness.” Jesus's life was an empty life from beginning to end. He was born by borrowing the empty womb of Mary, spending his first night in an empty manger, and he was even buried in an empty tomb upon his death. In his daily life, he always set aside the stones of self-will, self-interest, and self-love and lived only with God's love and mercy toward his neighbors. His disciple John reads the life of Jesus filled with love in the empty tomb. That's why he can see and believe. He understands that Jesus died the way he lived and was risen the way he lived.

All human beings die the way they lived and are risen the way they lived. Entering into further intrareligious dialogue within

myself as a Christian with Buddhist experience, I recall that in Buddhism, everyone is believed to be reincarnated. Being seen by others according to how they lived in the world, they are resurrected or reincarnated in the hearts of those who were left behind. If a person lived in the form of a dog, he or she will be resurrected in the form of a dog. If one lived in the form of a snake, he will be reincarnated as a snake. Jesus died the way he emptied himself during his life in the world, so John believes in his resurrection when he finds his tomb empty. To John, the empty tomb is a sign of the full life that Jesus lived.

Early that morning, Magdalena, who was the first to visit the tomb where Jesus was buried, sees the empty tomb and weeps. “Someone took the body of the Lord out of the tomb. I don’t know where he was placed” (Jn 20:2). She does not look for the living and breathing life of Jesus, but the cold and dead body of Jesus. Although she loved Jesus, she could not read the life and message of Jesus, which filled the empty tomb to the full. Love can open one’s eyes, but blind them at the same time.

Like a blind Magdalena, a monk asks Master Joju. “Do dogs have Buddha-nature too?” Master Joju responds: “Nothing”(無), which is the first rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. The monk’s question means “Where is Buddha-nature?”, “Show me the Buddha-nature.” He asks to show the Buddha nature right before his eyes, like Magdalena weeping for the body of Jesus who was dead. There is no such thing as Buddha-nature that can be found, just as there is no physical body of Jesus to be found in his empty tomb. Before reflecting on what our eyes see and our ears hear, our heart is empty. However, an empty heart can be filled with Buddha-nature just as the empty tomb is full of the life of Jesus. Buddha-nature has no beginning and no end. It is incomprehensible, invisible, and untouchable; but It can be abundantly experienced in our daily living together. Buddha-nature is not to be found, but to be experienced and lived in person. However, only those who have

experienced empty fullness can recognize it. We cannot grammatically describe with language where the essence of the experience is and what it is. That is why it is nothing.

The reciprocal illumination that can be gain from pairing Biblical teaching with Buddhist teaching leads us to recognize that this ‘nothing’ does not mean non-existence or absence as the opposite of ‘being’ or ‘existence.’ We cannot say that truth exists just because we say it exists and give grammatical expression to it or that the truth does not exist because we say it does not. In the same way, we cannot say that the truth exists because we positively assert its existence nor that the truth vanishes just because we deny its existence or cannot express it. The fact is that freedom itself is far away from the conceptual thought process and grammatical logic that we concoct within the relative space of existence and non-existence. The truth is free from any illusory discernment (*vikalpa*). Moreover, whether one refers to it as “existent,” “non-existent,” or by any other term, truth has no effect on the Buddha-nature itself and does not cause any change. Buddha-nature is the truth itself that transcends existence and non-existence, the way itself transcends existence and non-existence. It is the very thing that cuts off the conceptual thought process represented by discriminating discernment. The mind being locked up in discernment over the existence and non-existence can never come close to the truth. That’s why the word ‘nothing’ became the first barrier to Zen.

In Genesis, God creates the world out of nothing. Far from being the opposite of ‘existence,’ this ‘nothing’ transcends the concept of ‘non-existence.’ Since God is Being itself and the Whole of everything, nothing can exist outside of God; nor does the reality of ‘nothing’ exist separately. Creation is from nothing in the sense that nothing can exist apart from God. In God, moreover, the distinction between existence and non-existence loses its power; so it does not matter whether creation

is from ‘nothing’ or from ‘being.’ Creation is not an act that takes place ‘outside’ of God, but an inner activity within God.

Creation within God is possible because God is essentially an empty existence. Because divinity is empty or void, all things can be placed therein. Emptying oneself and giving up one’s space is called “Love”. People call it unconditional love; and because it is unconditional love, there is no distinction between existence and non-existence, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, big and small. Everything in God is full. It is literally an empty fullness and creation out of nothing.

Jesus could live a life of emptiness because he was so fully captivated by the unconditional love of God. Christians who have been baptized to become one with Jesus (Gal 3:27) must also be captivated by that love and become one with self-emptying love like Jesus. All discrimination must disappear and become one with unconditional love, that is, “nothing.” As someone said, a gram of action matters much more than a ton of ideas. It is much more of a burden to learn and live out the life of enlightenment than to conceptually think about what self-emptying life is or grammatically express what the Buddha-nature is and where it is. The living and breathing life in each of us is far more precious than a dead body. It is empty but full. Do dogs have Buddha-nature? Where is the dead Jesus? It is the truth of life and the truth that cannot be tasted by conceptual thinking trapped in the relative space of existence or non-existence. If we cannot experience empty fullness in ourselves, we might not find it anywhere else.

The grammar of Christianity is quite different from that of Buddhism. However, there is quite an overlap in the art of life (*ars vitae*), on how to live here and now. Of course, just because two religions have overlap, it does not necessarily mean they are the same teachings. While Christianity uses its own subject and predicate, Buddhism uses its own object and complement to unravel the content and form of life. However, it is easy to miss the point if we get too caught up in concepts and grammar. When it comes to

communicating in one's native tongue, a person can freely express all one's thoughts; but when it comes to communicating in a second language, everyone must have experienced the feeling of being stuck while trying to express one's truth. One needs to stand above concepts to achieve free expression and concomitant illumination and get out of slavery to grammar.

“Let Me See, Again.” “Did You Have Breakfast?”

When a group bears fruit abundantly, it means that someone has fallen to the ground like a grain of wheat that has decomposed after the fall. On the other hand, lack of fruit in a group means that no one has been willing to become the grain of wheat. Whether at home, at work, in a temple or church, there are no exceptions. I once had a chance to stay in a Catholic monastery for about six months. It was a fairly large monastery with a retreat house for visitors to pray and a convent where twenty or so nuns lived. The monastery building was always kept very tidy and the hallways so clean, almost shiny. There were beautiful pictures and decorative script hanging in every corner of the hallways; and the flower beds were carefully cared for, with no weeds in sight. Even the garbage dump in the far corner was always well kept. This was all because some persons fell to the ground and became grains of wheat.

A grain of wheat that has fallen to the ground is not clearly visible; it is buried deep in the ground, has rotted and died. Even people with the best eyesight cannot discern it well. Only persons with enlightened eyes who become grains of wheat themselves like those they see can recognize it. The place where the grain of wheat falls is the time and space of our daily living. A grain of wheat cannot fall to a place apart from daily life. Many of us, however, tell our neighbors that we will become grains of wheat in faraway places and give pledges and make plans to become grains of wheat for our country and people, for the whole world and other grand entities. There are many who

raise their voices to become grains of wheat, willing to sacrifice their lives for the democratization of society; but only a few are willing to put up with small sacrifices for democratization within their own family or and ready to serve friends living right next door. There are many 'religious people' who run around evangelizing or for promoting the ultimate Buddha land, but there are few 'faithful' who are willing to become grains of wheat in daily living in their own community.

Most of us fail in our daily life, but go on living unaware that we have failed. So Lao-tzu says paradoxically, "He who treasures his body as much as the world can care for the world. He who loves his body as much as the world can be entrusted with the world" (*Tao Te Ching*, ch. 13). One shouldn't call oneself selfish because one values and cares about one's own body. Abstract ideologies and 'great entities' like world, country, and our people are high or far away. They are not by my side, not living and breathing beings in my daily life. In a word, they are dead. Our bodies and the lives of our neighbors are alive, breathing with us. That is why Jesus says, "He who is faithful in little things is also faithful in great things" (Lk 16: 10) and, "You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31). A person who does not cherish and love himself, cannot love others. Everyday life is the owner of a clothing store in *Dongdaemun* Market and the woman who runs a stall in *Jagalchi* Market. Everyday living comes alive and moving with life force. A person who cherishes life is a person who values concrete daily life, and such a person is a person who opens his or her eyes to life and sees the world directly.

We are often blind because everyday life seems so trivial or demands too much of us and gets so annoying. The man who cried out to Jesus and asked, "Let me see, again" (Mk 10: 51) could see at once. Master Joju would ask him instead, "Did you have breakfast?"

A monk comes to Joju say. "I would like you to teach me." Joju asks, "Did you eat porridge for breakfast?" "Yes, I did." "Then, you

should wash your bowl,” which is the 7th rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. Some people may criticize Joju’s response as being bland and unkind, but there is no one more kind. Kindly, Joju spreads his teaching twice: “Eat” and “Wash your dish.” The truth and *Tao*(道) breaths and pervades everyday lives.

To a blind man’s request that he can see again, Jesus replies, “Go,” then kindly adds, “Your faith has saved you.” Where should he go? This is an invitation to enter the daily scene of eating and washing dishes. It is a call to enter into the life where one now stands, into the life of one’s neighbor. When we commit ourselves to the faith that the truth lives and breathes in our daily actions, we can rot and die like a grain of wheat and bear much fruit. The grammatical expressions that Jesus and Joju use stand out for their stark differences, but this is the salvation that I and any Christian or Buddhist can taste in our daily lives. Interreligious and intrareligious reflection on their different modes of expression in tandem can contribute to change and growth through reciprocal illumination.

We need to reopen our eyes and cherish our daily life. Jesus is a person who values and cherishes everyday life, who is adept at finding God in everyday life. Jesus’ basic message to God is always the same: our daily lives and encounters with others are the house where God dwells, the place of God’s presence. Similar to Joju’s koans, all of Jesus’ parables are stories of encountering God in our daily lives. Sowing seeds, plowing fields, finding lost sheep and money, meeting the sick, attending weddings, eating and washing are all part of our daily lives. We can go on a treasure hunt today, seeking those who are the grains of wheat that have fallen to the ground in the daily life of our local community.

**“You Do Not Believe Me Because I Speak the Truth.”
“Three Pounds of Flax Roots!”**

In the community where I live, about thirty priests live together. Some have been priests for over fifty years, while others have just been ordained. All are dedicated to their respective fields of study to realize the truth and the value of life that Jesus taught in words and deeds 2,000 years ago. The truth Jesus showed us is one. The Bible has recorded it, and various commentaries and documents supplement it. Probably each of the priests’ conceptual explanations of what the truth is is almost identical, not far from the scope of the commentaries. However, specific expressions of the truth lived by each of them in their daily living varies widely.

A person in love chooses melons and apples with the other person in mind. If I love myself most, I put the best melons and apples in my mouth. If I loved another, I would save the best for that person.

One day, there were as many Korean melons as the priests eating at mealtime. Some looked good, some not. I unconsciously sought one that had a bright yellow colour and clear white bands. I picked the one that looked the ripest and most delicious and returned to my table. It tasted fragrant and sweet when I took a bite after peeling off the skin; and I happily finished one whole melon, satisfied with my excellent choice. I guess I have always lived my life making

choices like picking a melon with the intention of taking the best for myself. Most of us have our own criteria when it comes to making choices, no matter how trivial. We seem to make unconscious choices, but we habitually follow the standards and values ingrained in our bodies and minds.

We usually choose something based on ourselves, for we tend to put ourselves first. So of the thirty melons in the basket, the one that looked the most delicious disappeared first, then one after another. If so, who chooses the least tasty-looking melon? When I was growing up, my mother always chose spoiled apples for herself, because she put other family members first. Sometimes she even gave up a spoiled one. She wanted to put a little more in her children’s mouths. That’s how my mother

made her choices. A person in love chooses melons and apples with the other person in mind. If I love myself most, I put the best melons and apples in my mouth. If I loved another, I would save the best for that person. If I asked my mother, "What is truth?" she would silently point to a spoiled apple. To my mother, truth is that apple. Hers is a life truth that is unacceptable and even unbelievable for persons who have never chosen a bad apple out of unselfish love, losing themselves.

Jesus always speaks the truth. That is why people don't believe him. They cannot accept Jesus' truth because they have never thought of or lived the truth even once in their life. Jesus first chose the poor, reached out to them, and stayed with them. As seemingly foolish as my mother choosing rotten apples, Jesus chose the poor; and he himself was poor. The poor also chose Jesus, but the people he dealt with were hesitant to choose the poor. Similarly, the poor choose the church these days, but Catholic and Protestant churches hesitate to choose the poor, because a non-poor church cannot choose poverty. So Jesus says, "You do not believe me because I speak the truth" (Jn 8:45).

For most people, the truth is not the poor who live among us; and most will never prefer to choose the poor. For most, the truth is thought of as existing out of reach, 'up there' or 'far away.' Since they think truth is eternal and infinite, only the truth that is out of their reach is worthy of its name. Such an unchanging and infinite world is only possible in the world of concept and thought. The world of experience that Jesus and Buddhist masters point to is always changing and finite. That is why people tend to seek the truth as firmly set conceptual thoughts in their heads, not in the shift of concrete, empirical realities. What they are looking for are plausible views, claims, and explanations of what truth and poverty should be. The reason people seek the truth through conceptually grammatical explanations is that conceptual truth does not interfere with their lives. Its only value, however, is as a kind of decorative accessory that satisfies intellectual vanity.

A monk once came to Master Dongsan and asked, "What is Buddha?" Dongsan answered, says: "Three pounds of flax roots!" which is the 18th rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. The monk who posed the question

was probably expecting a nice conceptual explanation that could provide answers to such questions as what Buddha should be and how we should understand Buddha. But Buddha cannot be known by asking questions or understood in one's head. So Master Dongsan introduced the truth of the world called Buddha simply by saying the seemingly meaningless words, "Three pounds of flax roots!" How can three pounds of flax roots be Buddha? On the other hand, how can a person who does not know what Buddha is think that three pounds of flax roots are not Buddha? Likewise, how can one who does not know what the truth is think that rotten apples and poverty are not the truth?

What constitutes Buddha lies not in the realm of thought, but in the realm of experience; it is not a matter of dogma, but of faith. We can teach what Buddha is, but if we do not have faith in the Buddha, we cannot experience it. Without experience, Buddhist or Christian, we may never be able to know what it is. Faith is not an unconditional acceptance of a particular teaching. It is an adventure where one leaves the known world and moves toward the unknown. Faith is courage to break the mold and take a leap into a new world. It is a challenge that disclaims the familiar and throws oneself into the unknown. My own intrareligious self-reflection has led me to begin to realize that if one's heart is not here, there is no courage to take on religious adventures and challenges; and faith and experience will not follow. For faith and experience are matters of the heart.

As long as a person is caught up with the grammatical phrase "Why are three pounds of flax roots a Buddha?" and seeks discernment in the head, one will never escape delusion. As long as we study apples and analyze poverty entangled in the question of how rotten apples and poverty can be truth, we can never enjoy freedom and enlightenment. As long as the non-poor church shies away from the poor and thus from Jesus, as long as we move away from the hearts of Master Dongsan and our mothers, the truth will always be eons away.

"I Am the Vine and You Are the Branches." "The Whole World Is One with You."

My uncle, a farmer, used to go out to check on the rice field every morning and evening. One day, I heard, my aunt shouting out a rather bitter question behind his back, "Why do you go out to the fields every day when there's nothing to do?" My uncle went on out to the fields without any

reply. After dinner, just out of curiosity, I asked him why he had to go out every day when there was nothing to do like my aunt said. He replied, "All crops grow at the sound of a farmer's footsteps." God, like a farmer, also comes to us every day, morning and evening. God wants us to grow in his presence as we listen to the sound of his footsteps every day. Not everyone can hear the sound of his footsteps; there are probably more people who cannot hear it than those who can. Nonetheless, God always comes and stays with us.

God comes to us every day, but he is clearly not a good farmer. We cannot call a person a good farmer just because he sows seeds. A good farmer chooses good soil and fertilizes the land well before he sows, but God does not. He sows seeds on the byways, on rocky ground, and into thorny bushes as well (Mt 13:1-9). Why does God do so? The Genesis creation story tells us how much effort God exerted for one man, Adam. God not only made the moon and the stars, animals, mountains, and seas for this one man; God also gave him a beautiful garden and a fitting mate. God sows seeds anywhere and everywhere because of his unconditional love and trust for the man he himself made with his own hands, shaped in his own image and likeness, and into which he breathed life.

The land where God sows seeds is the place where God breathes life, into the field of our hearts. God plants a vine in this field and always stays beside us twenty-four hours a day, watering morning and night. The farmer God has a son, who knows the heart of the Father better than anyone. The son tells us, "I am the vine and you are the branches" (Jn 15: 5). Vine and branches make up one tree. The tree cannot say to the branches, "I don't need you. Just go away." The farmer regards all the crops he planted as his offspring. The farmer and his crops are one body.

Carrying intrareligious reflection further, the Apostle Paul introduces a slightly different version of the expression "I am the vine and you are the branches." He speaks of "Christ as the head of one body, we as the members!" The head does not say to a hand or foot, "I don't need you. Get away from me." The head doesn't isolate or discriminate against the foot by saying, "You're so dirty. Get away." The thumb does not find faults with the little finger, saying, "Why are you so thin and small? I can't abide you." Jesus and his members are

one body, and all the members are equal. Some nuns who run social welfare facilities once told me, “We don’t feed the people who come, rather they feed us.” The sisters always refer to them, moreover, as ‘family members.’ They do not forget their gratitude toward those family members that come because they, themselves, always feel that they eat well thanks to those family members. We are all one family.

To the saying that we are all one body and one family, a virtuous old Buddhist monk once added as his shoulders were dancing with joy, “Even though a person sitting on top of a hundred-foot pole has entered realization, it is not yet real. He must step forward from the top of the pole and manifest his whole body throughout the world in ten directions,” the 46th rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. “Stepping forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole” (百尺竿頭進一步) is often cited in everyday life in East Asia. The saying could mean that even after reaching one’s lofty goal, one should not stop there, but work harder. One should not release the tension of guarding against indolence or take measures to escape a dead-end or unresolvable situation. In Zen, however, the highest level of enlightenment is expressed as “the top of a hundred-foot pole”; and the saying is used as a *koan* meaning, “One should step forward from the top.” Where can one take a step forward?

Zen practice does not end when one crosses over to the world of enlightenment. One needs to cross back again to where one originally came from, the world of everyday life. Only then will the first crossing become meaningful. In the end, we need at least two crossings. Usually, the first crossing – ‘moving upward’ toward enlightenment – is distinguished from the second – ‘moving downward’ back to everyday life. Sometimes the two crossings are described respectively as ‘centrifugal’ – gradual escape from the world of *samsāra* – and ‘centripetal’ – gradual return to the world of *samsāra*. The principles involved in the two crossings are also referred to as *prajñā* (wisdom), with a feminine character, and *karuṇā* (mercy) with a

Wisdom and mercy form one body. Confining wisdom and mercy within the grammatical framework of two mutually heterogeneous concepts, it appears that there is no direct relationship between them.

masculine character. Those principles are also compared to the two wings of a bird as self-centered and altruistic. These distinctions are made for a simple reason. If a person seeks genuine enlightenment, intangible wisdom is revealed in the world through the physical forms of mercy, like a lamp and the lamplight. Therefore, the person must “first attain enlightenment through cultivation, then save all beings” (上求菩提 下化衆生). In other words, on the true path we should all walk, “wisdom and mercy are one.”

Wisdom and mercy form one body. Confining wisdom and mercy within the grammatical framework of two mutually heterogeneous concepts, it appears that there is no direct relationship between them. Without the conceptual framework, wisdom and mercy are two different terms to describe the same reality. The difference, however, lies only in calling the reality ‘wisdom’ from an impersonal point of view and ‘mercy’ in terms of personal relationships. Wisdom is the love of truth, from which mercy overflows; and through the practice of mercy, we can experience the honey taste of wisdom. If we attain a certain level of wisdom, we should thus feel mercy toward our neighbors; and if we want to have mercy, we must acquire wisdom through experience.

In ancient India, mercy was called *karuṇā*. The etymology of *karuṇā* is *kr̥* and *kr̥*, the former meaning ‘flow down’ and ‘scatter’ and *kr̥* meaning ‘make,’ ‘practice,’ ‘accomplish,’ ‘implement.’ Therefore, in mercy that is *karuṇā*, wisdom flows down for the sake of all beings, does something for all beings. Wisdom does not remain as just wisdom; it crosses back to where it came from and undertakes merciful actions for all beings. Wisdom overflows, practices and achieves accomplishments for all. It is like when a person who has entered an intimate loving relationship with God gets completely immersed and captivated by that love. He gets internally stimulated to the point where his love overflows toward his neighbors. That is why Paul says, “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Co 5:14). The moment one receives inner stimulation and urging from the power of wisdom and mercy, discrimination between you and me disappears; and, of course, so does the distinction between right and wrong. The distinction between me and the mountain disappears, and so does the

distinction between me and my cat. The whole world becomes one body with me.

Epilogue

There were once two friends who set out on a journey to escape the life of slavery ruled by concepts and grammar. The Christian friend said that the way is narrow and the gate small (Mt 7:13); the Buddhist friend said the way is too wide and there is no gate at all (The Preface of *The Gateless Barrier*: “The Great Way has no gate.”). We all stand at the entrance to the truth and express ourselves differently. Why? Perhaps it is because Christians see the truth in terms of personal love and mercy, and Buddhists in terms of impersonal wisdom. But there is a hidden paradox here. People should see the way to a personal deity overflowing with love and mercy as wide and open to all. God’s love and mercy are far greater and broader than we think, so we should think that there is surely no gate. On the other hand, the way to disimpassioned and impersonal wisdom must be narrow, rough, and with a very small gate. The journey to enlightenment is not easy, but the two friends are at odds as to the way.

There are two kinds of gates in this world: a gate to truth and a gate to daily living. In entering the gate to truth, there is great competition, competition with oneself. The chance of winning depends mostly on how much a person can let go of his or her ego, empty and lower oneself. That is why it needs training and discipline. The more one can empty and lower oneself, the larger and wider becomes the gate to the truth. Though it be narrow and low, even a camel can easily come and go through this gate. It can become so wide open that it seems there is no gate at all. The gate to our daily living is also narrow and low. Enormous competition is also needed to enter this gate, mostly not with ourselves, but with others. That is why people work so hard to fill themselves, raise themselves, and display their achievements. This narrow gate thus becomes even more cramped. It becomes a wall with no gates.

Where can we find the narrow gate way and the no gate way that these two friends face? Whether it is narrow and difficult or broad and spacious, it is connected to the entrance to the heart. It is the same for everyone, but can be seen as large, small, or even no gate at all, depending on the beholder. The absence of a gate could mean that anyone can enter and exit because everything is the entrance to the heart, but it also could mean that

the entrance to the heart is completely blocked and no one can enter or exit.

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Rev Fr Rosario Rocha (1952-2021): The Person and the Message

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Abstract: This article reflects on the life and message of Rev Fr Rosario Rocha, a professor of Theology, Jnana Deepa, Pune, Provincial of Goa Province of the Society of Jesus and Spiritual Guide at Papal Seminary, Pune.

Keywords: Rosario Rocha, Goan Jesuit, Papal Seminary.

The Person

I guess that God engages the experienced and expert services of His faithful, who have returned to Him after completing their pilgrimage on earth, in building “the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is Heaven”. Otherwise, what would God do with such seasoned, experienced, skilled and qualified missionaries in Heaven? Building the Kingdom of God on earth as it is heaven is an Eschatological responsibility – reflection of participative and collaborative mission. Thus, the missionaries on earth and the missionaries in heaven are in constant communion and communication through their prayers and intercessions.

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On October 18, 2021, at 5.15 pm, Fr. Rocha Rosario perhaps had a deep spiritual conversation with his Heavenly Father — A conversation best known to only the two of them; and upon God’s invitation, Fr. Rocha Rosario returned to his heavenly abode. On his return to his heavenly abode, Fr. Rocha joined the Intercessory Mission of God in Heaven. The ‘Preface for Christian Death’ reads: “Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended ... When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.” So, after death, our missionary life in heaven begins in full swing, as we return to God with empirical experiences of working and guiding His mission on earth.

Fr. Rocha, born on 9th March 1952, the only child of Mr. Alleluia Rocha and Mrs. Anjelina Rocha, entered the Society of Jesus on 20th June 1970. We are deeply grateful to the late parents of Fr. Rocha for their sacrifice. Only parents who know the mission of God can sacrifice their only child for God’s mission. After completing his priestly studies in Pune, he was ordained as a priest on 1st May 1985, the feast St. Joseph’s Patron of workers. Together with his priestly studies, he did Bachelors in Arts, then Masters in Pali and Sanskrit, then M Phil and Ph D with focus on Buddhist studies. In 1991, he began his teaching in JD, residing at DNC.

The Message

He served JD and DNC in various capacities. Upon his appointment as Provincial of Goa Jesuit Province, he returned to Goa sometime in October 2011. He served the Goa Jesuit Province for 6 years. Recently, in June 2021, Fr. Rocha was appointed as a spiritual director in Papal Seminary. On September 1st, 2021 he joined the Papal Seminary Community. Prior to his coming to Papal Seminary, he had become a victim of coronavirus. Post period of coronavirus, he was falling sick on and off, he suffered from sodium deficiency and diarrhea.

With these sufferings and pains, yesterday he surrendered himself into God's loving embrace.

Dear Fr. Rocha, as you have the mission of God from heaven, please do a favor for us, please pray for us and share with the Lord the concerns and challenges of our world today.

As a formator in DNC, JD & PS, intercede for us that we, as Formators and Formees, may receive the grace for a fruitful and concrete formation.

As a Scholar in Buddhist studies – please share with God and His saints the importance of Interreligious Dialogue and the urgent need for harmony among different religions and people from different faith and walks of life.

As a Provincial companion and a Provincial of Goa – you have seen the struggles, pains and sufferings of the people, especially the migrants, the poor, the needy. Please plead their case before God.

Dear Fr. Rocha, as you fell sick, you know the suffering and pain of various illnesses, please ask God to heal the sick and give power to those who care for others.

I am sure, you will not mind sharing the concerns and challenges of the world our heavenly Father. Tell God, with our strengths and limitations, that we are making sincere efforts to establish God's Reign. What we need from God is only blessings and the assurance of journeying with God's Spirit. Thank you, Fr. Rocha, for all that you have been to us! We will remember you for your sincere and silent work. A big thank you, dear Fr. Rocha!

A Man of Incarnational Spirituality and Inner Freedom

Roland Coelho, SJ

Provincial, Goa Province of the Society of Jesus

We have gathered here this afternoon in the Chapel of Papal Seminary to bid farewell to our brother Rosario Rocha. Our brother has crossed the bridge and gone home to God, a God in whom he loved and gave his life for. He was not afraid of death, no, it is but a transition to be with Christ forever. I would like to share with you how Rocha was with God in this life and God was with him. Not details, which many of you already know, but the way I knew Rocha.

Rocha lived **an incarnational spirituality** as we read from Revelations (21.3-4): “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,... for God is making everything new!”

- Yes, my sisters and brothers, God worked in and through Rocha to make all things new, to help students and listeners and readers to see things anew. About 25 years ago, Rocha helped us students of JD-Pune to reach out to the slum dwellers in Ramwadi and in the neighbouring poor areas. He helped us to see God in the slums, to meet God and experience God in the people we taught in the evening classes.
- When Rocha returned to the province every summer to spend a few days with his mother, he made it a point to visit

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,... for God is making everything new!”

Jesuits in different communities in Belgaum and Goa. In his own way, he embodied a faith that was made of flesh, not an intellectual one.

Interior Freedom

The Gospel passage from John 12 is so apt for me to briefly describe how I experienced this man, Fr Rocha. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Two decades ago, I met Fr Rocha here on this campus. This thin tall man was cutting the weeds in the DNC campus after class hours. And then we would see him on his bicycle riding to the city for his pastoral ministry. He was available for us students and in much demand as spiritual father and as study guide.

- A man without ego, simple and humble. Not interested in power, prestige, or possessions. The man of the Vipassana meditations, the Buddhist way of equanimity, calm and peaceful, soft-spoken. He died to himself to give glory to God.
- Rocha said: “What is predominant in all the religions is the search for not just ordinary meaning, but the search for a deep meaning of life and also of the divine.”

Discernment

Rocha was a polyglot – he studied Pali and Sanskrit, and spoke a number of Indian and foreign languages. Three years ago, he asked me: May I go to Pune and continue with research and publication. I desperately wanted him to stay in Goa, to bring about a deeper scholarly reflection to shape public opinion, but I knew Rocha to be a man of discernment; he had given up all for His Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who loses their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

- “Awareness is the hallmark of your personality” wrote Fr Arturo Sosa to Rocha last year as Rocha celebrated 50 years in the Society which he loved. He allowed the Spirit to lead him and to choose that which would help him serve God and God’s people to the best of his abilities.
- I met him in March this year and he said joyfully: “I am in good health and I’m not taking any medication.” Since he was in good health, I invited him to consider an urgent and important need – that of spiritual director at Papal Seminary. He discerned for a few days and then wrote back. If there is a need there, I am happy to be of service to the seminarians at Papal Seminary.

The Cross

Many people criticize Rocha for being a poor eater. Some were upset when they prepared good food and Rocha would say it was not tasty. Then covid struck him and hit him badly. Yes, he was stubborn, but he did suffer much physically. He bore his sufferings patiently and sometimes, when his sodium levels fell, he was a bit abrupt. He was a Jesuit under the banner of the Cross. He knew when he was weak and he knew God was his strength. He could apologize for his mistakes.

- The scholastics at St Britto, Mapusa, were quite embarrassed when Rocha apologized to them for his ill temper. Rocha had to carry this cross of poor health over many years, but particularly since he was afflicted with covid this past summer.
- Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. My father will honour the one who serves me.

Conclusion: All about the Mission

Spreading the love of Christ to all. Building God’s family. In his own words, Rocha said: “How are we looking at our own

identity and how we need to learn to inter-relate. Once can go solo in many different things, but to build society today, to build communities today, one has to have a dialogical approach. A dialogical approach does not look at the negatives of others, but looks at the positives.

- He blended *cura personalis* and *cura apostolica*. Yes, Rocha was tough with many of us. He believed in certain principles and values. He desired people followed the way of the Society. He ruffled more than a few feathers.
- For the mission. Rocha –for inspiring us and for walking with us on our journey to God - thank you. We know you are now in the loving embrace of the Father. Amen.



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The Audacity of the Improbable and the Impossible

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Who has not stared at the world helplessly? Who has not worked hard to change oneself and the world around and feel lost? When everything around us seem to be so helpless and unjust, where do we draw hope?

These reflections are based entirely on an inspiring book, *Attempt the Impossible*, which is a carefully selected collection of articles by Archbishop Menampampil on the sharing of the Christian Message in the contemporary world. He acknowledges the uncertainty where the search for meaning and purposefulness is also growing intensely and look for solutions by working hard and trusting harder in the Lord.

In an increasingly secularized world where every tenet of the Faith is being questioned every day, it has become most challenging to explain our religious convictions, remaining always open to newly emerging perspectives on life. “Return to the ways of the Acts of the Apostles”, says Archbishop Thomas. It is an exciting mission to

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‘Attempt the Impossible,’ without which human life itself becomes impossible today!

Rooted in the Sense of the Divine

Our hearts are strongly entrenched in a desire to discover what is beyond our horizon. As a result, the collection’s first article, “The Lure of the Unseen,” lures us into the world of the invisible, the world of Transcendence. A yearning for the unseen has taken root in our hearts. The visionless direction of today has uprooted man from customary security and suffocated his or her inner essence. His frenzied search for any form of; religious experience is a restless attempt to break free from a meaningless materialism. If no one can help him, he will become lost in a sea of curiosities and thrills, as well as fleeting religious experiences.

“The Sense of the Sacred,” the next chapter, builds on the previous chapter’s ideas. Then it emphasizes that our secularized society owes a lot to (tribal) societies that have kept the Sacred Sense alive. In truth, all modern thought and achievements are the culmination and continuance of the quest for meaning.

The following chapter, “Those Who Take Their Commitment Seriously Ought to Act as a Dynamic Force,” examines the current conflict scenario to ensure that religion is not used as an excuse to avoid civic responsibilities. Religious people, on the other hand, should be beneficent and active in working for the general good. Their religious beliefs have helped them to bring authenticity and radical giving to the cause. They should have an informed and well-researched attitude to social issues, as well as a balanced perspective on the situation. Religious Congregations, it should be noted, come into existence with a strong sense of mission and a high level of motivation, and promotion of a Sense of Solidarity and Purpose in Society shows that Church personnel can offer themselves as an intellectual and spiritual renewal of religious commitment, and promotion of a Sense of Solidarity and Purpose in Society shows that Religious Congregations come into existence with a strong sense of mission and a high level of motivation. It is the responsibility of every

member to re-motivate fellow-religious if this zeal wanes. They give back to society in partnership with their fellow believers and all good people.

Sharing one's essential convictions is at the centre of a missionary's ministry to society, according to "Sharing the Gospel Today." As a result, they become living symbols of God's love for His people, willing to lay down their lives if necessary.

Their activities, such as education, health, and social service, gains a sign-value as a result of their status as icons. This also adds to their society's cultural and moral renewal. In a society of godless consumerism and violent extremism, they bear witness to their religious convictions. Believers will benefit from collective self-criticism in order to maintain their principles and stay faithful to their aspirations. Part of this self-criticism is learning to live with problems. Much of the persecution that missionaries endure today stems from simple misunderstandings in the community. Neighbours' sensitivities and concerns must be taken into account. Most problems can be avoided by interacting respectfully with the local community. The importance of cultural incorporation cannot be overstated.

The author believes that a human approach will always win a human response. Religious faith is very much alive in Asia, according to *Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Asia*, and people are inspired by Jesus' words. The current issue is that religion is tied to Cultural Nationalism in many areas. There is also the widely held belief that religious propagation is an unjustified interference with people's culture. Despite this, every international religion saw conveying its basic message as a primary responsibility. It should be given with the utmost respect for the recipient and his or her freedom, and shared in private. The film "Whispering the Gospel" attempts to capture this image. In this day of warring ideologies, extremism, and violence, the

This book argues that the spiritual can be traced in all activities, earthly, mundane and secular. It assumes that we can only reach the spiritual in and through the secular, the ordinary experiences of normal human beings.

Gospel may bring a sense of fairness to the table, as well as motivation and hope.

“The Origins of Religious Life: An Invitation to a Deeper Commitment to the Gospel,” the next chapter, discusses religious groups trying to witness to the radicality of the Gospel. Religious people have always been effective communicators of the Christian faith, and as spiritual masters, they have had a moral influence on society. They must ensure ‘depth’ in their spiritual exercises in order to be effective. They have the ability to influence society’s ideas and be a blessing to all.

The following chapter, “Taking the First Steps in a New Mission Field: Know and Respect the People You Serve,” encourages readers to recognize the necessity for a missionary to adapt to local traditions, with a focus on Northeast India’s distinct character. Imported ideas that are rushed can be misleading. In terms of culture, one must constantly listen and learn, from all directions!

The focus on serving people leads to the formation of collaborative communities. The Catholic Church’s community-building ministry is discussed in “Community Building: The Central Challenge Before Pastoral Leaders.” Christ’s followers built a family for him. Relationships with people become an important part of a pastor’s spirituality and personal identity. He welcomes everyone’s assistance and listens to everyone’s point of view, including marginalized groups’ fears, unheard opinions, unwelcome comments, unrepresented populations, unhappy sections, and opposing viewpoints. But, above all, he must devote his full attention to his spiritual exercises. He cannot disregard himself and allow his spirit to sag.

The Church places a special emphasis on the needs of families. “When it comes to assisting families in tough situations, it’s more important to understand than to be understood.”

The function of various pastoral agents in Northeast India is described in the next chapter, “Diocesan Plan of Evangelization and Pastoral Reflections.” Because the Catechist performs such an important function, he needs to be well trained and motivated. The Touring Sisters play a unique role in the region, and their commitment to service ensures the

success of their mission. Schools, boarding houses, medical services, the media, lay associations...they all play a part in the overall effort. The Parish Priest and his Assistants are the ones who inspire and encourage all of the parish's activities.

Similarly, "A Second Look at Our Work" provides a critical assessment of our work from several perspectives. For example, our short-term goals may have evolved into long-term goals, or gaps between our claims and actual achievements, promises, and performance may have grown; or people may no longer be the center of our attention, but financial security is; or our un-planning styles, lack of cultural insertion, and poor neighborhood relationships may have resulted in negative outcomes. Our spiritual seriousness will assist us in making changes to our habits and styles.

Fostering Relationship Among All

In the same vein, "Catholic Education and the Church's Concern for the Marginalized" lays out the Church's educational policy: in a nutshell, all-round human development, with a focus on the poorer kids and the marginalized. The most important thing is to teach Catholic youngsters about their faith and to instill ethical awareness in all students. Many dioceses and congregations have created programs in aid of the needy, such as remedial classes, scholarships, interest-free loans, free supply of books, teaching aids, and free tuitions, despite criticism of their objectives. The most important thing is to foster an evangelical environment in all educational settings, as well as a radical commitment to the poor.

The Church places a special emphasis on the needs of families. "When it comes to assisting families in tough situations, it's more important to understand than to be understood." "explores scenarios of great hardship in which many families in our time find themselves, such as intercultural, interreligious marriage and extreme poverty. Working parents are unable to devote as much time as they would like to each other and their

The living presence of Christ in our midst is central to our lives and missions. In this period of wars, suicide, abortion and communal confrontations.

children. Families that are suffering in such harrowing circumstances deserve sympathy, not condemnation. Members of families who have recently made positive changes in their lives can be of great help to others who are experiencing anxiety.

The living presence of Christ in our midst is central to our lives and missions. In this period of wars, suicide, abortion, communal confrontations, and so on, “The Eucharist the Source of Our Strength: A Presence that Challenges and Strengthens” asserts that Jesus, present to us in the form of Bread and as Word, is the source of life. His social message must reach everyone, including those in politics, economics, education, the media, sports, and entertainment. This pushes us to be spiritually mature individuals. Currently, our communities may be fighting autocratic governments, a discriminatory bureaucracy, and heartless members of the dominant community, among other things. But, because Jesus is beside us, we never give up.

This pushes us to be more productive in our personal and professional lives. “Growing Efficient in God’s Work: Exhortation to Deacons” is a wise chapter that wants for young priests to become tireless apostles, fervent pastors, and helpers of the poor, as well as promoters of good relationships. It is critical to organize one’s work, manage one’s time effectively, manage one’s money wisely, maintain intellectual interests even in later years, and maintain spiritual sincerity.

Finally, “Telling Jesus’ Stories in Today’s India” remembers how the people of Israel continued to retell and learn from their stories. Because his stories addressed universal themes such as justice and peace, love and forgiveness, and provided people a way ahead in the midst of life’s harsh realities, Jesus drew a lot of attention. The stories we tell must aid in the healing of personal and collective wounds, the reconciliation of conflicting communities, and the advancement of society’s future-building efforts. In India and Asia, stories about Jesus are always received. They are intended to improve people’s personal lives as well as the social lives of communities, peoples, and nations. Committed individuals have given their life for such noble causes. Nothing is Impossible warns us against becoming complacent because of our early missions’ success. We may need to consider whether we are losing talents such as persuasion and motivation that we gained from the pioneers. A sense of ‘call’ and mission should follow us at all times. For our administration and personal conduct,

we are answerable to the Church and society. Even today, business consultants take their employees to 'retreats' and self-critiquing exercises, as the author points out. It's all about the spirit. The spiritual perspective makes it possible.

In this context, "Everyone is Looking for You" (Mk 1:37) argues that everyone, including our opponents, who is looking for more serious answers in life is asking for Jesus. It's critical that we focus on Jesus, paying attention to our interlocutors' emotions and tastes, and addressing the fundamental concerns that disturb their minds. Before gently introducing Jesus, one must be attentive to the other person's point of view in our contemporary period of questioning and remembering of terrible events. Your suffering will have fruit of its own, and your words may be rejected at any time. However, what is proper is finally shown right by its internal consistency and veracity. And ('Wisdom is proven correct by her deeds.') " (Mt 11:19). "Leaving Security on the Shore" (EG 10) asserts that all members of society, including leaders and followers, bear equal responsibility. What matters is that you have a powerful mission that produces energy. Today's missionaries travel through large swaths of indifferent forest, not so much across oceans as across psychological mountains of distrust. ... the searing heat of fundamentalists vying for attention necessitates a focus on 'other' problems and shifting moods. To arrive at a solution, discernment is essential. Exaggerations and prejudices should be avoided in any situation. Establishing and maintaining deep human relationships, which assumes our intimate union with the divine, is the most significant value in the missionary environment.

Everything is Possible

The author truly holds that “Everything is possible for the person who has faith’ (Mk 9:23). The 20 specially chosen chapters in this book, including “The lure of the invisible,” “The sense of the sacred,” and “Leaving security on the shore” addresses the innermost concerns of the Church interacting with other religions in the contemporary India. With a forward by Thomas Manjaly, this book is a genuine invitation to reflection and retrospection (p. 12). It affirms the role and significance of tribal religions which have contributed significantly to all world religions (p. 51). It also seeks to elicit support even from opponents (p. 75), without which today’s missionary work is impossible. It invites all readers to tell the stories from their personal and experiential lives “that change mind and heart, transform societies” (p. 148). On the whole, this is a deeply relevant book for our contemporary times beset with conflict. It pleads for enduring peace, enriching dialogue and genuine relationships. Only such an approach can guarantee the relevance of religions and survival of humanity. When religions are in conflict it endangers the very survival of human race, as Pope Francis has been warning us.

The author truly holds that “Everything is possible for the person who has faith’ (Mk 9:23). The 20 specially chosen chapters in this book, including “The lure of the invisible,” “The sense of the sacred,” and “Leaving security on the shore” addresses the innermost concerns of the Church interacting with other religions in the contemporary India!

This book, the *magnum opus* of Archbishop Thomas Menamprambil, is a significant contribution both to the Indian Church and the world Christianity. It reminds us of the invitation of Fr. Bruno Cadorè, Master General of the Dominican Order, when he addressed the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. The then newly elected Jesuit General responded with a call to “the audacity of the impossible!”

As believers with joy and hope, we are truly called to dare the improbable and impossible with faith and trust. After working hard and surrendering ourselves totally to the Lord, we can dare the audacity of the improbable and impossible.

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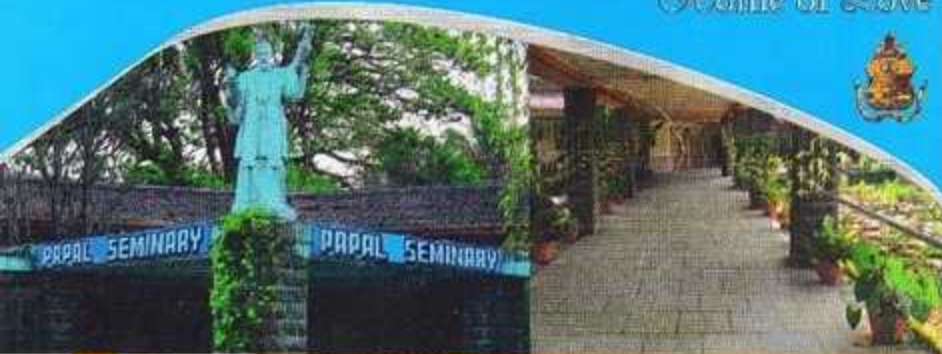
The Editorial Team wishes all the readers a blessed and bountiful New Year, in spite of....! May it be a year of peace and hope, especially for the marginalised!

Rev Fr Theodore (Ted) Bowling, SJ
(Patna Province)
04 May 1924 - 22 Nov 2021



Rev Fr. Rocha Rosario, SJ
(Goa Province)
09 Mar 1952 - 18 Oct 2021





AUC congratulates
Dr Manoj Durairaj
for having
received "Pro
Ecclesiae et Pro
Pontifice" award
by **Archbishop
Leopoldo Girelli**,
Apostolic Nuncio
to India!



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