

SANYASA

JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Vol. VIII, No. 2

July - December 2013

SANYASA
Institute of Consecrated Life
Carmelaram Post, Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

SANYASA *Journal of Consecrated Life*

A biannual published by Sanyasa: Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore

Chief Editor

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

Editorial Board

Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

Jacob Thekkanath

John Thadathil, CMF

Joseph Mattam, SJ

Martin George, CMF

Paulson Veliyannoor, CMF

S. Devadoss, CMF

Tresa Purayidam, EF

Vineeth, CMI

Manuscripts for publication, books for review should be addressed to:
The Editor, and business communications (correspondence, subscription,
change of address) to: **The Administrator**

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Sanyasa

Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944

E-mail: sanyasac@gmail.com / sanyasa.in@gmail.com

Web: www.sanyasa.com

*Published by SANYASA: Institute of Consecrated Life, Bangalore
in collaboration with Claretian Publications, Bangalore, India*

CONTENTS

Editorial	4
<i>Diarmuid O’Murchu, MSC</i> The Sequela Christi: Christian Discipleship in the Universality of the 21 st Century.....	7
<i>Pushpa Joseph, FMM</i> Eco-Feminism and Faith: Reclaiming a Subverted Global Wisdom.....	21
<i>Xavier E. Manavath, CMF</i> Call to New Evangelization: Scope and Relevance a Contextualized Reading of Instrumentum Laboris.....	33
<i>K.J. Thomas</i> Transmission of Faith: Agents and Forms	51
<i>Joseph Mappilaparambil, CMF</i> Consecrated Life in Response to the Call for New Evangelization	65
<i>M.K. George, SJ</i> Challenges to New Evangelization: Indian Context and the Call of Justice.....	81
<i>Cynthia Stephen</i> Creative Responses to the Challenges of New Evangelism: New and Living Ways	89

EDITORIAL

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, of Pope Paul VI, published in 1975, is considered as the first and the major systematic reflection of the evangelizing mission of the Church in the modern world since Vatican II. Since then the Church and the world have been undergoing major changes due to those upheavals that have been happening in all the major spheres of human life and interaction. All these changes have been affecting the way we perceive ourselves, the Church and the world. If the humans form the object of the evangelizing mission of the Church, the changes in their perceptions will also call for a revisioning of everything in relation to the human reality. Sensing this, Pope John Paul II alerted the Church to the need for a “new evangelization” on various occasions.

Pope Benedict XVI followed up on this and, sensing the urgency of this matter, decided to declare the Year of Faith and convoke the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. It was held in Rome from October 07-28, 2012. The “newness,” advocated by the Synod in its call for new evangelization is to be understood, not in the sense that the Gospel is old, its message is irrelevant or outdated, or the methods employed in its proclamation were incorrect; it simply means that the situation that the proclamation of the Gospel faces today is new and, therefore, the process of evangelization has to be new in its ardour, methods and expression.

Consecrated men and women are called to be evangelizers from the heart of the Church as they “are in mission by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their Institute” (VC.72). As we are in mission, we need to listen to these challenging times, the changes that are happening all around us and reflect with a discerning heart and mind on where and how to re-position ourselves, what new methods are to be used and what kind of formation we need if we are to respond to the call for new evangelization more effectively. This has been the rationale behind the choice of the title, *Call to New Evangelization: A Challenging Journey of Faith for Consecrated Life* as the major theme for the annual Consecrated Life Week Seminar, held at Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life from February 08-10, 2013. The present issue of the Journal carries the major papers presented at the seminar. One paper is an addition as it is closely relevant to the theme.

Diarmuid O'Murchu, in his much researched article, explores Christian discipleship as understood, lived and carried over from the past and brings out its inspirational motivations based on presuppositions which are irrelevant to the world of today. He argues for new understanding of the *Sequela Christi*, within the enlarged horizons of a *New Cosmology* that supports a spirituality of engagement than escape. He reinterprets key biblical concepts with the aid of modern biblical research and reveals their inner meaning that are quite in tune with implications of this emerging cosmology. His intention is to prepare and empower the evangelizers with a new vision of the Kingdom of God as the companionship of empowerment.

Although from a particular perspective of eco-feminism and faith, the concern of *Pushpa Joseph* is also to reclaim a global wisdom that has been subverted during the evolution of Christian spirituality. Her main contention is that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression, whatever the form may be, must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. Adopting a conscious partiality in favour of the most oppressed and silenced in society, she seeks to replace the 'view from above' with a 'view from below' that embodies both scientific and ethical-political dimensions. The author, finally, outlines seven principles of interpretation from a eco-feminist perspective that can help evangelizers critically analyze the inherited oppressions, searches for alternative wisdom and suppressed history, and risks new interpretations of the Christian faith tradition in dialogue with women's lives.

The next article by *Xavier E. Manavath*, is in view of helping us familiarize with the working document of the Synod, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* and, especially, the scope and the relevance of the call to new evangelization as envisioned by the Synod. After giving us a brief overview of the document, showing its significance, purpose, preparation involved and the outline, he goes on to show the urgency and the relevance of the call to new evangelization, necessitated by the sweeping changes happening in the world. He also shows the responses from the part of the Church that culminated in the convocation of the Synod and, finally, brings out some very important and essential dynamics involved in the process of transmission of Christian faith in the contemporary world.

K. J. Thomas, in his article, takes up the theme of the transmission of faith, its struggles, perils, obstacles, agents and forms. Exploring the doctrine of faith historically from Vatican Council I to II, he shows us some effective ways to transmit faith and also the difficulties in making faith experiences contemporary

and transmissible. He moves on to describe some major struggles of faith in our age and enumerates in detail, the different persons involved in the transmission of faith and their specific roles in this transmission, showing us how the whole church is involved in the proclamation and transmission of faith.

Explaining more specifically what new evangelization is and detailing the evolution of this concept historically, with its different types and characteristics, *Joseph Mappilaparambil*, brings us specifically to the response of consecrated men and women to the call for new evangelization. Speaking briefly about the crisis that affects religious life, he sees, within the crisis, the hidden potentials for renewal. The eleven areas that he outlines are the ways through which consecrated men and women can re-vitalize themselves so that they can effectively respond to the call for new evangelization and become primary agents in their evangelizing mission.

M.K. George situates the concept of new evangelization in the social, political and economic context of India and picks up the challenges that consecrated men and women would face, more specifically, in the area of social justice. He elucidates the problems of distress that lie beneath the Indian reality and guides us through an analytical framework to help us understand these problems and respond to them. Though he admits that the present context of the social and economic reality of India is truly complex, the analytical insights that he offers are very helpful to the religious in their crusade for justice, peace and integrity of creation.

As a follow up to the above article, *Cynthia Stephen*, presents us with new and creative ways of responding to the challenges we face as evangelizers in India. She uses the term, “consecration” in a wider sense, namely, the daily walk of faith of the individual believer, religious, ordained or lay, in experiencing and living out an ongoing consciousness of God’s presence in his or her life. She finds evangelizing as a call to a more creative engagement with the world. While giving us a glimpse of the deeper currents in the Indian society that are avenues for new evangelism, she helps us recognize the internal, structural and external challenges and invites us to respond to them effectively, while moving forward in the path of faith, worship and witness.

May this issue of the journal enkindle our evangelizing spirit and make us true proclaimers of the Gospel of God and witnesses of His Kingdom!

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)

THE SEQUELA CHRISTI: CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC

When early Christians adopted the following of Christ (the *Sequela Christi*) as the central focus for the vowed life, they were making a declaration with a set of internal convictions that have been largely unexplored. The monastic scholar, Herbert Workman (1913), is not alone in discerning early Christian monasticism as a protest movement against a Church becoming ever more engrossed in the culture of imperial power. Monks fled to the desert hoping to recapture a Christian counterculture that had been seriously compromised by Constantine's collusion with the colonial imperialism of the day. Even some of the monks refused to receive Christian sacraments, such was their passionate disapproval of what they perceived to be unfolding.

Another significant group in early Christian times were the *Virgins*, frequently described as women dedicated to God through prayer and penance, and devoted to the care of the sick and needy. However, historian, Mary Ann McNamara (1996) claims that the Virgins also represented a protest movement against the misogynist culture of the time whereby a woman was identified as somebody's daughter or somebody's wife, but of no significance as a person in her own right. By opting for virginity (non-marriage) the Virgins circumvented the oppressive system and were effectively declaring a new cultural and sociological identity for women of the time. Most history books never allude to this countercultural phenomenon.

Over the centuries, the *Sequela Christi* morphed into several modes of discipleship. Even early Benedictinism was characterized by a fascinating blend of prayerful enclosure and secular entrepreneurship, as Benedict's monks pioneered learning, commerce and agriculture throughout mainland Europe of the time. The Mendicants – Franciscans, Dominicans, Servites – matched the

Diarmuid O'Murchu is member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MSC). He is a global bestselling author and social psychologist who has focused on social ministry as a couple's counselor, bereavement worker with homeless people and refugees. He has led workshops, retreats and adult faith and development programs around the world. He can be contacted at: diarmuid.13@gmail.com

enclosed devotion of the monastic movement with a new transformative vision for the open world. The apostolic Religious – pioneered mainly by the Jesuits along with some outstanding Congregations of Brothers and Sisters – rooted the service to Christ in a range of apostolic expressions particularly in schooling and medical care. Finally, as we moved into the 19th century, the great missionary movement brought the vowed life to all corners of the globe, with a remarkable zeal to spread the Good News of the Gospel, tainted at times with conquering intent of European colonialism.

1. THE INHERITED FOCUS

In all these charismatic endeavours, the inspiring motivation was based on the following key factors:

- a) A personal commitment to Jesus understood primarily in anthropocentric terms; divinity mediated primarily through and with the human.
- b) A strong dualistic distinction between the sacred and the secular.
- c) Christian discipleship embodied primarily in males, rather than females, even where the latter made outstanding contributions.
- d) A Roman/Eurocentric base, assumed to be more advanced and enlightened than elsewhere on the planet.
- e) Following on all of the above – a worldview, predominantly earth centered (other planets did not matter), anthropocentric (human-focused), and imperial (Roman or European) in its core values.
- f) After the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the male celibate priest emerges as the primary model for all forms of Christian discipleship, undermining the prophetic potential unique to the vowed life.

Each of these features needs considerable elaboration. Historical and cultural influences underpin each of the factors outlined above. Sometimes all the features prevailed, but at other times some were more to the fore than others. I take the liberty of concretizing this brief list, primarily to highlight their current prevalence in our understanding of the vowed life as we encounter new challenges facing Religious Life today. These challenges – appropriating the *Sequela Christi* for the 21st century – are global and evangelical in nature and will be explored in greater detail throughout the rest of this article.

For much of Christian history, the following of Christ was based on a literal interpretation of Scripture. For instance, such literalism has impacted strongly on our understanding of the Eucharist, as a special meal reserved to Jesus and

the twelve male apostles. A rhetoric of penance, sacrifice and suffering has long informed Christian faith and devotion, with particular influence of Christian asceticism. Like the Christ who gave his life in radical obedience to his Father, and in unselfish suffering to rid the world of sin, the monastic person too was called to excel in such generous immolation. The vows were the primary structures facilitating this total sense of self-sacrifice.

As noted above, it was those self-same ascetical devotees that rendered unstinting service to humanity, uplifting the downtrodden, empowering the disadvantaged and providing much needed services in education and health care for millions of needy people. It has long been assumed that the ascetical inner life was the powerhouse for such unstinting outer apostolic zeal. We also know that these two movements were often in conflict leaving the devotee with much inner torture, and a great struggle to embrace the dualistic split between the sacred and the secular.

2. CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Around the middle of the 20th century, much began to change in our understanding and appropriation of Christian faith. Already in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scripture scholars embarked upon the search for the historical Jesus (Albert Schweitzer). The Gospels particularly came under renewed scrutiny, and literal interpretation rapidly lost its former credibility. Strategies such as Biblical Criticism (Bultmann, Dibelius, Gunkel, Weiss), came into vogue while Scripture scholars adopted insights from other sciences – notably archeology, history, cultural anthropology, social sciences – in pursuit of deeper truth. To some it felt like authentic Christian truth was under severe and reckless attack.

Notable in this new wave of Scripture research was the ascendancy of the notion of the *Kingdom of God* in the Christian Gospels. This phrase – with a range of possible meanings – gradually came to be recognized as the heart and soul of the Gospel message. Occurring 149 times in the four Gospels, scholars highlighted the fact that this phrase (*Kingdom of God*) was continuously on the lips of Jesus and seems to have been the primary focus for the message that Jesus was seeking to deliver. To access the mind of the historical Jesus, one had to discern what the Kingdom of God denoted and signified.

For much of Christian history, the preoccupation with imperial kingship obfuscated our ability to see the deeper significance of the kingdom of God. In all the major religions, God was deemed to operate on earth like an imperial king, fully faithful to the regal God reigning above the sky. The Christian revelation of this God was assumed to be through a new imperial figure who like King David

of old would restore the good fortune of Israel. For the early Christians, many assumed that Jesus was of royal decent and would deliver liberation through some mighty regal achievement. The Kingdom of God, therefore, would have had a double significance: Firstly, Jesus was considered to be a true representative of the reigning God from on high and this divine, king-like status was encapsulated in the phrase *the Kingdom of God*; secondly it also served as a counterculture to the Kingdom of Roman Imperialism.

In the 1970s, Christian scholars devoted considerable attention to the Jewish background of the historical Jesus, noting that in his preaching and teaching, Jesus would have used Aramaic, and not Greek, the language through which we now access the teaching of Jesus. Greek is a written language, the meaning of which is judged primarily through what we see on the written page, but Aramaic was a spoken language only the meaning of which is judged primarily by sound and not by sight. 2000 years later it is impossible to recover the precise meanings Jesus would have conveyed through the Aramaic idiom – and scholars seem reluctant to probe too deeply - but it certainly would have been different from the more precise literary structure of the Greek. Aramaic is considered to embody a much more ornate, elaborate and poetic set of meanings, that may have been neglected or even undermined in the Greek rendition of the Christian Gospels.

One suggested rendering for the Kingdom of God in Aramaic is that of the *Companionship of Empowerment*. Apart from the linguistic details the merit of this translation is that it opens up a range of Christian meanings more congruent with the parables and the several empowering strategies adopted by the historical Jesus in his preaching and befriending of the poor and marginalized. However, it changes considerably the notion of the *Sequela Christi*, and poses substantial challenges for living the vowed life today.

3. ENLARGED HORIZONS

In the inherited conventional spirituality of the vowed life, much emphasis rests on the notion of fleeing the world, the invitation to abandon and turn one's back on the world. The "world" denoted not merely all that led towards sin and temptation, but the material creation itself which was deemed to be imperfect and incomplete, something that would be destroyed at the end of time and transformed into the fulfillment of heaven and life everlasting. One central issue here was the dualistic split between the all-perfect realm beyond, and the flawed creation of the here and now. It was a narrow, reductionistic moralistic worldview, seriously challenged in our time even by the discoveries of atheistic, rational science.

Today – as Joan Chittister highlights – Religious, like all Christians, are being challenged to embrace a spirituality of engagement rather than one of escape (Chittister 1998). Serious ecological and global issues confront the human species. These can only be addressed by engagement with creation and not abandonment of it. The call in our time to eco-justice, or geo-justice, not merely has a timely current appeal, but is a central feature of the Companionship of Empowerment (as highlighted later in this article).

However, it is not merely the precarious predicament of planet earth that inspires and motivates Religious in the 21st century. There is something a great deal more expansive – and to many illusive – namely, the cosmic universal creation itself. In our time this has been renamed as the *New Cosmology*, contrary to the dominant mechanistic world view that prevailed from the 16th century till recent times. The appeal in this expanded cosmic vision is essentially a mystical one, and mysticism has always been endemic to the spirituality of the vowed life although largely undervalued and misunderstood.

The attraction of the New Cosmology, therefore, for contemporary Religious has a twofold inspiration: firstly, our passionate commitment to God is increasingly understood as engaging a God whose primary presence is in the cosmic creation itself as its energetic inspiring source (and ongoing sustenance), and not an imperial figurehead governing creation from a distant heaven. Secondly, our engagement with God implies living in a more Godlike way in how we treat everything in God's creation and how to use the gifts of this creation in a more sustainable and responsible manner. In Christian terms this dual shift in perception and understanding makes more sense in terms of the Companionship of Empowerment rather than in the conventional term, the Kingdom of God.

4. THE NEW COSMOLOGY

A great deal is written on this topic and several web pages provide illuminating and easily accessible overviews. The late Thomas Berry, priest and geologist, is internationally recognized as one of its primary and most informed proponents. He describes the challenge in these words: “Our story of the Universe, and our human role within it, is our primary source of intelligibility and value. Only through this story of how the universe came to be in the beginning, and how it came to be as it is, does a person come to appreciate the meaning of life, or to derive the psychic energy needed to deal effectively with those crisis moments that occur in the life of the individual and in the life of the society. Such a story communicates the most sacred of mysteries. It not only interprets the past, it also guides and inspires our shaping of the future” (Thomas Berry 1990, 54).

The following are some of the key features of the New Cosmology, requiring substantial shifts in understanding and engagement, and quite new challenges for discerning God at work in the world of our time.

- a) The universe is not an object that can be mechanically measured or quantified; it is an evolving unfolding process, probably without beginning or end.
- b) It is not merely the creation of an external divine manufacturer, but a process of co-creation involving each and every constitutive creature, humans and non-humans alike.
- c) It cannot be reduced to a mere conglomerate of isolated parts (the whole equals the sum of the parts), but flourishes as a holarchy in which the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts.
- d) Aliveness is not a feature merely of organic creatures, and less so an exclusive property of human beings. Aliveness belongs primarily to the universe, the primary source from which every life-form derives its sense of being alive.
- e) In scientific terms, we try to understand the universe as a collection of closed systems, when in fact evolution flourishes through open systems, often chaotic and unpredictable but always creative and open to evolutionary surprise.
- f) Instead of a flawed creation within which we can postulate the redemption wrought by the Christian Jesus, the New Cosmology postulates a fundamental paradox in which creation and destruction forever interweave and inform each other. This is a fundamental paradox, and not a pervasive flaw; without the paradox, creation long ago would have come to nought.
- g) Revelation does not belong primarily to formal religion, but rather to creation itself in which God was fully at work for billions of years before humans or religions ever came to be.
- h) Our conventional time-spans are heavily anthropocentric, congealing and destructive. We need to adjust to God's time-scales which are in billions of years and not merely in a few recent millennia.
- i) Humans are not in charge of creation and were never intended to be masters. We are servants to an elegant unfolding process. We are invited to be co-creators enhancing the complexity of creation with the self-reflexive consciousness with which we are uniquely endowed.

- j) Monotheistic religions, being primarily human-centred, operate out of very narrow worldview, one rapidly losing credibility in the light of our new understanding of creation today.

Religious life today can only speak meaningfully, and with appropriate prophetic engagement, after it has come to terms with the world we inhabit and the spiritual consciousness we bring to that endeavour. Any semblance of fleeing or turning our back on the world makes neither human nor spiritual sense in our time. Creation is God's primary revelation for us. It is in and through creation we primarily encounter the living presence of the Holy One. The world, rather than the Church, has become the new Jerusalem of the 21st century.

5. THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Several contemporary Christians are attracted to the New Cosmology and warm to its innate spiritual empowerment. Problems arise, however, when we seek to reconcile the new story with our inherited Christian faith. Christianity is perceived to be distinctively about the human, the incarnation of God with a human face. How do we reconcile the intimacy and personal nature of this belief with what seems to be the rather impersonal nature of the New Cosmology?

The wisdom of the New Cosmology requires us to reexamine all our inherited worldviews, the Christian one included. There is a cosmology to our Christian story that has gone unrecognized almost since the beginning of Christianity itself. It is embodied in the notion of the *Kingdom of God*, a phrase frequently used by the historical Jesus to articulate his dream for humanity. A better understanding of the Kingdom of God is essential to authentic Christian faith today and carries formidable challenges specifically for those of us committed to the vowed life.

We naively assume that Jesus subscribed to the prevailing three-tier worldview of his day, with Heaven above, Hades (the underworld) beneath, and the Earth in between. The hierarchical structure was governed and controlled by the Sky God, reigning and creating from above the sky. And on earth, the male king was the one and only true representative of the ruling God. Such was the prevailing worldview at the time of the historical Jesus. It seems that the twelve apostles all subscribed to this view, and hence their eagerness to crown Jesus as their new imperial king. It seems the four evangelists also endorsed this regal cosmology while Constantine, in the 4th century, so enthusiastically embraced this royal vision that it became the foundation stone of Christian faith (and practice) up to the middle of the twentieth century.

The soul-searching question for our time is this: *What worldview did the historical Jesus subscribe to?* Such was the veneer of Roman and Jewish

imperialism in his day that nobody even considered that Jesus might have held a different worldview. And after the evangelists wrote the Gospels with frequent references to the *Kingdom of God* (Greek: *Basileia tou theou*), Christians assumed that Jesus was using the phrase to endorse and embrace what later came to be known as the divine right of kings.

In the 1800s liberal Protestant theologians in UK and Germany became suspicious of the imperial veneer, and suggested that there were other ways of understanding the phrase, *Kingdom of God*. Not until the mid twentieth century however, did the alternative interpretation come to the fore with increasing reinforcement from Scripture scholars of all Christian persuasions. They came to realize that the Kingdom of God is not an endorsement of divine kingship, but a blistering critique of it. It seems that Jesus totally denounced divine regal prerogative, postulating instead an empowering, ground-up alternative movement with justice and liberation as its core values.

In short, Jesus had espoused a different world view from the dominant one of his day. It becomes much clearer when we look at the notion of *kingdom* in Jesus' own native Aramaic language (Jesus spoke in Aramaic, not in Greek). The word for kingdom in Aramaic is *Malkuta*, with the root *kut* denoting empowerment rather than power, in other words, "power with" rather than "power over." And from this we can extrapolate a different way of identifying the Kingdom of God, namely as the *Companionship of Empowerment*. This is a much more accurate way to describe the empowering vision underpinning the words and deeds of the historical Jesus. His worldview marked a radical departure from the kingly imperialism of his day. It is a daring new cosmology which has eluded Christian followers for almost 2000 years.

Two key concepts are invoked in this new naming. Firstly, the shift from power to empowerment. For much of its history, Christianity has indulged in power-games, politically and ecclesiastically, and has liberally adopted patriarchal power structures mainly of Roman and European origin. Discipleship, therefore, has been construed as submission to authority and virtue has been hailed as passive acquiescence (obedience) to the imperial-like demand of rule and law. Empowerment, of course, can be mediated downward by a benign patriarch, but it appears that such top-down mediation was not acceptable to Jesus and, hence, the significance of the other key word, *companionship*.

It appears that Jesus wanted to rid the world of *all* top-down systems of power, replacing condescending models with constructs characterized by mutuality, community and circular formations. This new sense of empowerment is invested in circles, not in pyramids. The empowerment comes from within

not from without. Obviously a whole new paradigm of leadership and authority is envisaged here, glimpses of which we glean from the parable stories of the Gospels.

6. IS THERE A CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGY?

Delivering the Gospels in Greek certainly enhanced their cultural acceptability, and won for the fledgling Church a degree of credibility in the intellectual culture of the time. However, Greek philosophy with its strong emphasis on logical rationality, metaphysical distinction and epistemological precision dictated a literary outcome that had strayed significantly from the more relational interdependent value-system inherent to Hebrew thought. And the dualistic split between the sacred and the secular, body and soul, matter and spirit became endemic to the new religion, although largely absent in its mother culture.

The biggest shift however was in the newly adopted worldview. Plato and Aristotle are often credited with laying the foundations for modern science and cosmology, and this is largely true for the mechanistic, Newtonian science developed from the 16th century onwards. It was the Greeks who introduced the notion of the world being made up of atoms, tiny bits of material stuff, bouncing off each other like billiard balls thus creating friction and tension which came to be understood as the basis of all the energy and structure in the universe. And while Aristotle acknowledges a Creator God, it is God's representatives on earth, namely rational human beings – who are in charge of the atomistic creation. Anthropology controls cosmology.

Arguably, the Hebrew worldview is also quite anthropocentric, and as described in the Hebrew Bible (O.T.) viciously violent at times. It depends on how we interpret the role of Torah, and the ensuing notion of the Covenant. While scholars hold divergent views, many highlight the relational basis of the Covenant and claim that the wisdom inherent to Torah embraces cosmic, planetary and personal dimensions.

Whether inspired by the alternative wisdom of his Jewish background (a view upheld by several scholars today), or by a wisdom largely unknown in previous times, Jesus embraces a radically different world view, one that is not merely at variance with the adopted Greek cosmology, but one that opposes and challenges all the key values of the Greek context. What worldview was Jesus adopting in proclaiming the new Companionship of Empowerment? When we examine closely the dynamics and challenges of the new companionship, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the worldview adopted by the historical Jesus is none other than the one described earlier in this essay, namely, the New Cosmology.

We cannot ascertain precisely why or how Jesus would have adopted this worldview. It certainly was very different from all the cultural models available to him, including his native Jewish background. It is in the unpacking of the notion of the Companionship of Empowerment that we begin to glimpse a worldview that is expansive, relational, trans-rational and warmly embracing the living earth itself. The Gospels give us few insights into this expanded view, as the evangelists themselves were not grounded in it. However, the several allusions to land and landscape in both the parables and the Sermon on the Mount do give significant hints that Jesus was on to an enlarged cosmic perspective.

In the limited space of this article, I cannot elaborate any further on this newly understood world view of the historical Jesus – with far-reaching consequences for all forms of Christian discipleship, including that of the vowed life. By way of resume, I have tried to highlight the fact that there is no conflict between the wisdom of the New Cosmology and the worldview which inspired the historical Jesus. More significantly, we need the insights of the New Cosmology that fully appreciate and internalize the vision of the Kingdom of God, reappropriated for our time as the Companionship of Empowerment.

7. PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

In our appropriation of the New Cosmology, contemporary Christians encounter another major stumbling block, namely the understanding of the human person. Shifting the emphasis from the person of Jesus to impersonal concepts like the Kingdom of God or the Companionship of Empowerment, undermines the more personal sense of calling and interpersonal sense of responsibility that many Christians deem to be central to vocation and mission. The call to Christian discipleship is personally communicated to each one by a personal God, and at the end of life each one of us must render an account for how we respond.

The sense of personhood being evoked in this understanding belongs once more to the invasive Hellenistic culture rather than to the Hebrew context of Judaeo-Christian faith. Under consideration is the notion of personalism promoted by classical Greek culture and specifically in the thought of Aristotle. For Aristotle, the core of personal integrity is the use of reason, whereby a persona differentiates from all the intuitive and emotional attachments to the natural world. An authentic person should stand over against the natural world as an autonomous, self-reliant, rational individual. Just as the supernatural is above and outside the natural, so should each person strive to differentiate – and become separate from the entrapment of the natural world.

Today, we accept this understanding without question or reservation. Such is the cultural and patriarchal conditioning of the past two thousand years, the person as a lone-ranger, skilled from a young age for fierce competition and adversarial conflict, is a construct nobody ever dreamt of questioning. More disturbing still is the realization that this understanding is quite alien to the prevailing self-understanding that was ours as an earthly species for most of our evolutionary time on earth. So deep-seated is this ideological construct it is well nigh impossible to engage in an informed and creative way with any alternative sense of what it means to be a human being.

An alternative does exist, and indeed it flourished for thousands of years before the Aristotelian understanding ever came to the fore. It is the relational construct of human personhood, widely known throughout Africa as the *Ubuntu principle* (I am because we are), and sometimes defined thus: “I am at all times the sum of my relationships, and that is what confers my identity.” It is this relational understanding that is at the heart of the Companionship of Empowerment, and central to every teaching and practice of the historical Jesus.

Here is where we confront the inner core of the *Sequela Christi*. It is not about following an individual Jesus, but rather an interconnected web- *a new relational matrix* (“I call you friends . . . – Jn.15:15), with Jesus as the primary disciple of the new companionship. The historical Jesus serves as a model of communal discipleship, not to be imitated as an individual, but followed in adopting a similar quality of commitment to the cause for which Jesus lived and died. The following scholarly quotes captivate the depth and complexity of how we now are invited to understand our call to the *Sequela Christi*:

“God was “incarnate” not in the physical nature of Jesus as such, but in the gestalt that coalesced both in and around his person – with which his person did in some sense become identical, and by which, after his death, he took on a new, communal identity. . . . For Christians the person of Jesus of Nazareth played and continues to play a normative role in mediating the shape of God in history, which is the shape of love in freedom. Jesus’ personal identity merged into that shape in so far as he simply was what he proclaimed and practiced. But Jesus’ personal identity did not exhaust this shape, which is intrinsically a communal, not an individual shape. . . . the communal shape of Spirit is the true and final gestalt of God in history” (Peter C. Hodgson, 1989, 209-210).

“Jesus pointed to something he called God’s domain, something he did not create, something he did not control. I want to discover what Jesus saw, or heard, or sensed that was so enchanting, so mesmerizing, so challenging that it held

Jesus in its spell. And I do not want to be misled by what the followers did: instead of looking to see what he saw, the devoted disciples tended to stare at the pointing finger. Jesus himself should not be, must not be, the object of faith. That would be to repeat the idolatry of the first believers” (Robert Funk 1996, 305).

8. COMMUNAL EMPOWERMENT

We speculate at great length on the personal identity of Jesus, as the early Christian theologians did at the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. At the end of the day, however, the call to discipleship is not about some kind of metaphysical clarity, but about transformative action that is essentially communitarian in nature. We share with the Jesus partnership in the web of life. In our Christian faith Jesus engaged with the web though the cultural context known as the Companionship of Empowerment. Jesus is our primary empowering model in that undertaking and we are called to be co-disciples in the transformative mission of bringing about on earth a newly empowering reign of God.

There is, therefore, no individual salvation apart from communal transformation. God’s saving grace touches each one of us to the extent that we touch each other’s lives with the empowerment to live more creatively in God’s universe. We work out our salvation by co-creating heaven on earth. “As long as you did it to one of these the least of my loved ones, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). Today, however, “the least” must include the suffering earth itself, a planetary home without which we cannot live out our God-gifted potential as planetary and cosmic co-creators.

The late Belgian theologian, Eduard Schillebeeckx, on being asked if he could briefly summarise the mission of the Kingdom of God, responded with one sentence: *It is about making God’s world a better place for everybody*. There are criteria, however, on how Christians are called to activate the transformation. Some are the lofty ideals outlined in the Gospels and elsewhere in the Christian scriptures, particularly the key values of love, justice, liberation, healing, inclusivity and empowerment. For Religious, the key values are mediated through our vowed living, our communal discernment, and our apostolic endeavours.

It is the practical implementation however that can prove difficult and even daunting. Our over-spiritualized emphasis in Religious Life can actually alienate us from the contemporary call to mission. We need to match the spirituality with a grounded praxis simultaneously serving both the New Cosmology and the Companionship of Empowerment. I wish to recommend one empowering strategy which I borrow from a social analysis of poverty in the contemporary world.

In order to address and rectify poverty in our world today, Stephen Smith (2008), professor of economics at George Washington University (USA), proposes eight empowering strategies, most of which sound distinctly secular. To overcome the remnant conditioning one may still be carrying around dualistic splitting; keep in mind the word empowerment as you read through these eight criteria. In my opinion, they focus our calling at this time to become co-disciples in the Companionship of Empowerment:

1. *Health Care*: without at least rudimentary facilities to enhance healthy living, people will feel grossly disempowered.
2. *Basic Education*: One's God-given potential cannot be realised without some basic structures of education.
3. *Credit and Insurance*, facilitating a degree of access to money to be able to live with dignity.
4. *Functioning Markets*, providing a forum whereby one has the opportunity to exchange goods, thus feeling a useful member of society.
5. *Phones and Internet*. We live in a world where information means power, and its lack inevitably results in a sense of being disempowered.
6. *Non-degraded Environment*. Without a healthy environment, people will not enjoy good health, without which we cannot realise our God-given potential.
7. *Personal Empowerment to gain freedom from exploitation*, but also to know that one can contribute meaningfully to the common good
8. *Community Empowerment for participation in the wider world*, through some degree of meaningful involvement in cultural activity and development.

A meaningful Religious Life presence in the contemporary world, and a credible form of mission, will require the personal and communal skills to deliver some or all of these empowering strategies. In turn this will require new forms of lay collaboration largely unknown in the recent past. Networking with various NGOs and government agencies, previously seen as peripheral to mission and witness, will now assume a much more central and critical role. The *Sequela Christi* in our globalized world requires us to translate the Companionship of Empowerment into real liberating action.

To realize this goal we must outgrow the dualistic split between the sacred and secular. In the new companionship God works through the integration of

sacred-cum-secular, and so must we as credible witnesses to the living Gospel in the contemporary world.

Reference Bibliography

Berry, Thomas. *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 1990.

Chittister, Joan. *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Funk, Robert. *Honest to Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996.

Hodgson, Peter C. *God in History*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

McNamara, Jo Ann Kay. *Sisters in Arms*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *Christianity's Dangerous Memory*. New York: Crossroad, 2011.

Smith, Stephen. *Ending Global Poverty*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Workman, Herbert. *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*. London: Epworth Press, 1913.

ECO-FEMINISM AND FAITH: RECLAIMING A SUBVERTED GLOBAL WISDOM

Pushpa Joseph, FMM

Eco-feminism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as myriad forms of feminist and environmental theories and activism intersected. The term was introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death), published in 1974. Some theorists, such as Ynestra King, name it as a third wave of feminism, while others place it in the general category of deep ecology. Eco-feminism acts in both, and simultaneously serves as an environmental critique of feminism and a feminist critique of environmentalism. Eco-feminist trajectories are varied; there is no one accepted as orthodox "eco-feminism." Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Starhawk, Sallie McFague, Luisah Teish, Sun Ai Lee-Park, Paula Gunn Allen, Monica Sjöö, Greta Gaard, Karen Warren and Andy Smith are among the voices speaking from eco-feminist positions.

Eco-feminism asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. These socially constructed oppressions come out of the power dynamics of patriarchal systems. In one of the first eco-feminist books, *New Woman/New Earth*, Ruether states: "Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this modern industrial society."¹ Ruether makes clear a central tenet of eco-feminism: earth and the other-than-human experience the tyranny of patriarchy along with women.

Pushpa Joseph is a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, holding a Masters Degree in English Literature from Calicut University and a Masters Degree in Religion and Philosophy from Kamraj University, Madurai. She was a Resident Graduate at Harvard University. She completed her Ph.D. from the University of Madras. She has taught for nine years in the University of Madras. She is at present Provincial of the Bangalore Province of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in India.

Eco-feminism is multi-faceted and multi-located, challenging structures rather than individuals. By confronting systems of patriarchy, eco-feminism broadens the scope of the cultural critique and incorporates seemingly disparate but, according to eco-feminism, radically connected elements. Combining feminist and deep ecological perspectives – in and of themselves extremely varied ways of thinking about reality – is a complex, transgressive process that is often in flux. Eco-feminist positions reflect varied political stances that may be, and usually are, transformed through time and place. In other words, the political activisms and alliances stemming from eco-feminism modify in relationship to the perceived justice issues being confronted in differing cultural and historical settings. Because of this constant morphing, eco-feminism simultaneously challenges patriarchies from different angles. This is one of the myriad strengths of the fluid and radically diverse positions assumed by eco-feminism.

Eco-feminism claims that patriarchal structures justify their dominance through categorical or dualistic hierarchies: heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature, white/non-white. Established oppressive systems continue to manifest their abusive powers by reinforcing assumptions of these binaries, even making them sacred through religious and scientific constructs. Eco-feminism posits that as long as any of the dualisms exist as an integral component of societal structuring and justification, they will all continue to serve as starting points to justify patriarchy. Therefore all dualisms and binary oppositional forms must be dismantled otherwise humanity remains “divided against” itself, a phrase that Griffin uses to describe the ideological impact of dualism.²

There is no single definition of eco-feminism, but there are core principles. Eco-feminists agree that the domination of women and the domination of nature are fundamentally connected and that environmental efforts are therefore integral to overcoming the oppression of women.

1. QUALITIES THAT DISTINGUISH ECO-FEMINISM

Eco-feminism is characterized by certain principles. As a significant example of critical hermeneutics, its core issues have been constant despite the variety of its positions. In this section we will deal with some of its distinguishing characteristics.

1.1. Challenge to Gender Asymmetry

Eco-feminism focuses continuously and reflexively on the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life and texts. The

dichotomies of the public and private realms have influenced how we interpret gender. Here, the public world is associated with men. It is the world of activity, logic, reasoning, leadership, authority and culture. The private world of the home has been associated with women and as a place of reproduction, emotion, intuition and dependency. In Greek/Roman thought women were defective and incapable of reaching full humanity and transcending this lower nature. There was one way for a woman to be a guardian in Plato's *Republic*: she could give up her female nature and transcend to become a pseudo male. Eco feminists question this dichotomy of private/public and reason/intuition that has influenced how we interpret gender. Eco-feminist interpreters of the Bible affirm that all of our lives are wholly before God and both male and female are created in the image of God with the cultural mandate to multiply, fill the earth and care for it. Eco-feminism considers it mandatory to question the ideas and structures that impede the full humanity of all.

1.2. Challenge to Masculinist Thinking: A Cultural Critique

It challenges the male as the human norm and the collapse of the male into the human as identical. Thus in masculinist thinking the distinction between maleness and humanity is clouded over and 'man' truly becomes the measure of all things. Femaleness is viewed as an exception to this standard or as the 'other.' This results in the male experience as the defining experience of what it means to be human and ignores the unique experiences of women as fully human experiences.

Eco-feminism has brought up the issue of women's voice, agency, identity and power in regard to every academic discipline. It has challenged the male viewpoint and masculinist assumptions about the world. Feminist philosophy of Science has questioned the interpretation of 'objective' science. It has pointed out male bias in research and interpretative models by challenging sex difference research, including the assumption that if we find a sex difference in some ability or behavior that means that all males or all females will behave in the same way. They also challenged the idea that sex differences are biologically based and therefore inevitable and unchangeable. They have questioned how science is done and interpreted. They question the ability of scientists and classical hermeneutics to discover and describe 'Truth' without a male bias. They questioned not only how things were studied but also what is chosen or considered worthy of study. The scientific study of women done mostly by men in which women were the objects was particularly assaulted. In eco-feminism thus, woman becomes the subject.

2. A VIEW FROM BELOW

Interpretation from an eco-feminist perspective proposes that the traditional goal of objective and disinterested interpretation be replaced by conscious partiality. Traditional theories have been committed to being scientific and objective. Feminist scholars have candidly acknowledged androcentric biases and patriarchal interests in such a value neutral interpretation. They challenge the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from one another and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific. Embracing conscious partiality in favour of the most oppressed and silenced in society, leads to replacing the 'view from above' with a 'view from below' that embodies both scientific and ethical-political dimensions. Analyzing symbol systems and concepts, feminists emphasize, is not sufficient; one must question the impact and relation that they have on the historical reality of women in the past, present and future. An eco-feminist hermeneutic of the Bible for example, must become a critical-evaluative and transformative interpretation, subjecting the Bible to its own canon of liberation.

2.1. Focus on the Politics of Interpretation

Whereas masculine hermeneutics has always prescribed to a hermeneutics of discovery based on the notion that meaning lies either *behind* (author centered), *within* (text centered) or *in front* (context centered) eco-feminist hermeneutics is not so much concerned with where meaning lies as in how meaning is constructed and who constructs meaning and for whom. It grapples with issues of power dynamics associated with the project of interpretation and meaning making. It critiques a historical positivism that fails to detect its own biases in the name of an objective universalism. As such the questions that a feminist hermeneutics raises will be how is meaning constructed? Who constructs it and for whom? What are the power dynamics associated with Meaning making? What is the social location of the one who constructs meaning? Whose meaning survives and becomes part of tradition? Why? What are the implications thereof? What are the political intentions with which such meaning is constructed?³ The very act of questioning becomes a deconstructive interaction both with the text and the history of the text. A feminist hermeneutics thus has two moments, one, the moment of suspicion and deconstruction. The second moment is a creative moment of reconstruction accompanied by creative remembering by giving voice to the silence of the marginals, a reconstruction of meaning from a perspective and stance hitherto neglected.⁴

2.2. Embodied

Feminists have highlighted that traditional epistemologies neglect women's ways of knowing and being and feminine aspects of understanding, many of which are essential to sound interpretation and theorizing. To approach these issues requires us to have a theological and philosophical renaissance that intersects with culture. Meaningful gender dialogue depends on us being able to articulate an understanding of the body from our theological and philosophical worldviews. All gender issues are based on what we believe about the body. This irreducible bedrock of who I am is located in time and space. The body is the concreteness on which we layer culture and faith. As such eco-feminist hermeneutics focuses upon the body as the locus for human experiencing, reflection and action.⁵

A reappraisal of body and, especially, the female body is crucial for four reasons. First, body is so inextricably bound up with the self and identity of a woman and her agency. Second, the power of patriarchy is most dominating over the realm of women's body and sexuality. Third, religious and philosophical traditions have contributed in varying measure to the devaluation of women's bodies through their doctrines and practices – a point which is so evident from history and present practices.

Classical theories repeat the traditional dualism of nature and culture, body and mind, which has resulted in the objectification of women's bodies even in scriptural discourse. To counter such a dualism, the embodied hermeneutics of eco-feminism presupposes a feminist ethics and epistemology, which has four distinctive features: a relational ontology; a relational ideal; a methodology of caring attentiveness; and an insistence upon knowledge of the particular. Thus feminist hermeneutics stresses the sheer physicality of our mutual understanding, not only cognitively or emotionally, but also with our bodies.⁶

The critical principle of eco-feminist hermeneutics is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Theologically speaking, eco-feminist hermeneutics underscores that whatever denies or diminishes the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine, or reflect the authentic nature of things. What positively promotes the full humanity of women is of the Holy and reflects a genuine relation to the divine. Eco-feminist hermeneutics wishes to change unjust structures and distorted symbol systems so that a new community of equality becomes possible in the church and in society. Equality does not diminish the diversity of men and women, it simply reflects the valuation of

women as human beings—created, sinful, redeemed—having all rights, dignity and responsibilities intrinsic to human beings. The common goal of feminist hermeneutics, despite its varied perspectives, is not to make women equal partners in an oppressive system. It is to transform the system as we shall see in the next section on the different schools in feminist hermeneutics.

3. THE METHODOLOGY OF ECOFEMINSM

This section draws from the seven part critical and rhetorical feminist model of interpretation for liberation proposed by Schüssler Fiorenza for reading texts in emancipatory ways. The seven steps that make up the hermeneutical model proposed by Schüssler Fiorenza are the hermeneutics of experience, the hermeneutics of social location, the hermeneutics of suspicion, the hermeneutics of critical evaluation, the hermeneutics of imagination, the hermeneutics of remembering and reconstruction and the hermeneutics of transformation.⁷ This model of feminist hermeneutics is used by scholars in Asia and India as a viable model of eco-feminist hermeneutics even for the Indian context.

3.1. A Hermeneutic of Experience

Experiences of women which are so linked with nature and ecology are the starting point of eco-feminism. This comes from the awareness that the experiences of women have been neglected and marginalized. Moreover sad stories of oppression form the content of women's lives. Nonetheless women's stories are not only one of oppression but also of agency and affirmation. In addition the marginalization of women is linked with the atrocities on nature.

Experience as the starting point of eco-feminist hermeneutics has three characteristics. First of all experience is mediated linguistically and culturally. There is no pure experience. Secondly, the personal is political. Individual experiences are not private but public and are affected by variables of class, gender, caste, race and so on in their construction. Thirdly, since experience is determined socially and religiously it calls for an analysis.

The notion of feminist experience begins with a 'break through' moment, leading to a critical vision. This is the moment of feminist consciousness. Feminist interpretation has consciousness raising and ideological and societal transformation as its goal. This calls for a critical analysis of our social and religious location.

3.2. Hermeneutics of Domination and Social Location

A critical interpretation for liberation reflects not only on the experiences of women with a particular text and interpretation. It also reflects on the manner

in which our social, cultural and religious location has shaped our experience with a particular text. It is to this end that feminist interpreters engage in the critical analysis of domination and social location. The kind of systemic analysis we adopt will determine our interpretation of a text. An eco-feminist hermeneutics insists on a systematic analysis that will both disentangle the ideological functions of the texts that legitimate patriarchy and also set free the potential within texts to foster justice and liberation. Such a systemic analysis identifies both contemporary situations of domination and situations inscribed in an instrumental approach to nature.

In short any hermeneutical theory which does not inspire people to question their own social location and its patriarchal power relations, nor conscientize people politically nor engender the search for justice as an ongoing principled struggle is to be suspected. That leads us to the third strategic move – the hermeneutics of suspicion.

3.3. Hermeneutics of Suspicion

The hermeneutics of suspicion can be defined as a deconstructive practice of inquiry that denaturalizes and demystifies linguistic and cultural practices of hegemony. It is concerned with the distorted ways in which women's presence and practices are constructed. When applied to Biblical hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of suspicion, first of all, does not take the androcentric text and its claim to divine authority at face value. It investigates it as to its ideological functions in the interest of domination. Suspicion, however, does not denote paranoia. It is aroused by the insight that all Biblical texts are articulated in grammatically masculine language. It challenges and demystifies the structures of domination that are inscribed in the Biblical text, in our experience, and in contemporary contexts of interpretation.

In short, a hermeneutics of suspicion does four things. Firstly, it makes a critical analysis of dominant strategies of meaning making. Secondly, it draws out and makes manifest masculine/feminine, superior/inferior, we/others roles and values inscribed in the text. Thirdly, it consciously articulates the ideological strategies of the text. Fourthly, it makes apparent the text's interaction and resonance with our experience and cultural value system. Ultimately, it seeks to determine and circumscribe the rhetorical situation and context in which the text was formulated and operates today.

Schüssler Fiorenza has developed her hermeneutics of suspicion in terms of liberation theology. She uses Stephen Breck Reid's description of the hermeneutics of suspicion to explain her own position. According to Stephen

Breck Raid, “the African-American community of slaves is a ‘stepchild’ of the Enlightenment which constructs a world where the ‘natural’ view is Eurocentric and the ‘natural children’ are of European origin... As the stepchildren to the Enlightenment African-American scholars/preachers employ a hermeneutics of suspicion to which they add hope... The stepchild learns through deciphering texts and experience that the natural child’s view of truth is based on a lie . . . Their hermeneutics of suspicion formulates new readings to replace what the dominant group calls the ‘accepted reading.’ It clears away the debris of conventional reading and moves to a different style of deciphering.”⁸

To employ the hermeneutics of suspicion means to act as a detective or a sleuth in order to disentangle the ideological workings of androcentric language.

3.4. Hermeneutics of Critical Evaluation

The hermeneutics of critical evaluation both presupposes and completes a hermeneutics of suspicion. It is necessary because texts have a multiplicity of meanings. The main aim of the hermeneutics of evaluation is to assess and appraise texts and traditions in order to examine if they are emancipatory. When applied to Biblical interpretation, the hermeneutics of critical evaluation emphasizes that a text can be proclaimed as the word of God only if it is emancipatory. Otherwise they are to be proclaimed as the word of John or Luke or the word of men. Such an evaluation and appraisal is done in terms of a feminist scale of values. The criterion of evaluation is the well being of every woman.

In short the main goal of a hermeneutics of evaluation is to adjudicate whether a particular text and tradition is emancipatory or not. It does this in terms of a feminist scale of values.

3.5. Hermeneutics of Creative Imagination

A hermeneutics of imagination offers us the possibility of imagining a new world of justice and well-being. It is a space of memory and possibility, of freedom and fantasy. In this space possibilities are explored, boundaries are crossed. We have had many men and women who dared to create such expanses for the liberation of humanity. In the Indian scenario, we have the great example of Pandita Ramabai. She envisioned a new and free world for the widows of her time who were given very inhuman treatment. Living in the first part of the 20th century was not easy for a Brahmin woman and widow who dared to dream of a new future for her sisters. But she created a space where possibilities are explored, boundaries are crossed. In this space she entered into the feelings, longings, anxieties, dreams and sorrows of others. Imagination has power. It helps us to tell the story differently, in a way other than the Patriarchal stories of exclusion.

This strategy employs aesthetic methods like role-play, bibliodrama, pictorial arts, dance, story-telling and so on. However it is very important to couple it with the hermeneutics of critical evaluation and suspicion lest imaginative retellings of Scripture reinscribe cultural and stereotypical notions of women

3.6. A Hermeneutics of Re-Membering and Reconstruction

To re-member means to bring together different parts of a larger structure in order to construct a new design. In this case, the different elements are the surviving bits and pieces of women's forgotten and petite histories. Thus the hermeneutics of remembering widens our historical imagination.

Feminist historiography highlighted the rhetorical nature of texts. In order that we reclaim women's lost heritage, it is important in this new construction of history to place at the centre hitherto silenced voices. Such a model of historiography does not understand texts as a window to the past or as a mirror image of reality. It demands that every stage of historiography – research, explanation and writing be accompanied by the hermeneutics of critical evaluation and suspicion.

Whereas the mainstream models of historiography are positivist, a feminist model of historiography which Schüssler Fiorenza has likened to patch-work quilting calls for new hermeneutical assumptions. Firstly, the assumption that women were present and active in history unless proven differently. Secondly, injunctions on women that seek to censure are to be taken as prescriptive and not descriptive. Thirdly, texts and information should be contextualized in their various cultural and religious environments and reconstructed in terms of alternative social movements for change.

The specific characteristic of a hermeneutics of re-membering and reconstruction are that it affirms women's historical existence and claims women's historical subjectivity. In the Indian theological context, such a strategy is being adopted by Dalit theology. Dalit theologians are involved in the reconstructive process of articulating history by a revalorization of Dalit participation and agency.

3.7. Hermeneutics of Transformative Action for Change

The process of critical reconstruction is complete only when accompanied by transformative action for change. Thus the goal of the feminist hermeneutics is change which is figuratively explained in terms of the "journey to the open house of wisdom." A process of transformation, visualized as changing texts, traditions and everyday life is accountable to the women who are at the bottom of the patriarchal pyramid, in Indian terms the "Dalit of the Dalits." With its

commitment to transformation, biblical interpretation and biblical theology evolves from the mire of individualized and privatized rhetoric to a public and political discourse. In order to realize the goal of transformation, it is important to articulate and create new visions.

Feminist hermeneutics shows us that it is possible for us to reclaim our heritage through a complex, committed critical struggle. Such a hermeneutical approach offers wide possibilities not only to Christian women but to millions of women in other religions who have experienced victimization as a result of the culture of patriarchy.⁹

4. CONCLUSION

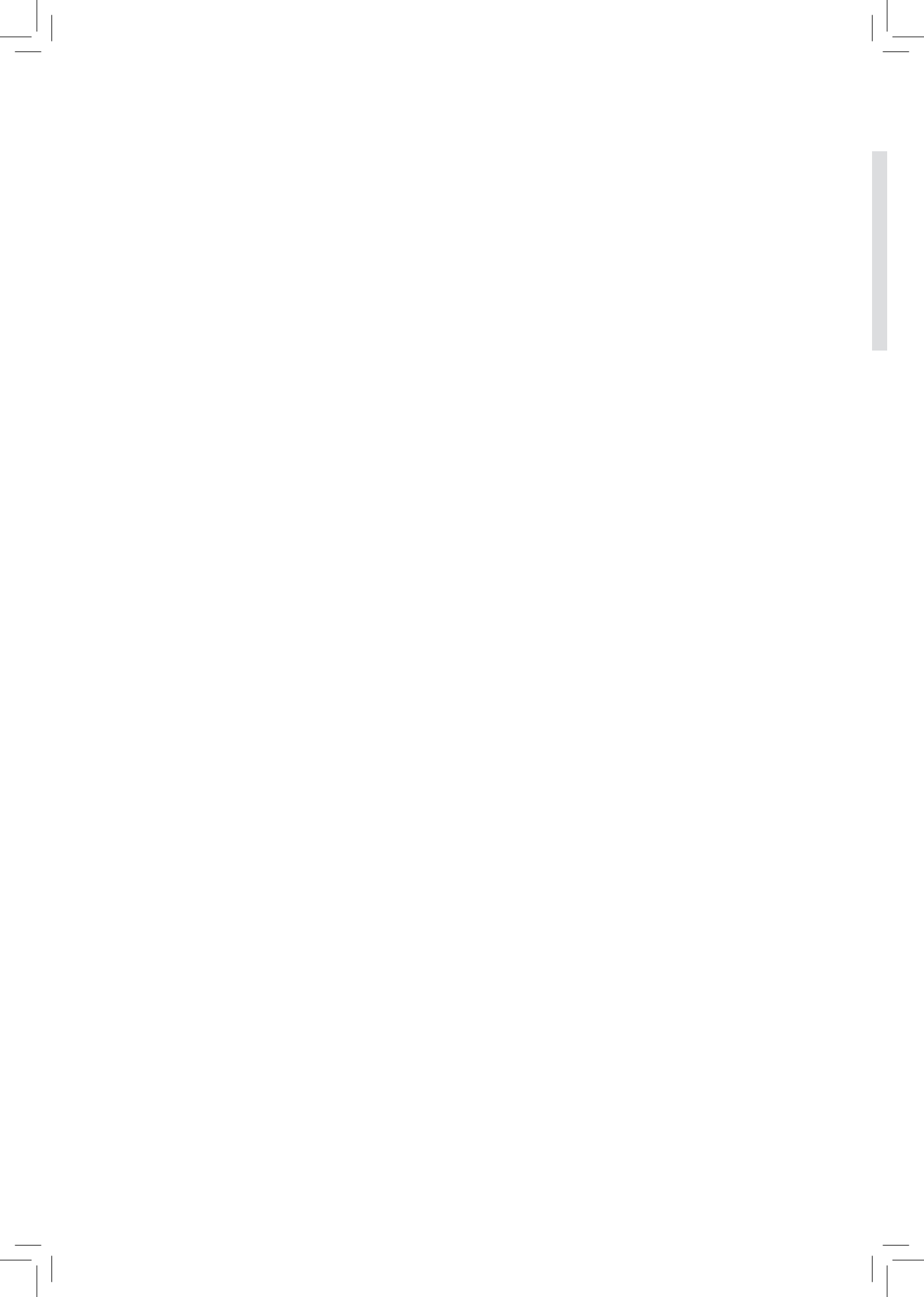
Eco-feminist hermeneutics deals with interpretation from a feminist perspective. A thoroughgoing critique of sexism is the primary intent driving the methodology, criteria, and goals of feminist hermeneutics. By appealing to women's experience, oppressive patriarchy is exposed and a new understanding is embraced. Empowered by this seldom considered resource of feminine social experience, feminist hermeneutics engages in at least three interrelated tasks: it critically analyzes inherited oppressions, searches for alternative wisdom and suppressed history, and risks new interpretations of the tradition in conversation with women's lives."

Inherited oppressions are critically probed through the unmasking work of deconstruction. The hidden dynamic of patriarchal domination in traditional language, custom, memory, history, sacred texts, ethics, symbolism, theology, and ritual are exposed. Throughout history, women have been denied political, legal, and educational rights. For most of Christian history women have been subordinated in theological theory and ecclesial practice at every level. Feminist criticism seeks equality and dignity for all who are oppressed in both theory and praxis. It continues to self-define, revealing its weaknesses and strengths in the process. In light of its long awaited recognition by the academy and the Church, the movement will undoubtedly continue to grow and mature, presenting opportunities for exploration and discourse.

Endnotes

- 1 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, 204.
- 2 Susan Griffin, *The Eros of Everyday Life: Essays on Ecology, Gender and Society*, New York: Double Day, 1995, See pp. 31-36.

- 3 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, New York: Continuum, 2000, 23- 28.
- 4 See Elsa Tamez. “Women’s Rereading of the Bible”, in Ursula King (ed), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 190-201.
- 5 For such an argument, cf. Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, “Significance of the ‘Body’ in Feminist Theological Discourse” in Bangalore Theological Forum, Volume XXXIII, No.2 December, 2001, 80-98.
- 6 For such an argument, cf. Pushpa Joseph, “Pushpa Joseph, “Philosophizing from Feminist Perspectives” in George Thadathil (eds.), *Philosophizing from Subaltern Perspectives*, (Bangalore: ATC, 2005).
- 7 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 45-55.
- 8 As quoted in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 89.
- 9 Lilian Calles Barger, “Women’s Culture: The Gospel and the Future,” A speech delivered at one of the plenary sessions at the God and the Academy conference for Christian Professors held in June. <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri0009/barger.html>



CALL TO NEW EVANGELIZATION: SCOPE AND RELEVANCE A CONTEXTUALIZED READING OF *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS*

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

What is the story beneath the call of the Synod of Bishops to New Evangelization? Let us just explore the scope and relevance of this theme from the perspective the working document, *Instrumentum Laboris* of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which was held in Rome from October 07-28, 2012. This working document is titled as *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT

First of all, let me give you an overview of the document, showing its Significance, Purpose, Preparation involved and the Outline.

1.1. Significance

This working document was prepared in view of the Synod of Bishops. We all know that this Synod was convoked at a significant time as it coincided with three major historic events: 50th anniversary of the opening of the II Vatican Council, 20th anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the Declaration of the Year of Faith by Pope Benedict XVI.

Evangelization is the energy which gives the Church the dynamism needed for the realization of her goal. Evangelization is intrinsic to her very identity because the Church exists in order to evangelize. We know, however, that the world that she seeks to evangelize has changed drastically during the last 50 years and is still changing. Therefore, the Church must constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting, or representing to it God's revelation and faith in Jesus Christ. Though this process calls for a redefinition of the Church's

Xavier E. Manavath is a Claretian Missionary who has long experience of service in formation and on-going formation. He has a doctorate from Van Kaam's Institute of Formative Spirituality, Duquesne University, USA and has been the founding director of Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life. After having served as Provincial Superior of the Claretians of Bangalore and the President of KRCC, he is currently the Director of Sanyasa and the chief editor of its Journal. He may be contacted at: xmanavath@gmail.com

relation to the world, it presupposes, first of all, “an ongoing internal renewal, a continuous passing . . . from being evangelized to evangelizing” (NE.13).¹ The Church is convinced that without a renewal of faith in our times, there cannot be a new proclamation and transmission of faith needed for our times. Only a re-evangelization can ensure the growth of a clear and deep faith capable of encountering the new world and regenerate forces of authentic freedom needed to transform the world. Pope John Paul II writes: “Without doubt, a mending of the Christian fabric of the society, is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about, what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself present in these countries and nations.”² This is the task of new evangelization facing the Church today, especially in countries with a Christian tradition.

1.2. Purpose

This Synod of Bishops, therefore, was an attempt to grasp and re-propose to the people the invitation to rediscover the faith. The declaration of the Year of Faith by Pope Benedict should also be seen as a determined effort to give new fervor to faith and to the testimony of Christians and their communities.

In convoking the Synod, the Church wants to “lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives life and life in abundance” (NE.8). It wants to “devise new tools and new expressions so that the word of faith “be heard more and be better understood even in the new deserts of this world” (NE.8). She wants us to re-discover the joy of believing and a re-kindling of enthusiasm in communicating faith (NE. 9).³ What is involved is not just devising something new or undertaking heroic initiatives in spreading of the Gospel, but calling us to live the “faith in the spirit of it being a divine proclamation” (NE.9) In rediscovering the love of God, revealed in Jesus, the missionary commitment of believers attains force and vigor that can never fade away. “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness” (PF.7), capable of leading those people who are seeking it to the “door of faith.”

1.3. Preparation Involved

In order to facilitate the preparation of this document, a set of guidelines, called *Lineamenta* was prepared, including questions to be answered and was sent to all the Conference of Bishops of different countries, Synods of Bishops of Eastern Catholic Churches *sui juris*, the Departments of the Roman Curia, and

the Union of Superiors General. Their responses were collected. Observations were also gathered from individual bishops, priests, members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life, lay associations and ecclesial movements. All these responses, observations and comments were collected, summarized and synthesized in this working document of the Synod.

1.4. Outline

Chapter One helps us discover the heart of evangelization in the experience of faith as an encounter with Jesus Christ, the Good News of God to Humanity; it also shows how this new experience transforms, gathers, and introduces us to a New Life as a Church, and how this new life becomes a source of joy which makes us witnesses and heralds of the gift received, urging us to travel to the streets of the world.

Chapter Two describes the context of this call for new evangelization, helping us to discern the changes that affect the way we believe and live our faith and evaluating the reasons for the call to New Evangelization; it also shows the different ways the Particular Churches can get involved and brings out the sectors of evangelization.

Chapter Three details the basic places, means, persons and activities in the transmission of faith and how in this transmission, faith needs to be professed, celebrated, lived and prayed.

Chapter Four discusses the various areas of revivifying pastoral activity, specifically dedicated to proclamation and transmission of faith

2. NEW EVANGELIZATION: URGENCY AND RELEVANCE

2.1. Looking for a Definition

What is New Evangelization? Seeking to define this concept, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, proposes the following. “In its precise sense, evangelization is the *mission ad gentes* directed to those who do not know Christ. In a wider sense, it is used to describe ordinary pastoral work, while the phrase “new evangelization” designates pastoral outreach to those who no longer practice the Christian faith.”⁴ This definition indicates the geographical area for the new evangelization, primarily, though not exclusively as the Christian West, where the baptized are facing new experiential and cultural situation that threatens their faith and witness. The same situation is also emerging and affecting younger Churches as they are also faced with social and cultural changes associated with the rapidly expanding urban centers all over the world.

The call of the Church to new evangelization and its urgency, therefore, have to be understood in the context of the challenges emerging in today's world. We cannot understand the challenges unless we situate ourselves properly in our world today and read what is happening to us. Vatican Council II reminds that "groups among which the Church dwells are often radically changed for one reason or other, so that an entirely new set of circumstances may arise."⁵ We need to look at the world around us and try to identify some of the most important manifestations of the challenges we face as evangelizers.

2.2. Situating the Theme in the Proper Context

If there is one word that would synthesize best the different aspects of the challenges that we perceive in today's world, it might be the word, "change." We live in a world of increasing changes—though not as rampant and pervasive as in the West. We may say that there is nothing new because each age has lived through important changes such as those taught us by history. But there exists an awareness that we are going through a time in which this change has been accelerated and that its consequences are beginning to be felt very strongly in the life our congregations and their evangelizing mission.

There is change in one important area; we are truly changing in terms of values, in terms of relationships and in terms of institutions and systems. First of all, there are these social and cultural changes that are profoundly affecting our perception of the self, the world and consequently, our personal way of believing in God.⁶ The underlying causes of these socio-cultural changes that we witness today are complex. There is a conglomeration of factors unleashed by secularization and globalization, the first one tracing its origins far back in time and the latter, being a recent phenomenon. Taken together, these phenomena affect the climate of faith in both the North and South and the East and West; in both countries with age-old christain tradition and countries which have been evangelized during the last few centuries.⁷

2.2.1. Secularization

What is secularization? Prevalent in a particular way in the West, secularization is the result of certain social and philosophical happenings and movements, which had a profound effect on its history and identity. There are indeed many positive aspects which are visible to all and are often perceived as invaluable contributions to the development of human culture and surge of knowledge in many fields.⁸

However these changes have also caused many to take a critical look at values and some fundamental aspects of daily life which deeply affect people's faith.

There exists, particularly in the West, a wide spread disorientation leading us to form a mistrust of all that has been passed down and a certain unwillingness to surrender to what has been revealed as the profound truths our being. We could call it a “certain detachment from faith,” as a way to live as if God does not exist at all.

There has been a “troubling loss of the sense of the sacred, which has even called into question foundations once deemed unshakable, such as faith in a provident creator God, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the one Saviour, and a common understanding of basic human experiences: i.e., birth, death, life in a family and a reference to a natural moral law . . . (and) the human being wishing to be the soul architect of his nature and destiny” (NE.43).

Besides, this trend of secularization is often seen by some people as a sign of liberation, providing openness to possibility of “envisaging life in this world, and human life in general, without any reference to the transcendent. In recent years, secularization has not assumed the form of publically or directly speaking out against God, religion or Christianity, even though, it expresses itself discretely in anti-christian, anti-religious and anti-clerical tones. In fact, the Synod rightly recognizes a *subdued tone* in secularization with its charm and seductive character which invades people’s daily lives to the point that some have developed a “mentality in which God is effectively absent, in whole or in part in human consciousness” (NE. 52) or eliminates the questions of God from a person’s examination of self. Traces of a secular understanding of life are seen in the habitual attitude and behavior of many Christians. It has given rise to an “unproductive, hedonistic and consumer mentality, which leads to a highly superficial manner in facing life and responsibility” (NE. 53). Faith runs the real risk of losing its fundamental elements. Religious persons revert to individualistic forms of spirituality or forms of neo-paganism to the point of loss of convictions and forcibly spreading a general kind of relativism.

2.2.2. Globalization

Next major reason for the changes that we witness is globalization. Globalization has overcome distances and brought individuals and people closer together, and is capable of starting activities and movements of diverse character that rapidly overcome national and cultural frontiers. It brings about an ambiguous reality with great potential for the creation of powerful networks of solidarity, but with the real threat of being manipulated by those who hold power with the aim of consolidating and increasing it.

The global consciousness that is emerging is also the one created by the media. No one can doubt its influence. Every place on the globe can be reached by communication and, therefore, is subject to the influence of the media. It creates an entirely “new social space where the connections created have the potential of influencing society and culture . . . by incisively entering into people’s experiences and widening human potential” (N.E. 60). The media and the social space it creates must be viewed positively, as a “resource which requires a discerning eye and a wise and responsible employment” (NE.60). The same social space, however, can be controlled by those in power and driven by their own interests. They can suppress the voice of truth and justice, and projects whatever they want as truth to be believed.

Added to this is the *phenomenon of great migration* which is causing an increasing number of people to leave their own places of origin and live in urban settings resulting in a meeting and mixing of cultures. Though this promotes, on the one hand, economic advancement and better living standards, on the other hand, contributes to the erosion of basic reference points to life, values and the very bonds through which people build their identity and come to know the meanings of life. This causes “extreme cultural liquidity, which increasingly leaves less room for long-standing traditions, including religious ones” (NE. 55).

Globalization, in the long run, becomes discriminatory, imposes models of thought and values of those in power and can initiate a process that can weaken “traditions and institutions and thereby rapidly eroding both social and cultural ties as well as their ability to communicate values and provide answers to perennial questions regarding life’s meaning and the truth. The result is a significant fragmentation of cultural unity and a cultures’ inability to hold fast to the faith and live the values inspired by it” (NE.47). Various areas of globalized liberal culture display a certain intolerance towards anything claimed to be the truth. The modern idea is that “freedom means absolute autonomy from truth, which finds relativism the only way of thinking suitable for living in cultural and religious diversity” (NE. 126).

Such a situation, as the Synod rightly points out, runs the risk of weakening the faith, and consequently, the ability to bear witness to the Gospel. Whether we admit or not, such a situation has unfortunately become a “reality in most of the countries where, for centuries, the Christian faith has contributed to the up building of culture and society” (NE.7).

The effects of such a negative environment on experiencing the faith and on the various forms of ecclesial life are: a weakening of faith in the Christian communities; a diminished regard for the authority of the magisterium; an

individualistic approach to belonging to the Church; a decline in religious practice; and a disengagement in transmitting the faith to the new generations.

Secularization and globalization can push faith into a private domain and an individual matter. Faith becomes more a “presupposition” than a conviction that seeks to express itself in the way we live and relate. Some may have faith, but only have an imperfect knowledge of its basic tenets and their implications in everyday living. It can also happen that faith in its deepest sense is often not understood or not actually taken up and lived. Many of the ordinary Catholics may have learnt about their faith during the catechism classes of their childhood. Since then, there may not have been any serious learning about their faith in their adult lives. Many communities lack an instruction program geared to growth and development of a mature faith. As we pass through the different developmental stages, we also need to be fed with the knowledge of faith appropriate to the successive stages of life journey, capable of dealing with and responding to the challenges that we face today. It is no wonder that many sense the need to know Christ in a different way from what they have been taught.

2.2.3. Cultural, Linguistic and Religious Pluralism

As Indians living in the Asian Continent, we do not need a lecture on cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism. Globalization has put us in close proximity with a great diversity of religions, cultures and languages. On the other hand, the tendency to level out, inherent in the globalizing process, has produced, at the same time, some powerful movements that affirm cultures that demand respect and attempt to protect themselves, at times, even with a fundamentalist bias, when they feel themselves threatened by other cultures, above all those that are dominant.

The inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue is as passionate as it is difficult. The awareness of this pluralism arouses questions that will make us uneasy. It is true that every person has the right to hear the Gospel of God to humanity, which is Jesus Christ and we cannot but proclaim to others what we experience deep down in our hearts. St. Paul says: “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16). To give to others the possibility of having a similar experience requires that someone be sent to proclaim it. But how do we proclaim our faith to non-Christians, especially that we are a minority in the midst of dominant non-Christian religions? Is this done by preaching superiority of Christianity and looking down on others or to leave the missionary command of the Lord unheard and ineffective? Are these the solutions? Often it is maintained that any attempt to convince others on religious matters is a limitation of their freedom and so it is legitimate to present one’s own ideas and

to invite people to act according to one's own consciences without aiming at their conversion to Christ. Is it enough that we help people to become more human and more faithful to their own religion and build communities which strive for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity? Should we proclaim Christ to those who do not know him since it is possible to be saved without explicit knowledge of Christ? (NE.37) All these questions will challenge us as we are faced with the reality of religious and cultural pluralism.

3. ECCLESIAL RESPONSE

Obviously such a critical situation in society and also in Christian life demands a response. The Church has been sensing these challenges and the deteriorating situation in the life of faith of her members, and therefore, came the convocation of the Synodal Assembly on the theme: *New Evangelization for the Transmission of faith*.

The term "new Evangelization" calls for a new manner of proclaiming the Gospel. It was Blessed John Paul II who sanctioned and defined this term during his discourse to the Bishops of Latin America. He exhorted the Bishops for a commitment, "not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardor, methods and expression." The adjective "new" refers to the changing situations of our world and the need for the renewed energy, determination and the resourcefulness that the Church needs to look at the way she lives and transmits her faith. New evangelization expresses the commitment of the Church to renew her communal experience of faith and to proclaim it within these new situations. In order to do that she must "muster her spiritual energy and be determined in this new cultural setting to take a clear and active role by acknowledging whatever is good in these new areas, while giving renewed vitality to her faith and her duty to evangelize" (NE. 49). It also involves making Christian communities aware of the magnitude of the challenges generated by the new environment and of preparing them to dialogue critically and creatively with the challenges that we enumerated before.

3.1. Re-Stating the Core of Christian Faith

At the heart of the efforts of the Church to evangelize in a new way, is the indispensable task of restating the core of the Christian faith which is not understood or remains unknown to many Christians. This core which is the theological foundation for any evangelizing activity cannot be overlooked; instead, it needs to be authentically re-stated in order to give dynamism and proper framework to her evangelizing mission. The new evangelization, therefore, provides a providential opportunity, as individuals and communities,

to “return . . . and drink from the sources of our faith and so become more disposed to undertake the work of evangelization and testimony” (NE. 20).

3.2. Faith as an Encounter and Relationship

We need to begin by removing the misconceptions about faith. Christian faith, as often understood, is not simply teachings, wise sayings, a code of morality or a tradition. It is not simply a package of dos’ and don’ts or a package of obligations and rituals.

It is a true *Encounter* and *Relationship* with Jesus Christ, the Good News of God to humanity. This encounter gives life a “new horizon and a decisive direction” as we see ourselves mirrored in his love as He has first loved us (1 Jn 4:10). This encounter and the relationship takes place in “accordance with the Scriptures’ (1 Cor 15: 3, 4) and the Church is formed precisely through the grace of this relationship. In such an encounter, we feel an “attraction which leads to our transformation, causing us to see new dimensions to who we are and making us partakers of divine life” (NE 19). Gradually, faith takes the form of a relationship with him and in remembrance of him, especially in the Eucharist and Word of God; it creates in us the mind of Christ (personal), makes us recognize our brothers and sisters gathered by the Spirit (community), see ourselves as heralds and witnesses of this Gospel (Proclamation), and equips us to do new things (Mission) and witness to the transformation of our lives in the works of (conversion) as announced by the prophets (Jer 3:6ff; Ez 36: 24-36) (NE.19). Once this encounter happens, everything is different as a result of this *metanoia* or conversion.

3.3. Learning from Christ, the First and the Greatest Evangelizer

Jesus reveals himself as being sent to proclaim the Gospel of God to humanity. The purpose of his evangelizing mission was to draw people into a relationship with God. It was not simply driven by a desire for social or cultural change, but to offer a “profound experience, accessible to each person of being loved by God and learning to recognize him in the face of a loving and merciful Father” (NE. 23). The way Jesus treated people reveals an essential element of his method of evangelizing, welcoming everyone and never excluding everyone; the poor, the rich, the outsiders, the righteous, prostitutes and public sinners. He knew how to reach into the depths of a person and elicit faith in the God who first loved us (1Jn 4:10, 19), whose love always precedes us and is not dependent on our merits, because he is love itself: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). Thus Jesus teaches us how to evangelize, demonstrating for us the heart of the Christian faith, which is, to believe in Love and in the face and voice of this Love, Jesus Christ.

The evangelizing actions of Jesus lead people to an experience of conversion, bring us also to a profound truth that evangelization and the call to holiness and conversion are intricately bound together. As we set out to evangelize, it is good to examine to what extent the call to holiness and conversion is present in our communities today and thereby nourish the lives of those around us or to whom we minister.

3.4. Evangelization as Transmission of Faith

The Church exists in the world to continue this evangelizing mission of Jesus. The goal of all evangelization is transmission of faith. This transmission means “creating in every place and time the conditions which lead to this encounter between person and Jesus Christ” which is “intimate, personal, public and communal” (NE.18). It means that we have to look and search for innovative ways and means so that this encounter of persons and communities with Jesus Christ, the Good News of God to Humanity can happen. It consists in “proposing the Gospel which transforms the human individual, his world and his personal story” (NE. 31). We must learn how to take every human experience and give it rebirth through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Roma 6:4) with the conviction that the experience of the newness of the Gospel transforms every person. Countless are the examples as we look at history (NE. 31). Every person has the right to hear the Gospel of God to humanity and the Church has the duty to give it, creating every possibility for this encounter to happen. Every action on behalf of the Church is an evangelizing action when it becomes an “act of witness, a source of attraction and conversion and a preaching and proclamation of the Gospel” (NE.27). She needs to make every effort so that every person is drawn into an intimate and transforming relationship which the proclamation of the Gospel creates between the person and Christ.

3.5. Transmission of Faith: Some Essential Dynamics

In order that such a transmission of faith can happen, we need to be attentive to some essential dynamics. For clarity, let us enumerate them.

1. What is fundamentally required is a willingness to engage the new world with a discerning eye, learning to evaluate its changes along with the potentials for both life and death on the basis of the Gospel.¹⁰ We need to be bold in entering this new “Areopagus” and dialogue, enlarging our own vision of faith, accepting and assimilating whatever is good, and unmasking the deceptions that lie in the culture of death, always with an unflinching loyalty to the spirit of the Gospel. The changes need

to be taken up and purified through a process of discernment in their encountering and experiencing the Christian faith. At the same time, it also provides an opportunity for self examination whether our manner of life and pastoral activity are really suited to the task ahead of us. It calls for “reforming our manner of ‘being Church’ among people and avoiding the pitfalls of ‘sectarianism’ and a ‘civil religion’ all the while retaining the form of a missionary Church” (NE. 83).

2. We cannot convey what is not believed or lived. “Gospel cannot be transmitted in a life which is not modeled after the Gospel or a life which does not find its meaning, truth and future based on the Gospel” (NE.91). Transmission happens through the basic works of the life of faith: charity, witness, proclamation, celebration, listening and sharing (NE.92), the five wings in the transmission of faith.
3. Transmitting the faith is not the work of just one individual. Neither is it the exclusive work of priests and religious. Instead, it is the responsibility every Christian and the whole Church (NE. 92). Precisely for this reason, there cannot be clear cut boundaries between pastoral care, new evangelization and specific missionary activity. We need to actively follow up on the new ecclesiology of communion, developed by Vatican Council II, where there are varieties of charisms and ministries, all inspired by the same Spirit (I Cor 12: 4-11).
4. Principle obstacles to transmission are, both internal and external. Internal are: a faith that is lived in a private and passive manner, not feeling the need to be instructed in faith, a separation of faith from life, excessive bureaucratic character of ecclesiastical structures, very formal and almost routine celebration of the rituals; external are: consumerism, hedonism, cultural nihilism (NE. 95).
5. The best place to transmit the faith is a community nourished and transformed by the liturgical life and prayer (NE.97). That is why parishes are seen as an entry way, to everyone in every place on the globe to the Christian faith and an experience of the Church. Parish is not just place for religious activities, but as a “gathering place for families, Bible groups and renewed lay movements, where a true sense of church is experienced” and as a place for coordination for a wide range of church realities and pastoral initiatives (NE. 107). Parishes are places where a person “receives instruction on searching for the truth, where faith is nourished and strengthened and where Christian message and God’s plan for humanity and the world is communicated”(NE. 81). Other resources

for the transmission are baptized lay people, communities of consecrated life, various ecclesial groups and movements, and the many devotional shrine centers.

6. For faith to be transmitted, it must be “professed, celebrated, lived and prayed” --creed, sacraments, the commandments and Lord’s Prayer (PF.9). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* has developed the methodology based on this pattern with a dual purpose: to set for the basic tenets of faith and at the same time, to indicate the pedagogy for its transmission. Its goal is to stir faith to life in the heart of every believer, which is both adhering to the truth and proposing it. Hence there has to be a sincere and dedicated commitment to attentively consider the format and the deeper meaning to the catechism of the Catholic Church. We will have to devise a program of catechesis that follows the principle of faithfulness to God and the person, a program which is “able to transmit fully the core elements of the faith, and at the same time, knows how to speak to people today, in their cultures, while listening to their questions and inspiring their search for truth, goodness and beauty” (NE.104).
7. To accomplish this task, mere information on the basic tenets of faith is not enough, but a formation in them. This would call for a personally digested faith which through the power of the Gospel is capable of affecting “humanity’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (EN.19). All Christians, especially the lay faithful, are to be formed to show how Christian faith is a valid response to the pressing problems of life in every age and culture that affects every person, including the agnostic and unbeliever (NE. 118).
8. We need to develop a broader and comprehensive understanding of the pastoral mission in the transmission of faith that makes the Church enter different, local and social settings with the participation of the various persons in the Christian community—priests, deacons, parents, religious and catechists, each exercising their proper task and responsibility (N.E 105-115).
9. New Evangelization would call for a greater involvement of catechists and a greater commitment by the Church on their behalf. It is because they are “immediate witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers” who

manifest the basic strength of the communities. Church needs to reflect more creatively on their task and provide them with more stable living conditions, greater training and visibility in their service (NE. 108).

10. Family is, indeed, the model place for witnessing to faith because of its “prophetic capacity in living the core values of the Christian experience.” The basic spiritual dispositions of trusting, loving, relating, praying, respecting, sharing, forgiving etc. are learnt in the intimate ambience of the family. Due to the great stress that family is undergoing due to various kinds of pressures of the modern times, family needs the support of the wider parish community and should feel accepted and listened to. Pastoral projects should aim at strengthening families as active agents in the process of transmission of faith (NE. 110-113).
11. Religious Communities, with their prophetic and evangelizing charisms, form a dynamic source of energy in the life of faith of entire Christian communities and a great number of the baptized. As timely, credible and living signs and parables of God’s Kingdom, they, through their evangelizing presence and ministries, sow the seeds of God’s kingdom, even beyond the frontiers of the Church, so that these seeds can sprout and grow, making the proclamation of the Gospel more incarnational and effective (NE. 114). Their prophecy must be in denouncing all modern forms of idolatry (making idols out of the finite) and must reveal in their presence and action what they are truly passionate about: the New Reign of God, inaugurated, mediated, symbolized and expressed by the Lord in the Gospels. They are called to incarnate this Reign of God, contextually meaningfully and relevantly in the way they are, live and act and signify. Unfortunately, their life styles often reveal something contrary to this vision of the Gospel
12. Church also recognizes various groups and movements that are also “new evangelizers” as long as they are clear and consistent in the values they espouse and live out. Such values are: a desire to profess their faith in a public manner without fear of false modesty; actively seeking moments of lived communion through prayer and fraternal sharing; an instinctive preference for the poor and the downtrodden; and a zeal in the work of forming succeeding generations. In the animation of these groups and movements in the way they live and transmit faith, there has to be an evaluation of the close relationship between charism and institution, between charismatic gifts and hierarchical gifts, operative in them.

13. The modern situations with all their challenges demand the task of proclaiming and handing on the faith be rendered more visible, operative and credible. The essential elements of faith are to be re-stated and examined always in a new manner so as to bear witness to the faith in a coherent way in an entirely new historical situation. This also involves the challenge of overcoming the separation of Gospel from life and re-building, in the midst of the activities of the home, work and society, the unity of a life, sourced in the Gospel which also gives strength to realize it fully. Credibility comes as we manifest the fruits of the transformation, made possible by the life of faith¹¹ (NE. 122, 125). “Just as faith is manifested in love; so love without faith is philanthropy. For the Christian faith and love are essential to each other; one supports the other” (NE.123).
14. In facing the modern situation with all its challenges, we need to be able to communicate effectively to others the reasons for our faith. This involves sharing with others the evangelical reasons beneath whatever we do. This is very important in the present context in which choosing the faith and following Christ are not easy and little understood by the world, if not resisted and opposed. St. Peter asks us to give an account and respond to anyone who asks for the reason for the hope which is in us (1 Pt 3:15). Questions concerning the reasons for our faith provide occasions for us to renew ourselves, to be pruned so as to bear more fruits and thereby make the hope and salvation given to us by Jesus Christ more effectively present in the world in which we live. This demands a new manner of responding that involves not only a “state of mind, but personal deeds and public testimony as well as the internal life of our communities and their missionary zeal . . . marked “with gentleness and respect, with clear conscience” (1Pt 3:16), by zeal, trust and frankness as seen in the preaching of the Apostles (Acts 4: 31; 9: 27-28) (NE.118-120). Along with the collective proclamation of the Gospel, it is also important that we engage every one personally whereby “an individual’s personal conscience is reached and touched by an entirely unique word that he receives from someone else.”¹² In this sense, the call to transmit our faith is also an invitation to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord.
15. We must admit that everyone of the actions of the Church has an evangelizing character and must never be separated from the duty to help others encounter Christ in faith. If as a Church, “we bring people only knowledge, ability or technical skills and tools, we bring them too little”

(NE. 34). The primary goal of evangelization is to bring people to Christ though not by the “use of coercion, or of devices unworthy of the Gospel but by the power, above all, of the word of God.”¹³

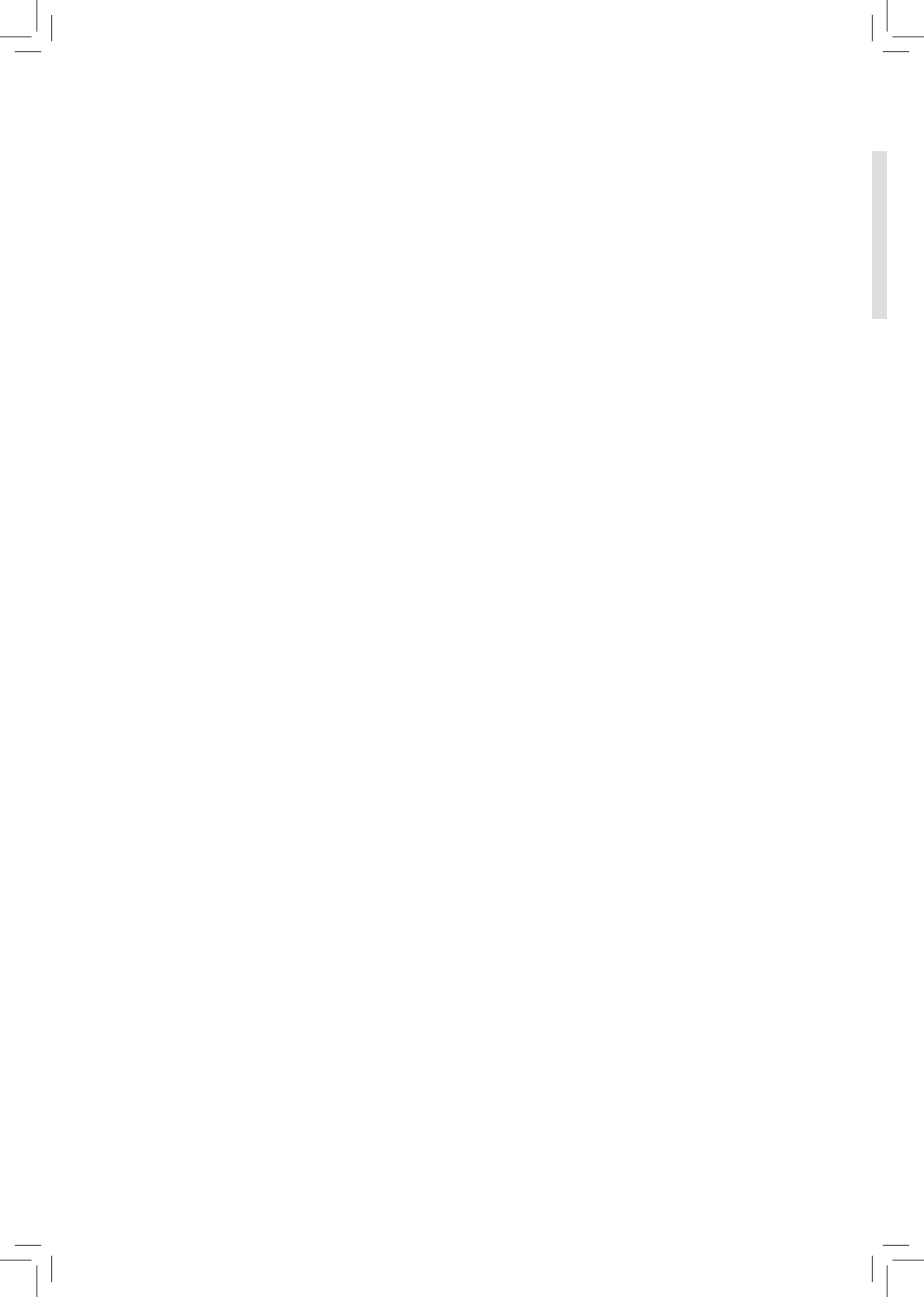
16. The word dialogue is often on our lips. It must be admitted that, dialogue whatever its form may be, must begin by listening to agonies, pains, situations of unbelief, to the context that people live in and the ways in which this context affects and forms them. For dialogue, there has to be the capacity and the skills to get connected to people living around us, build up rapport, share at least in the special moments of their lives so that they do not look at us as strangers. This is the most indispensable aspect of every form of dialogue.
17. We must be ready to face up to the challenges that come from religious pluralism. In the midst of the emerging anthropological, cultural, social and religious paradigms, we may have to enter into dialogue with religions and cultures and search for new ways of posing the fundamental questions of meaning and contemplate on the beauty of the responses provided progressively throughout history. Such moments can be opportunities for us to understand our own faith in virtue of the questions that such dialogue and encounter raise in us. We must search for the signs of God’s presence, signs of His Kingdom already present in the lives of the people and their cultures, recognize, affirm, foster and build on them. This must be so even if they are non-catholics, non-christians or even atheistic. As evangelizers, our concern must be to elicit God’s presence out of them, out of their life, situations and faith and form traditions, when placed in the horizon of the evangelical vision of life.
18. The search for God clearly involves, in a supreme way, the freedom of the individual. This search, however, is truly free when it is open to truth which does not impose itself by force but by the power of its own truth.¹⁴ As the II Vatican Council states: “Truth, however, has to be sought in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. This inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which people explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that people are to adhere to it.”¹⁵

19. If we are completely dedicated to God, such a commitment is bound to create in us a “special sensibility to know how to support the calls that He directs to us through the richness of the cultures and religious traditions that we encounter.”¹⁶ Accompanied by Jesus, we recognize the love of the Father in the “words’ that have been filling the journey of so many of our brothers and sisters with meaning and hope. This, indeed, is a real challenge. Against the forces that threaten the emergence of God’s reign, perhaps, it is necessary to build Christian unity and show to the world in a convincing way the prophetic and transforming power of the Gospel.
20. The return to religion manifested in some spiritual revival movements must also be analyzed whether they awaken people’s search for truth and facilitate a liberating experience. Due to some of these revival movements that are not very liberative, the positive aspects of re-discovering God and the sacred are often seen as “impoverished and obscured by fundamentalism which frequently manipulates religion to justify acts of violence” (NE. 65)
21. Evangelization is no longer a North-South or West-East movement as it extends today to all five continents. “Going beyond the continental borders means having the energy to raise the question of God in every step of the process of encountering, interchanging and reconstructing social relations” wherever we are or sent (NE.70).

Endnotes

- 1 The working document of the Synod, titled, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, is hereafter referred as NE. Numbers of the paragraphs are given in the text itself for easy reference.
- 2 John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 34; AAS (1989), 454, 455.
- 3 See also Pope Benedict XVII, *Porta Fidei*, 2011, 7
- 4 Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Doctrinal Notes on Some aspects of Evangelization* (Rome: 2007), 12.
- 5 Vatican Council II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, 6.
- 6 Paragraphs (51-84) of the Document deal with the changes that are happening in the various sectors (cultural, social, economical, civic, scientific, media and religious). As such they are all potential fields for new evangelization. Read also the Circular Letter of Joseph M. Abella, Superior General of the Claretians, *Missionaries* (Rome: General Curia of the Claretians, 2012), 25-36.

- 7 John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifidelis Laici* (Rome: 1988), 34.
- 8 Some of these benefits are: commitment to peace; the development and liberation of peoples; better international relations and interaction of national governments; the search for possible areas of listening; co-existence, dialogue and collaboration between different cultures and religions; the defense of human rights and peoples, especially minorities; the promotion of the most vulnerable; and the integrity of creation and a commitment to the future of our planet (NE. 59).
- 9 John Paul II, *Discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM*, (Port Au Prince, 9 March 1983), 3.
- 10 See N.E. 78.
- 11 Some of these fruits are: families which are a true sign of love, sharing and a hope which is open to life, communities equipped with a true ecumenical spirit; the courage to support initiatives for social justice and solidarity; the joy of giving one's life to priesthood or the consecrated life; a renewed commitment to ecumenism and the courage to acknowledge the faults, infidelities and scandals in.
- 12 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (8 December 1975), 46.
- 13 Vatican Council II, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 11.
- 14 Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the XLIV World Day of Peace, *Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace*, (8 December 2010).
- 15 II Vatican Council, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 3.
- 16 Joseph M. Abella, *Missionaries*, 33.



TRANSMISSION OF FAITH: AGENTS AND FORMS

K.J. Thomas

The year of faith is a unique opportunity for the entire Church to reflect, speak, teach and propose New Evangelization (sharing the faith) and above all to live what we believe. The purpose of new evangelization is the transmission of faith with enthusiasm and vigour.¹ The Church by her very nature is missionary, therefore she herself lives by transmitting the faith. Transmission of faith is constitutive for the life and mission of the Church. All Christians are called to make their contributions to transmit the faith, no one is left out, and no one can be bypassed.² The obstacles to the transmission of faith can be within the Church when faith lived passively or privately or one's refusal to be educated in one's faith, or when there is a separation between life and faith. It can be from outside the Church when we do not have religious freedom. Churches should "have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith, whether by the spoken or by the written word. However, in spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonorable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people."³

1. WHAT IS FAITH?

It is often said that faith is a Christian term. Indeed all religions do have something analogous to what Christians call faith. All the revealed religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, regard faith as the appropriate response to the word of God. But the idea that faith should govern our whole relationship to God and man/woman is, specifically Christian. Christians believe that we are to be saved by faith, and that without faith no one can be saved. But before we

K.J. Thomas is a priest who belongs to the Diocese of Ooty. He holds a Doctorate in Systematic Theology from Gregorian University and has been President of St. Peter's Pontifical Institute and later the Rector of the Seminary until his tragic death on last April 1, 2013. This lecture must have been his last public address before his death and this article is published as a tribute to the legacy he has handed down to us. May all that he stood for take root and grow in all those who have known him!

get to doctrines such as these, we must consider more carefully the meaning of the word “faith.” In English, and in most modern languages, “faith” has a great variety of meanings. It often corresponds to fidelity, as we know from expressions such as “keeping faith” and “breaking faith.”⁴ It can also mean something like trust, as we say that we have faith in a person’s leadership or honesty. Faith can also mean believing something to be true in spite of the absence of compelling evidence. Sometimes our belief goes beyond the evidence we have, then we take assent to the word of a witness or expert in a matter that escapes our personal competence. This final meaning comes closest to the meaning of faith in modern Catholic theology, though the other meanings form part of the context.

2. VATICAN I AND II

The Catholic doctrine concerning faith is most concisely and authoritatively taught by the two Vatican Councils. Vatican I (1869-1870) in its Dogmatic Constitution on Faith, *Dei Filius*, taught that because we are totally dependent on God our Creator and Lord, “since created reason is absolutely subject to uncreated truth, we are bound to yield by faith the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals himself.”⁵ The Council then defined faith as “the supernatural virtue whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that what he has revealed is true, not because of the intrinsic truth of things perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God who reveals, who can neither be deceived nor deceive.”⁶

Vatican II (1962-1965) in its Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, used similar language: “The obedience of faith (Rom. 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving ‘joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it’. To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.”⁷ A slight shift of accent may be noted here. Whereas the key words in Vatican I’s definition are “truth” and “authority.” In Vatican II, “trust” and “obedience” seem to predominate. Whereas Vatican I emphasized almost exclusively the intellectual aspect of faith as assent, Vatican II spoke first of all the free submission of one’s whole self to God, and only subsequently of the intellectual assent that is involved. Vatican I spoke more explicitly of the authority of God, whereas Vatican II preferred to speak of God’s loving self-gift in revelation (DV 1 and

2) and of faith as our grateful response. This change of accent, however, does not amount to a change of doctrine. Neither the Councils denies what the other affirms or affirms what the other denies.⁸

Both councils look upon the “submission of faith” (*obsequium fidei*) as a religious act by which the believer submits reverently to God. It is a kind of sacrifice – not exactly a sacrifice of reason but rather a “reasonable sacrifice” by which the believer entrusts himself to a God who is supremely loving and wise. On the necessity of faith, Vatican I affirmed that no one could ever be justified without having faith and persevering in it until death.⁹ Vatican II at various points refers to texts such as Mk 16:16 and Heb 11:6 requiring faith as a condition for salvation. In order to clarify further, Vatican II declared that persons who are inculpably ignorant of the Gospel can, through the mysterious workings of grace, achieve at least an implicit faith that suffices for eternal salvation.¹⁰ The council indicated, in addition, that all who are in a position to find out that Christ and the Church are necessary for salvation are held to make more explicit acts of faith and to enter the Church.¹¹

The principal characteristics or properties of faith can be deduced from the Conciliar statements already quoted. Faith, as explained by the two councils, is an interpersonal transaction, involving at least two persons; a revealer who vouches for some intelligible truth, and a believer who accepts it on the word of the speaker. In divine faith the person in whom we believe is none other than God and the content is whatever he declares. The content of revelation (and therefore of faith) is conveyed by the word or speech of God.¹² Vatican I quotes: “In ancient times, many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son”(Heb 1:1-2). The actions of God in history, as seen by Vatican I, are the miraculous interventions by which God confirms the truth of the words. Vatican II likewise refers to the interplay of words and deeds, but it gives a somewhat greater emphasis to the revelatory character of God’s significant deeds in history. “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”¹³

Thus we can conclude that Christian faith is more than simply teachings, wise sayings, a code of morality or a tradition.¹⁴ Christian faith is about an encounter and a relationship with Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI rightly remarked: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive

direction. *Since God has first loved us* (cf. 1 Jn. 4:10), love is now no longer a mere command; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”¹⁶

3. SHARING AND TRANSMITTING OUR FAITH

Many Christians are intimidated by the idea of sharing their faith. Jesus never intended for the Great Commission to be an impossible burden. God called us to be witnesses of Jesus Christ through the natural outcome of living for him. We make it complicated. We think we need some specialized formation on evangelism and apologetics before getting started. God designed an easy evangelism program. He made it simple for us by sending his only Son and the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:16). Jesus followed the simple method of sending two by two saying: “Peace be with you: as the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21).

People can spot a fraud from a mile away. The absolute worst thing one can do is to say one thing and do another. If one were not committed to applying Christian principles in one’s life, one will not only be ineffective, but will be seen as insincere and phony. People are not as interested in what one says, as they are in seeing how it’s working in one’s life. Pope Paul VI opined that “to evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to bear witness that in His Son God has loved the world - that in His Incarnate Word He has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life.”¹⁷

One of the best ways to share one’s faith is to demonstrate the very things one believes by staying positive and having a good attitude even in the middle of a crisis in one’s own life. Remember the story in the Bible about Peter walking out onto the water when Jesus called him. He kept walking above the water as long as he stayed focused on Jesus. But once he focused on the storm or on himself, he sank. When the people around us see the peace in our life, especially when it seems like we are surrounded by storms, we can bet they will want to know how to get what we got! On the other hand, if all they see is the top of our head as we sink into the water, there is nothing they could ask.¹⁸

Treat people with respect and dignity, no matter the circumstances. As the Council teaches: “...The chosen People of God is one: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity.”¹⁹

Whenever we have the opportunity, show how we don't change; how we treat people even if they are wrong. One cannot identify mistakes or error with the one who makes an error.²⁰ Jesus treated people with dignity, even when they mistreated Him. People around us will wonder how we are able to show this kind of respect for others. You never know, they may even ask.

A true believer finds ways to become a blessing for others. Many times in our pursuit of excellence, achieving our goals and living life, we do not take the time to realize the impact of our behaviors on others, both good and bad. May be because we are struggling in our own lives or having our own pain and frustrations to overcome. Sometimes we do not put enough effort in order to be a blessing for others. Our Christian Faith is a constant reminder that we need to be blessing for others. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). This is not only planting amazing seeds for a harvest in our own life, but it shows that we live what we believe. Saying we are a Christian is one thing, but living it in tangible ways every day is something else. The Word says, "They'll know them by their fruit"(Mt 7:16).

The ability to forgive quickly is a very powerful way to show how Christianity really works. We have to become a model of forgiveness. Nothing creates division, hostility, and turmoil more than an unwillingness to forgive the people who hurt us. St. Paul wrote to the Colossians highlighting the need for forgiveness: "Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same" (Col 3:13). If God is willing to forgive and heal us at the roots, then we have to practise the same in our lives. That forgiveness is a characteristic of Christian faith. Forgiving enemies is what Christianity is all about. Of course, there will be times when we are absolutely right. But being right doesn't give us a free pass to punish, humiliate, or embarrass someone else. Moreover, it doesn't eliminate our responsibility to forgive. In short, the best way to share our faith is to be an example of forgiveness.²¹

Today we speak of "the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."²² It means: (a)giving new fervour to the faith and to the testimony of Christians and their communities; (b) enlivening and energizing the church in undertaking a new evangelization (not just *ad gentes* but to the baptized also); (c) rediscovering the joy of believing and a rekindling of enthusiasm in communicating the faith; and (d) realizing that faith is strengthened when it is given to others.²³

4. DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING THE FAITH EXPERIENCES CONTEMPORARY AND TRANSMISSIBLE

Sometimes, it seems that these historical works of the early Church are part of a past age and are confined there because they seem to lack the ability to communicate the evangelical character of their witness in the present day.²⁴ The evangelizing ministry of the Church has changed form and method through the years depending on places and situations. Vatican II reminded us that “groups among which the church dwells are often radically changed, for one reason or another, so that an entirely new set of circumstances may arise.”²⁵ Today, we witness a cultural change which challenges our mandate to proclaim the Gospel.²⁶

These changes are both positive and negative. They advance human culture, increase knowledge, but they also cause many to question values and some fundamental aspects of daily life which affect people’s faith. “If on the one hand humanity has derived undeniable benefits from these changes and the Church has drawn from them further incentives for bearing witness to the hope that is within her (1 Pt. 3:15), on the other hand, there has been a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred, which has even called into question foundations once deemed unshakeable, such as faith in a provident creator God, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the one Saviour, and a common understanding of basic human experiences: i.e. birth, death, family life, and references to natural and moral law. Even though some consider these things as a kind of liberation, there soon follows awareness that an interior desert result, whenever the human being, wishing to be the sole architect of his nature and destiny, finds oneself deprived of that which is the very foundation of all things.”²⁷

5. MAJOR FAITH STRUGGLES OF OUR AGE²⁸

1. The struggle with atheism of our everyday consciousness that is the struggle to have a vital sense of God within a secular culture.
2. The struggle to live ourselves in torn, divided and highly-polarized communities, as wounded persons, and carry that tension without resentment and without giving it back in kind.
3. The struggle to live, love and forgive beyond the infectious ideologies that we daily inhale, that is, the struggle for true sincerity.
4. The struggle to carry our sexuality with responsibility, the struggle for a healthy sexuality that can both properly revere and delight in this great power, .the struggle to carry our sexuality in such a way so as to radiate both chastity and passion.

5. The struggle for interiority and prayer within a culture that thirsts for information, and where distraction constitutes a virtual conspiracy against depth and solitude, that eclipse of silence in our world.
6. The struggle to deal healthily with the dragon of personal grandiosity, ambition, and pathological restlessness, in a culture that daily overstimulates them, the struggle to healthily cope with both affirmation and rejection.
7. The struggle to not be motivated by paranoia, fear, narrowness and over-protectionism in the face of terrorism and over powering complexity, the struggle to not let our need for clarity and security trample compassion and truth.
8. The struggle with moral loneliness inside a religious, cultural, political and moral Diaspora . . . the struggle to find soul mates who meet us and relate with us inside our moral centre.
9. The struggle to link faith to justice. . . . the struggle to get a letter of reference from the poor, to institutionally connect the Gospel to the streets, to remain on the side of the poor.
10. The struggle for community and Church, the struggle inside a culture of excessive individuality to find the healthy line between individuality and community, spirituality and ecclesiology . . . the struggle as adult children of the enlightenment to be both mature and committed, spiritual and ecclesial.

6. TRANSMITTING THE FAITH

Announcing and proclaiming the Good News is not the task of any one person alone or a select few, but rather a gift given to every baptized person (male or female no difference) who answers the call to faith. The whole Church, in this very activity, continually rediscovers her identity as a People gathered together by the Spirit to live Christ's presence among us and discover the true face of God who is Father.²⁹

Transmission of faith is a fundamental act of the Church since the role of faith in salvation is fundamental. By faith humans recognize the reality and absolute gratuitousness of God's initiative in saving sinful humanity through Christ.³⁰ It leads Christian Communities to articulate the basic works of a life of faith: charity, witness, proclamation, celebration, listening, and sharing. The Church transmits the faith which she herself lives. Liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, transforms a community from a simple gathering of people into a community

which transmits faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Eucharist becomes a pattern for living that shapes the life of the community and reaches outward, through the community, into the world.³¹

7. THE PERSONS INVOLVED IN THE TRANSMISSION OF FAITH

The transmission of faith involves the whole Church. Believers are gathered by the Spirit into communities to be nourished by word and sacrament, by witness and proclamation. Pastoral activity allows the Church to enter different, local, social settings and from within, display the richness and variety of ministries which bring life to everyday existence.

7.1. Ordained Ministers

Particular reference is to be made here to the ordained ministers (bishops, priests and deacons), who fulfill an essential role of leadership, coordination and discernment. Their mission should neither isolate them, nor place them above the community, since only by integration in the community can they fulfill their mission with efficacy. They should coordinate, stimulate and discern the transmission of faith, ensuring communion with the entire Church and fidelity to the faith. On the necessity of ordained ministers for the mission and ministry of the Church, Pope John Paul II says: “Without priests the Church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience which is at the very heart of her existence and her mission in history.”³²

The Bishops, “teachers of the faith”³³ and guarantors of ecclesial unity are the ones primarily responsible for preservation and transmission of faith. They have the primary responsibility for coordinating and enabling in their Churches various ministries. They should not only watch over and control, but rather guarantee spaces of freedom and creativity, attentive mainly to the formation of the catechists and elaborating a good global project of faith formation. “For bishops are preachers of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ, and they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice, and by the light of the Holy Spirit illustrate that faith. They bring forth from the treasury of Revelation new things and old, making it bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors that threaten their flock.”³⁴

The priests, as “educators of the faith”³⁵ and collaborators of the bishops also have a great responsibility in this task, specially promoting the catechetical capacity of all and helping the community to grow in the gift of faith. As ordained ministers, they are to be at the service of the common priesthood,³⁶ by paying a special care to celebrate and foster the faith.

The Deacons: The Second Vatican Council synthesized the ministry of deacons in the threefold “*diakonia* of the liturgy, the word and of charity.”³⁷ In this way diaconal participation through the ordained ministry in the one priesthood and the triple *munus* of Christ is expressed. The deacon “is *teacher* in so far as he preaches and bears witness to the word of God; he *sanctifies* when he administers the Sacrament of Baptism, the Holy Eucharist and the sacramentals, he participates at the celebration of Holy Mass as a ‘minister of the Blood’, and conserves and distributes the Blessed Eucharist; he is a *guide* in as much as he animates the community or a section of ecclesial life.”³⁸ Thus deacons play a vital role in transmitting the faith to the parish community.

7.2. The Family

The family is always the model-place for Evangelization and transmission of faith. The *Lineamenta* responses emphasized the place of family in the transmission of faith. Family is the place of witnessing a lived faith and values of Christian life-style. Formation and transmission of faith begins from the very beginning of life. Family needs the support of the faith community.³⁹ “Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God’s family, which is the Church.”⁴⁰

7.3. The Parish

The Parish becomes an important centre, not simply as a place of religious services, but a gathering place for families and study groups and service groups, and a lived celebration of life.⁴¹ The family is the “place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates”⁴² and a family cannot exist by itself, it has to be a part of the parish community. Christian parents exercise a true ministry towards their children by virtue of the sacrament of marriage. The family catechesis that “precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis”⁴³ needs to be rediscovered and valued in its irreducible originality by rejecting any practice and overcoming a mentality that would ignore this responsibility which pertains to it. The celebrations of the sacraments very specially the sacraments of initiation such as Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are introducing people to faith. The customary entrance to Christian life is infant baptism. It is also a common practice of adults and adolescents to request Baptism. The course of preparation, the scrutinies and the celebration of the sacrament are moments which nourish the faith of the catechumens and the community. The more active engagement of catechumens, parents and Godparents in preparing

for sacraments of initiation leads to better participation in subsequent Christian life. In many places they have initiated a “post-baptismal” catechumenate which is also very effective. Pastoral programmes for Baptism are one of the priorities of the new evangelization.⁴⁴ Admission to the First Holy Communion usually takes place in elementary school, preceded by a course of preparation, which can also have experiences of mystagogy and guidance in later years.

The Sunday homilies, Parish missions, Marriage preparation, Novenas, Marian devotions etc. are the ordinary means for transmitting the faith. Catechists attached to the parish play a vital role in parish communities. Catechists are the immediate witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers,⁴⁵ who represent the basic strength of Christian communities. They have made a unique and irreplaceable contribution in the proclamation of the Gospel and the transmission of the faith, especially in Churches which have been evangelized in the last centuries.⁴⁶

The important role and dedication seminarians, religious and many committed lay man and women who are involved in catechesis cannot be ignored. In recent years, due to a declining number of priests and their being forced to minister to more than one Christian community, the practice of delegating to lay people their work of catechizing is increasingly becoming common.

7.4. Basic Christian Communities

One of the significant developments in the Church after Vatican II is the emergence of Basic Ecclesial Communities or Small Christian Communities all over the world especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia. “In order to make Jesus’ vision a reality, we recommend very strongly that the basic structure of the Church in India is to be a communion of communities and for this, Small/Basic Christian Communities must be formed in every parish. ‘They aim to help their members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service, and are therefore a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love.’”⁴⁷ These are small communities whose members are in unity and solidarity with one another and with their pastors. The members have a strong sense of belongingness and responsibility for one another. The members share the Word of God and are guided by regular catechesis. “These communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a ‘civilization of love.’”⁴⁸ They can live and transmit the Christian faith in a profound manner today.

7.5. Catholic schools, Colleges and Universities

Educational institutions are present throughout the world. These institutions are intended to pass on to future generations basic values of life and moral

conduct. Teachers and Management of the schools/colleges/universities if properly motivated would always be serving as instruments of transmitting the faith.

7.6. Religious of Consecrated Life and of Societies of Apostolic Life

Religious can offer service towards the new evangelization with a renewed union to Lord Jesus, each according to their proper charism, in fidelity to the magisterium and to sound doctrine. Consecrated persons, as bearers of original charisms within the Church, have a specific role in the exercise of the catechetical action. Their contribution goes beyond a mere collaboration and substitution where priests and catechists are lacking. Their catechetical contribution is realized, first of all, by their “being” in the Church and in the world disciples and prophets, embodying the Church’s “desire to give herself completely to the radical demands of the beatitudes,”⁴⁹ and announcing the primacy of the transcendence and the eschatological dimension of Christian hope. “In diocesan catechetical activity their original and particular contribution can never be substituted for by priests or by laity. This original contribution is born of public witness to their consecration, which makes them a living sign of the reality of the Kingdom.”⁵⁰ Contemplative communities by their prayers, specifically for the renewal of the faith among the People of God and for a new impulse for its transmission to the young transmit faith. Associations and Ecclesial Movements are invited to promote specific initiatives which, through the contribution of their proper charism and in collaboration with their local Pastors, will enrich the experience of the *Year of Faith*. The new Communities and Ecclesial Movements, in a creative and generous way, will be able to find the most appropriate ways to offer their witness to the faith in service to the Church. In the transmission of the faith and the proclamation of the Gospel the great religious orders and the many forms of consecrated life especially the mendicant orders had played a vital role. From the vantage point of faith, their presence, even if hidden from sight, is seen as a source of many spiritual blessings in the missionary mandate which the Church is presently called to fulfill. Many local Churches recognize the importance of this prophetic witness to the Gospel as a dynamic source of energy in the life of faith of entire Christian communities and a great number of the baptized.⁵¹

7.7. The Special Prophetic Charisms

Within the Church, there has always existed the invigorating presence of the special charisms of the Word and of witness that accomplish the mission of deepening, motivating and provoking the faith. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. “In the history of the Church, alongside other Christians, there have been men and women consecrated to God who, through a special gift of the Holy Spirit,

have carried out a genuinely prophetic ministry, speaking in the name of God to all, even to the Pastors of the Church.”⁵² It is not strange that, even prior to such a prophetic ministry, there has seemingly existed a tension between the institution and the charisms – a tension which has at times led to the exclusion of many prophetic voices. Such a presence, however, if authentic, becomes an eloquent sign of the action of the Spirit in the Church. Ignoring them or repressing them impoverishes the community and manifests a serious lack of faith.

In fact, these two elements namely *institution* and *charism* are not contradictory,⁵³ since all ministries possess a charismatic foundation. Just as the ordained priesthood is in function and at the service of the ministerial character of the whole Church, so too the prophetic ministry is at the service of the universal prophetic ministry of the faithful. The exercise of the prophetic dimension by the magisterium is at the service of the Word, and assisted by the Holy Spirit, draws from the living tradition of the whole ecclesial community.⁵⁴ The apostolic ministry can propose as objects of faith only that which is found in the faith of the Church. It fulfills this act with authority and is therefore authentic, however always drawing its faith from the Church itself.

Thus, a healthy tension needs to be maintained between the dynamic ecclesial poles: between the various roles (pastors and faithful), between the institution and the charisms (prophetic and routine). The particular charisms, together with the role of the pastors and the ecclesial community at the foundation represent the triple point of reference for the ecclesial Word. The constant reciprocal interaction among these three points of references guarantees fidelity and authenticity in the exercise of the evangelizing and catechetical mission of the Church.

8. CONCLUSION

Speaking of transmission of faith today does not mean a totally new concept rather it is an adequate response to the signs of the time, to the needs of individuals and people of our time and to the new sectors with their cultures. The witness of all the people of God together with the religious and those in the ministerial priesthood show forth the one and only face of the Church which is a sign of the Kingdom of God. “Faith is like the flame of a torch or a candle which when shared, does not burn out but instead multiplies and grows.”⁵⁵

Endnotes

- 1 XIII Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops , *Instrumentum Laboris*, Preface.
- 2 XIII Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 12.
- 3 *Dignitatis Humanae*, 4

- 4 Becker K., and Morali I., (Eds), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*, TPI, Bangalore: 2011, p.303.
- 5 Neuner, J., and Dupuis, J., (Eds), *The Christian Faith*, 118, TPI, Bangalore:2001, p.44.
- 6 *Ibidem*
- 7 *Dei Verbum*, 5.
- 8 Becker K., and Morali I., (Eds), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*, p.304.
- 9 Neuner, J., and Dupuis, J., (Eds), *The Christian Faith*, 122.
- 10 *Lumen Gentium*, 16.
- 11 *Lumen Gentium* 14; *Ad Gentes* 7.
- 12 Becker K., and Morali I., (Eds), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*, p.304.
- 13 *Dei Verbum*, 4.
- 14 XIII Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops , *Instrumentum Laboris*, 18.
- 15 *Ibidem*, 19.
- 16 Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas est*, 1
- 17 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 26.
- 18 <http://tasteofthoughts.tumblr.com/page/2>
- 19 *Lumen Gentium*, 32.
- 20 *Dignitatis Humanae*, 14
- 21 John Paul II, Address to the Youth of Lesotho, in *OR*, no.39, September 26, 1988, p. 8.
- 22 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 1.
- 23 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20120619_instrumentum-xiii_en.html
- 24 Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 32.
- 25 *Ad Gentes*, 6.
- 26 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 42.
- 27 Benedict XVI Apostolic letter, *Ubicumque et semper*.
- 28 <http://www.ronrolheiser.com/columnarchive/?id=894>
- 29 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 92.
- 30 Rahner, K., (Ed), *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 2, TPI, Bangalore:1978, p.320.
- 31 *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 23

- 32 *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1; cf. also *BEM* 8.
- 33 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 68.
- 34 *Lumen Gentium*, 25
- 35 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6
- 36 *Lumen Gentium*, 10.
- 37 *Lumen Gentium*, 29
- 38 John Paul II, Allocution to Permanent Deacons, 16 March 1985, n. 2.
- 39 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 111.
- 40 *Familiaris Consortio*, 15.
- 41 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 107.
- 42 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71.
- 43 *Catechesi Tradendae*, 68.
- 44 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 135.
- 45 Alberich, E., and Vallabaraj, J., *Communicating A Faith That Transforms*, Kristu Jyothi Publications, Bangalore: 2004, p123.
- 46 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 108
- 47 *Ecclesia in Asia*, 25;
- 48 *Redemptoris Missio*, 51.
- 49 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 69.
- 50 *General Directory for Catechesis*, 228.
- 51 *Instrumentum Laboris*, 114.
- 52 *Vita Consecrata*, 84.
- 53 *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
- 54 *Dei Verbum*, 10.
- 55 Pedro Pablo Elizondo, as quoted in <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/faith-a-treasure-shared-by-evangelizing-reflects-mexican-bishop/>.

CONSECRATED LIFE IN RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR NEW EVANGELIZATION

Joseph Mappilaparambil, CMF

1. THE CALL FOR A *NEW EVANGELIZATION*

Pope Benedict XVI, on October 11, 2011 published the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* ('The Door of Faith') and announced a Year of Faith, starting on 11 October, 2012 and concluding with the Solemnity of Christ the King on 24 November, 2013. By launching his plan for a 'New Evangelization,' he invited everyone of good will to cooperate and work for the transmission and renewal of Christian Faith.¹

The recently concluded XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome from 7 to 28 October 2012, on the theme *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, was a reaffirmation, progression and consequence of the two previous Synods on *the Eucharist* and on *the Word of God*.

2. WHAT IS *NEW EVANGELIZATION*?

For Pope Benedict XVI, 'new evangelization' or 'renewed evangelization' means "rediscovering the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith."² It also means to endeavour to bring back to true Catholic faith those "who no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel."³ 'New' does not mean that the Gospel, as formerly preached, is 'old' or outmoded and has lost its relevance, or that a new Gospel has to be preached; it only means to reactivate or rejuvenate the existing Gospel with new vigour and vitality. It means to be new "in ardour, methods and expression."⁴ It is 'new', not because the old methods were incorrect or useless or are not applicable today, but the context of the proclamation has changed,

Joseph Mappilaparambil is a pioneering Claretian Missionary to North East India. He has a Masters Degree in World Mission Studies from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago and Ph.D. from the University of Madras from the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Loyola College. He teaches Missiology in Oriens Theological College, Shillong. At present he is the Rector of the Claretian Minor Seminary, Umsning, Meghalaya.

and it has to suit the modern man. Today's situation is 'new' due to the vast and sweeping changes that are taking place in the social and phenomenological world. In that sense, new evangelization can be understood as a fresh proclamation of the Good News to the present world, taking into consideration its new situations, needs and challenges and the need to proclaim it with new zeal, new methods and new expressions.

Holy Father Benedict XVI called for a 'new evangelization' in order that the Church may be better prepared to address effectively the crisis in faith and to receive a new vitality in the changing situation and challenges of the modern man. During his homily during the Eucharistic celebration for the solemn inauguration of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Bishops, the Pope recalled that the new evangelization is directed "principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life to help these people encounter the Lord who alone fills our existence with deep meaning and peace, and to favour the rediscovery of the faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life."⁵

New Evangelization invites us to deepen our faith and commitment to Jesus, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim that Gospel. Thus it is a call to all Catholics to be evangelized and then go forth to evangelize. In a special way, New Evangelization focuses on 're-proposing' the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith. Pope Benedict XVI called for the re-proposing of the Gospel to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but that have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization

2.1. The Context

The de-Christianization that began in the aftermath of the French Revolution gathered momentum and later turned into a mood of general secularism, unbelief and outright atheism. The western Christian world has become secular. The impact of it slowly engulfed the rest of the world and the Eastern countries too became its prey. The post-colonial Christian world and even some younger Churches have become its victims. What is heartening is that the Church has faced the issues and problems of today not with fear, but with unshakable hope and optimism.

The idea of a new evangelization can be traced back to the teaching of Vatican II which announced, "The Church on earth is missionary by her very nature."⁶ A renewed thrust was given by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), where he reaffirmed, "Evangelizing is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her

deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”⁷ The Church in her entirety is missionary. With the thrust of revitalizing the evangelizing activity of the Church, the Pope used expressions such as “a fresh forward impulse,” “a new period of evangelization,”⁸ and “renewal of humanity.”⁹

Pope John Paul II used the term “new evangelization” for the first time in his homily at Nowa Hutay on 9 June 1979, during his papal visit to Poland.¹⁰ It was further emphasized when he spoke to the Latin American Bishops at their XIX General Assembly at Port-au-Prince on 9 March 1983.¹¹ He elaborated the idea more deeply in 1984 in a speech entitled ‘The Building of a New Latin America’.¹² He urged the Catholics to promote the new evangelization through new zeal, new methods and new expressions. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II outlined the vast horizons and new contours of the church’s mission, especially to the millions who have not heard of Christ.¹³ John Paul II sometimes used the term *new evangelization* explicitly and at other times he used the expression *a renewed evangelization* and went on to explain its intimate relationship with other forms of evangelization and affirmed it as a challenging task of the Church.¹⁴

2.2. The Three Types of Evangelization

The Second Vatican Council brought a Copernican change in the Church’s attitude towards salvation, mission and non-Christian religions. Until then, the Church’s mission was oriented to “saving the souls” of the pagans under the traditional axiom: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church). The Vatican II Documents *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes* and particularly *Nostra Aetate* clearly articulated that there are positive elements, a deep religious sense and hidden power in other religions, and “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.”¹⁵ *Redemptoris Missio* clearly and logically clarified that Church’s “mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity.”¹⁶ Thus *RM* identified three types of evangelization:

- (a) **Mission *ad Gentes*** is the special undertaking in which preachers of the Gospel are sent by the Church, going into the whole world to carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among people who do not yet believe in Christ.¹⁷
- (b) **Pastoral Evangelization** is carrying out the pastoral care of those Christian communities who are fervent in faith and Christian living.

- (c) **The new Evangelization or re-evangelization** is addressed to those baptized who have lost a living sense of faith and who live far from Christ and his Gospel, to bring them back to the Church.¹⁸

2.3. Characteristics of *New Evangelization*

Based on the different documents where this concept of *new evangelization* is presented to the believers, we may try to understand the concept through the following characteristic features:

- a) It is not new in its content; its theme is always *Christocentric*, that is, the one Gospel given in Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour of all mankind. Pope Benedict XVI has often reminded us that “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the event of an encounter with a person – Jesus Christ, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”
- b) It is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who guided Jesus’ steps, and from the day of Pentecost guides the Church. The gift of the Spirit is the prime mover, the first source, the first breath of a true evangelisation.
- c) It is the responsibility of all the people of God, not just the work of a few with a special vocation. All the laity are co-responsible. As Christians, we cannot avoid the supreme duty to evangelize.
- d) It is not limited to foreign missions or to those who have not heard or do not believe the Christian message. New evangelisation is also for healthy Christian communities, as well as those Christians who have lost a living sense of faith.
- e) It is directed to individuals as well as to entire cultures and to a wide variety of socio-cultural and demographic sectors.
- f) It is not only about proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, but involves the comprehensive process of *being* Christian, about ongoing conversion and catechesis, and about creating a civilization of love.
- g) It calls for a faithful missionary spirit that springs from prayer and holiness, from hope and charity toward others.

3. RELIGIOUS LIFE IN CRISIS

In this modern era, just like Christian faith, religious life is also undergoing a crisis. The Major Superiors’ Meeting of 2012, held in Hyderabad, reiterated this by observing that “the life of religious is passing through a crisis of identity and commitment.” They also added that “individualism has made members

fragile.”¹⁹ Consecrated life today, according to the Major Superiors, stands in need of a re-visioning and re-grounding as its fire is dying out. The identity of religious women and men is in crisis today as it is compromised and channeled primarily to minister to the pastoral and institutional demands of the local church. This phenomenon stifles the prophetic and mystic dimension of religious life and the creative imagination of the religious women and men for creative fidelity to their original charismatic vision.

The crisis is perceptible in all areas of consecrated life, including prayer life, community living, life-style, religious vows and the spirit of service, piety, austerity etc. Unlike in the past, very few are attracted to this way of life, which gives an indication that it is undergoing a tremendous crisis. Powerful witnesses and strong role models are less and less prominent in this testing times. Besides, the alarming number of people, leaving the religious life after years of vowed life, is also a clear sign of this crisis. The reasons for this could be varied: some perceive a seeming lack of challenge in religious life; some others find the demands of religious life too high; still others feel that the secular world offers more scope and opportunities - hence it appears more attractive. Some people also feel that those who are choosing consecrated life these days are from a lower strata of society and educational background and are less committed than in the past. All of these are reasons, as the Major Superiors indicated, that compel us to renew and restore religious life, because today, more than ever, it is necessary to have persons who are lovingly dedicated to the Lord and the Gospel.

New evangelization demands that consecrated persons have a thorough awareness of the theological significance of the challenges of our time. In every place and circumstance, consecrated persons should be zealous heralds of Jesus Christ, ready to respond with the wisdom of the Gospel to the questions posed today by the anxieties and the urgent needs of the human heart.²⁰

4. THE RESPONSE OF CONSECRATED PERSONS TO NEW EVANGELIZATION

As stated above, today’s consecrated people are going through many problems, both internal and external. Amidst the manifold challenges, the question is: What does ‘new evangelization’ demand a religious to be equipped with? In order to face these challenges courageously, the following steps will prove effective.

4.1. Deepening the Spiritual Dimension of Religious Life

We have discussed about the identity crisis in religious life: let us take the example of the services like medical care, education and other developmental activities, which were once considered in some places as the monopoly of the

religious; now they are provided more efficiently with better facilities, expertise, dedication and quality by many government and non-government organizations, often secular and non-Christian. Many committed youth and lay leaders, even non-religious and non-Christians, are rendering quality service with the sole motive of the betterment of humanity and the alleviation of suffering and poverty. Then, what is the uniqueness and specific contribution of the religious, in terms of human transformation and societal up-building? To answer this, the religious are compelled to go back to the core essence of their vocation and recover the 'theological dimension' that gives meaning to their life and to everything that they do. Being centred in God and his plan will allow them to discover ways in which they can restore significance to their works and activities in a world that seems to be fine without Him, or that at times even tries to manipulate Him.²¹ Without a deep spirituality, our apostolic work cannot communicate the Gospel. We have come to understand the urgent need to rekindle the inner fire that gives meaning to our lives and dynamism to our apostolic commitment.

Vita Consecrata emphasises that consecrated life should be nourished from the wellspring of a sound and deep spirituality. This is the primary requirement, inscribed in the very essence of consecrated life. To tend towards holiness: this is in summary the program of every consecrated life.²² The experience of God brings them closer to the essence of human persons, compels them to approach the poor and the excluded, awakens in them a new ecologic and cosmic awareness that leads to a feeling of solidarity with all of creation. Their experience of God enables them to capture his presence in the life of peoples, cultures, religions other than their own, and to place themselves at the service of all. Therefore, the first concern of a religious is to deepen one's spirituality and to recapture the Godliness placed in him/her, through an in-depth search for God. If someone asks a religious about the reason why he/she has chosen this way of life, will he/she be able to share about his/her God experience? In other words, has the religious personally experienced Christ, whom he/she claims to follow, and can he/she share that experience with others? These are guiding questions that help us to analyse the bases of our spirituality. And we have numerous models before us - persons gripped by Christ like St. Paul, possessed by God-experience like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, willing to work and suffer for Christ like St. Claret and St. Alphonsa, moved with a passion for Christ like Francis of Assisi and filled with compassion for His people like Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

4.2. Personal Renewal and Conversion

Consecrated persons, because of their specific vocation, are called to manifest the unity between self-evangelization and witness, between interior renewal and

apostolic fervour, between being and acting; needless to say that dynamism arises always from the first element of each of these pairs.²³ The Pope reinforced this in the opening Mass of the Synod of Bishops in Vatican City, saying that we cannot speak of New Evangelization without a “sincere desire for conversion.”²⁴ Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), at the Synod of Bishops reiterated that before you can be agents of evangelization, first you must be evangelized yourselves. Quoting Saint Bernard, Cardinal Dolan said, “If you want to be a channel, you must first be a reservoir.”²⁵

Before becoming an evangelizer, one has to pass through the tiring interior journey of renewal. True conversion or *metaneoia* has to start from within oneself; it is an ongoing, never-ending and continuous process. The evangelizer has to be evangelized first. One must first become what he/she wants to see in others.

4.3. Renewal of Communities through Community Living

Community life is an essential dimension of consecrated living. The religious community is a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God’s will, a community of sisters or brothers with a variety of roles but with the same goal and the same passion, a community of people who share a common vision. These give religious life its meaning.²⁶ When we live together in communities, especially with persons of different backgrounds, temperaments, attitudes, nature and age-groups, of course, it can be difficult; much adjustment is required on everyone’s part. It curtails individual freedom – one cannot do whatever pleases him/her; and it can demand much personal sacrifice for common good.

Hence in recent years, community living has undergone drastic changes. Some seem to consider as out-dated many of the basic tenets of community living: community prayer, common time-table, sharing life with others, sacrificing one’s personal freedom etc. In some places consecrated people prefer to live in apartments and work according to one’s choice, just like any non-consecrated persons. Tendencies like individualism and consumerism and a desire for comfortable lifestyle have taken precedence over the ideals of common good, renunciation, austerity, simple lifestyle and radical commitment. To conform to the worldly standards and its comforts is the acceptable norm for many religious. Religious life has become for them another profession or a comfortable way of life and a place to enjoy everything with a possibility to escape from responsibilities, a place where one can lead essentially a care-free life.

Thus a candidate, who wants to join religious life today, very often does not find any challenge of renunciation and sacrifice in it. So many do not opt for such a life; and those who sincerely want to join, look for institutes where they find a certain amount of austerity, hardship, challenge and fulfilment. That could be the reason why there are comparatively more vocations even in Europe and America to some contemplative orders and Congregations where there is real challenge, renunciation and asceticism. Those who sincerely seek austerity, genuine service and radical commitment, do not find any difference between life inside religious communities and the life outside, except that there seems to be more security in religious life. Hence it is high time for a renewal of the radical living, which the founders of religious institutes had initiated.

4.4. Refocusing on the Evangelical Counsels

Dealing with the major challenges facing consecrated life today, *Vita Consecrata* explains that the evangelical counsels should not be a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for oneself. Insofar as these inclinations are based on nature, they are good in themselves. The decision to follow the counsels, far from involving an impoverishment of truly human values, leads instead to their transformation.²⁷ *Vita Consecrata* identifies three challenges in the area of the three vows: hedonistic culture is the first challenge against consecrated chastity, because it separates sexuality from all objective norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and consumer good, justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct.²⁸ The second challenge today is that of materialism, which craves for possessions, heedless of the needs and the sufferings of the weakest and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources.²⁹ The third challenge comes from those ideas of freedom, which separate this fundamental human good from its essential relationship to the truth and to a moral norm.³⁰ To fight against these real challenges, the religious today have to be more sincere, firm and radical in the following of the evangelical counsels, instead of making a half-hearted, unintentional and lukewarm profession of the vows. The Synod on Consecrated Life speaks of “the prophetic character of the consecrated life” and its “significance for the contemporary world.”³¹ To be prophetic, the religious have to rise from the slumber and live more radically the evangelical counsels, they profess.

4.5. Revival of Religious Charism

A continuous renewal of religious life must be promoted under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and with the guidance of the Church.³² The Vatican Council

instructs that this renewal must constitute both a constant return to the sources of the authentic Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes and their adaption to the changed conditions of our time. The charism of each Congregation has to be reinterpreted, based on a prudent reading of the signs of the times, so as to make it relevant and meaningful and to attain the goal for which the founder/foundress envisioned it and thus to fulfil the will of God. In order to be faithful evangelizers, *Vita Consecrata* proposes that the Religious Institutes cultivate “fidelity to the founding charism, communion with all those who in the church are involved in the same undertaking, especially the Bishops, and cooperation with all people of good will. ... In every place and circumstance, consecrated persons should be zealous heralds of Jesus Christ, ready to respond with the wisdom of the Gospel to the questions posed today by the anxieties and the urgent needs of the human heart.”³³ Only if one is rooted in one’s own charism and spirituality, he/she can reach out to others.

4.6. Savouring the Sacramental Life: Eucharist and Reconciliation

Deliberating on the renewal of Religious Life, *Pefectae Caritatis* holds that the religious should perform the sacred liturgy, especially the holy mystery of the Eucharist, with their hearts and their lips according to the mind of the Church, and they should nourish their spiritual lives from this richest of sources. Thus, refreshed at the table of the divine Lord and the sacred altar, let them love the members of Christ as brother [and sister] ... and then dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to their mission.³⁴ The Decree on Confession for Religious, admonishes that the religious, “desiring closer union with God, should endeavour to receive the sacrament of penance frequently, that is twice a month.”³⁵ Cardinal Dolan’s intervention at the Synod of Bishops reaffirms that the primary Sacrament of the New Evangelization is the Sacrament of Penance: he says, “The answer to the question ‘What’s wrong with the world?’ is not politics or the economy, secularism, pollution, global warming...no. As Chesterton wrote, the answer to the question ‘What’s wrong with the world?’ is two words: ‘I am. I am!’” Admitting one’s vulnerability leads to conversion of heart and repentance, which are fundamental invitations of the Gospel. That happens in the sacrament of Penance. So this is the sacrament of Evangelization.³⁶ A consecrated person has made a more serious and definitive option and hence has better possibilities and a graver obligation to administer and participate in the sacred Liturgy of the Church and its sacraments, than his/her lay counterparts. Sometimes we are saddened by the fact that religious do not show as much enthusiasm in liturgy as the lay people.

4.7. Learning the Documents of the Church

The publishing of the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* on the occasion of the 50th year of Vatican II and the 20th year of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is an explicit invitation to familiarize and deepen one's knowledge of those two documents. In addition, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith admonishes all the believers, especially the candidates to priesthood and consecrated life, to deepen their knowledge of those primary documents.³⁷ Therefore, it is imperative for all consecrated persons to learn the richness of those sixteen documents of Vatican II, particularly those on Religious life (*Perfectae Caritatis*) and Missionary life (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*), so that they can immerse themselves in the richness of their teachings and thereby, live meaningfully and teach others, each according to his/her vocation.

4.8. Reaffirming the Centrality of the Word of God

A consecrated person, by virtue of his/her calling, should have a special love for Sacred Scripture and study it daily, so that he/she might learn “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:8) by reading and meditating on the divine Scriptures.³⁸ The word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will. ... Although the whole of sacred Scripture is “profitable for teaching” (2 Tim 3:16), and is “the pure and perennial source of spiritual life”, the writings of the New Testament deserve special veneration, especially the Gospels, which are “the heart of all Scriptures”.... the Founders and Foundresses were inspired by these texts in accepting their vocation and in discerning the charism and mission of their Institutes.³⁹ For any religious, the Word of God is the Book of Life, the prime constitution to meditate on, to pray with, to learn, to live, to bear witness and to teach others.

4.9. Rekindling the Missionary Spirit: Consecration is for Mission

Consecrated persons are ‘in mission’ by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their institute. Indeed, more than in external works, mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life!⁴⁰ Religious life, moreover, continues the mission of Christ: *fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission*.⁴¹ When we speak of ‘mission’ we are of course, speaking of something more than just apostolic activities. The mission reaches further than specific apostolic ministries; it permeates different dimensions of our life, all of which are called to be an announcement of the newness of the Kingdom of God. Mission is at the centre of the consecrated life and of the identity of each institute.⁴²

Religious life is more and more seen as a mission since the Church herself is a mission. One area, most religious Congregations have been comfortable with, is the field of missionary commitments. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, reinforced the idea saying, “Evangelizing is, in fact, the grace and the very vocation proper to the Church and there is a constitutive link between Christ, Church and Evangelization.”⁴³ It is her deepest identity. Pope Benedict XVI, while inaugurating the Synod of the Bishops in Rome, stressed again, “Church exists to evangelize.”⁴⁴

Cardinal Dolan of New York, quoting the Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, commented, “The first word of Jesus in the Gospel was *come*; the last word of Jesus was *go*”.⁴⁵ The Major Superiors meeting in Hyderabad (28-31 October 2012) reiterated that mission is the heartbeat and life-spring of religious life and the Church. It is time for religious men and women to move from ‘religious-life shaped mission’ to ‘mission-shaped religious life’, where mission and creative fidelity to the charism shapes our religious life.⁴⁶ Mission is in the heart of every consecrated person, whether active or contemplative, depending on one’s vocation.

Indian Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo, Archbishop of Ranchi, speaking at the Synod of Bishops, raised an alarm on the situation of the religious orders and threw a challenge at them. “I would like to make a humble appeal to the religious orders to become missionary again! In the history of evangelization, all the religious orders led by the Holy Spirit have done outstanding and marvellous work. Can we say the same of the Religious Congregations today? Could it be that they have begun working like multinationals, doing very good and necessary work to meet the material needs of humanity, but have forgotten that the primary purpose of their founding was to bring the kerygma, the Gospel, to a lost world? We must appreciate many Youth Groups and new Ecclesial Movements that are taking up the challenge. But, in my opinion this Synod must appeal to the Religious men and women to explicitly and directly take up the work of evangelization and transmission of the faith in collaboration with the local bishops! I would also like to call upon the Sacred Congregation for Consecrated Life to be pro-active in promoting the *sensus ecclesiae* among all religious.”⁴⁷

4.10. Reviving the Catechetical Instruction of the Faithful

To teach the believers the essentials of Catholic faith is a fundamental responsibility of the religious. “Christians today often do not even know the central core of their Catholic faith,” Pope Benedict XVI observed at his regular public audience on 17 October 2012. He said that the goal of the Year of Faith

is “to renew our enthusiasm at believing in Jesus Christ.” “The faith,” Pope said, “is not something extraneous and distant from real life, but the very heart thereof.” He added that a clear and firm belief in Christian doctrine “does not limit life, but makes it human.” The fundamental content of the Christian faith can be found in the Creed. Those fundamental beliefs, in turn, form the basis for Christian moral life. “It is the Church’s duty to transmit the faith, to communicate the Gospel, so that Christian truths may become a light guiding the new cultural transformations, and Christians may be able to give reasons for the hope that is in them.”⁴⁸

Australian Prelate Archbishop Costelloe, speaking on the *New Evangelization* spoke thus: “The fundamental task for the Church of all time... is to return Christ to the heart of the Church, and return the Church to Christ.”⁴⁹ The major superiors gathered in Hyderabad observed that consecrated life today stands in need of a re-visioning and a re-grounding, as its fire is dying out.⁵⁰ How it can be done depends on the individuals and institutes themselves. One of the ways the consecrated people can make serious effort to celebrate the Year of Faith is by rekindling the faith deposited in them and spreading its flame to everyone.⁵¹ Catechesis is an explicit way of spreading this flame.

4.11. Collaboration and Net-working among Religious Institutes

Mission, by its very nature, needs collaboration. Mission does not exclusively belong to anyone; it belongs to God who pours out his love on all people; it means participation in the “*Missio Dei*”. The differences in charism are just channels for expressing the richness of this mission, which is born of God and is a vehicle of his love for everyone. Mission is essentially “shared mission”.⁵² The mission of the Church, the only one that Jesus entrusted to his disciples, is also the fundamental mission of each Institute of consecrated life. Therefore it is ‘our’ mission, although the ‘our’ goes beyond the limits of one’s own Congregation or Institute. It is the mission of the Church to announce the Gospel of the Kingdom to all people and to serve those to whom, according to Jesus himself, it belongs: the poor, the peace makers, those who work for justice and those who suffer.⁵³

Ours is an era of synergies. The process of globalization accelerates synergy in different spheres of life and activity. The complexity of situations and complementarities of skills provide a new opportunity; where there was just one option until quite recently, now we have many.⁵⁴ The mission of the Church today needs more collaborative work style and net-working among the different religious Congregations and a common witnessing to the people outside, avoiding duplication and multiplication of ministries and unhealthy competitions among

different institutes and church personnel. In some areas, the Church is threatened and viewed with suspicion, accused of foreign origin and criticised for proselytism: in such circumstances it is all the more imperative that the religious institutes and personnel work together for the common good, imitating their Master with humble service, instead of showing off their institutional power and authority. As individual Congregations, we may be able to accomplish many things with our own resources and ability; yet, through common witness, teamwork and the cooperation of others we can achieve much more. Therefore the rule of thumb should be: *never do by ourselves what we can do with the cooperation of others.*

CONCLUSION

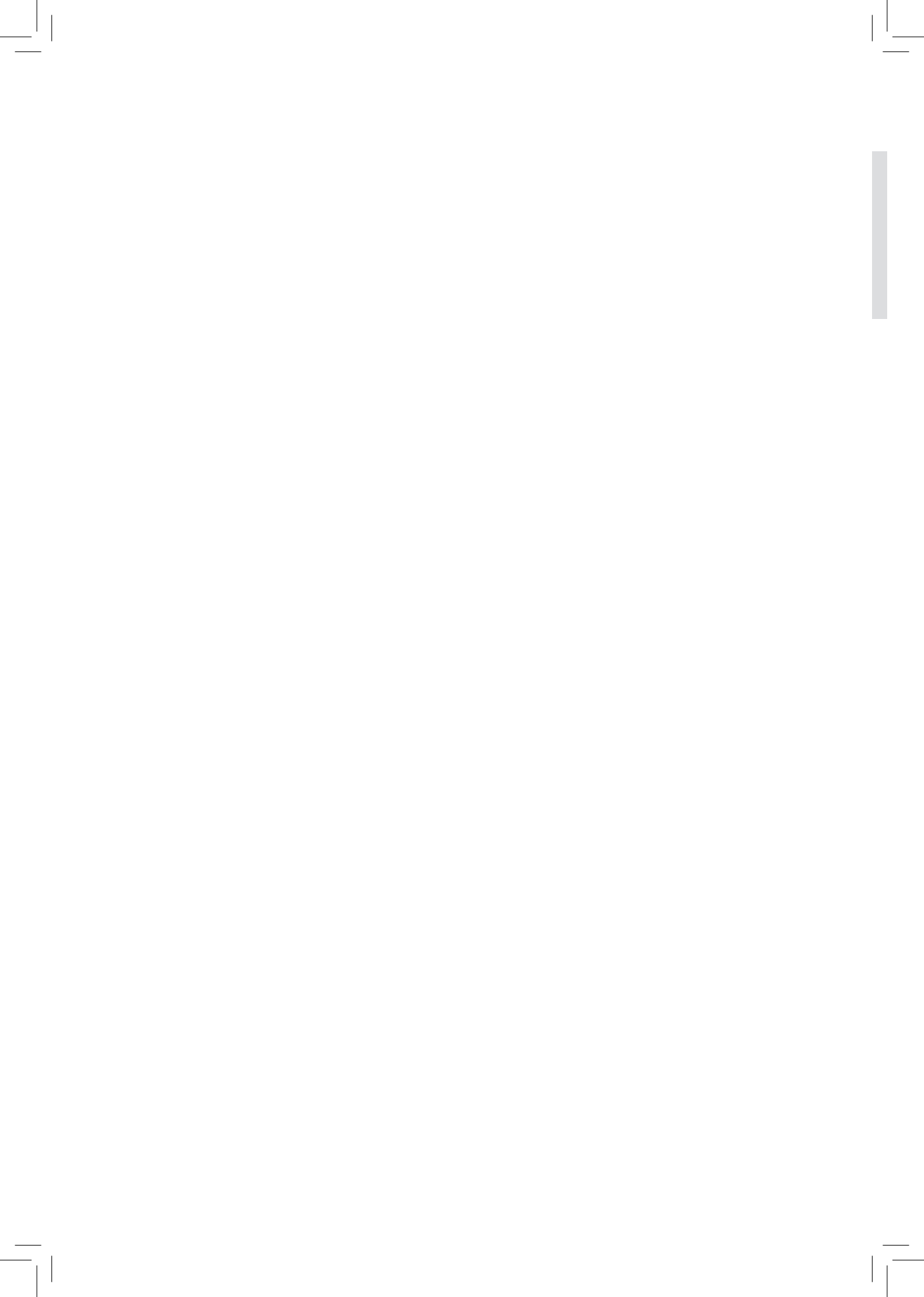
In this Year of Faith, as consecrated persons we are invited to profess our faith in the Triune God, deepen our commitment, renew our way of proclamation and become a new religious community, amidst the challenging problems of today. Religious have to break the barriers of division, war, hatred, and violence and build bridges between communities, cultures, religions and peoples. To be agents of transformation, channels of peace and messengers of reconciliation, we should go beyond a narrow outlook and ghetto mentality and be open for change and collaboration. We should feel with the Universal, Episcopal, Regional, Diocesan and Parish Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*) and cooperate to stimulate the faith of the people through a true Christian witnessing to life. Let the call to *new evangelization* and the celebration of the Year of Faith be a new spring-time to our religious communities and may we find new meaning and enthusiasm in our consecrated life! May the call to holiness inspire in us a “Passion for Christ and a Passion for Humanity” so that living the ideals of our Congregations and Institutes may be a source of joy for us!

Endnotes

- 1 Pope Benedict XVII, *Porta Fidei*, 2011, 4.
- 2 Ibid, 7 & pp. 33-34.
- 3 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, 33.
- 4 Lineamenta, 5
- 5 Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for the Eucharistic Celebration of XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Bishops, Rome, 7 October 2012. Final Message of the Synod, Vatican City, 27 October, 2012, No. 2.
- 6 Vatican II, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, (1965), 2.
- 7 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 14.

- 8 “still more firmly rooted in the undying power and strength of Pentecost, a new period of evangelization”, Ibid, 2.
- 9 Ibid, 24
- 10 *L’Osservatore Romano* (July 16, 1979), 11.
- 11 *L’Osservatore Romano* (April 18, 1983), 9.
- 12 Pope John Paul II, Discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM
- 13 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 31.
- 14 Ibid, 33 & 34.
- 15 Vatican II, *Nostra Aetatae*, 2.
- 16 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 31
- 17 Vatican II, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, (1965) 6, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 33, 34.
- 18 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 33.
- 19 Matilda Monteiro, UCAN India, News Letter, Posted on October 31, 2012
- 20 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, No. 81.
- 21 Joseph M. Abella, “Missionaries” (Rome: General Curia of the Claretians - Circular Letter), 2012, p. 39.
- 22 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, No. 93.
- 23 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 81; The 9th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, (Vatican: *L’Osservatore Romano*), 3-4 October 1994.
- 24 Pope Benedict XVI, The Synod of Bishops, (Zenit.org) October 8, 2012.
- 25 Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, Synod of Bishops, October 10, 2012.
- 26 Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “The Service of Authority and Obedience,” (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House), 2008, p. 8.
- 27 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, No. 87.
- 28 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, No. 88.
- 29 Ibid, 89.
- 30 Ibid, 91.
- 31 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Nos. 84-85.
- 32 Vatican II, *Pefectae Caritatis* 2.
- 33 Ibid, 81.

- 34 Ibid, 6.
- 35 Vatican II, Decree on Confession for Religious (*Dum Canoniarum*), 3.
- 36 Cardinal Timothy Dolan, 10 October, 2012.
- 37 Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 6.
- 38 Vatican II, *Pefectae Caritatis*, 6.
- 39 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, No. 94.
- 40 Ibid, 72.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 25; Joseph M. Abella, “Missionaries” (Rome: General Curia of the Claretians - Circular Letter), 2012, p. 25.
- 43 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nintiandi*, No 16.
- 44 Pope Benedict XVI, (Zenit.org), Oct. 8, 2012.
- 45 Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Synod of Bishops, October 10, 2012.
- 46 CRI Conference, Hyderabad, CRIB via CNUA, October 28-31, 2012.
- 47 Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo, Synod of Bishops, October 10, 2012.
- 48 UCAN News, October 17,
- 49 Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, “Returning Christ to the Heart of the Church” (Zenit.org), 18 October, 2012.
- 50 CRI Conference, Hyderabad, CRIB via CNUA, October 28-31, 2012.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Joseph M. Abella, “Missionaries” (Rome: General Curia of the Claretians - Circular Letter), 2012, p. 57-58.
- 53 Ibid, 26.
- 54 Ibid, 49.



CHALLENGES TO NEW EVANGELIZATION: INDIAN CONTEXT AND THE CALL OF JUSTICE

M.K. George, SJ

The article looks at the concept of New Evangelization as proposed by the Church and locates it in the social, political and economic context of India and the overall scenario of globalization and its impact with a specific purpose to identify the challenges to those in the consecrated life specifically in the area of Justice.

1. NEW EVANGELIZATION AND CONSECRATED LIFE

The idea of New Evangelization was first proposed by Pope John Paul II in 1979 during his visit to Poland. He then exhorted the people: “Look to the future with commitment to a New Evangelization, one that is new in its means of expression.” In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1991) he used the concept officially. He re-iterated that the New Evangelization is to find new paths and means to proclaim and live the Gospel in today’s world. It is to find new frontiers of proclamation. It is a spiritual activity to re-capture the first Christian community experience.¹

Further it is elaborated in relation to consecrated life: “Of this supernatural horizon of the meaning of human existence, there are particular witnesses in the Church and in the world whom the Lord has called to consecrated life. Precisely because it is totally consecrated to him in the exercise of poverty, chastity and obedience, consecrated life is a sign of a future world that relativizes everything that is good in the world. . . We exhort them to hope in situations that are difficult even for them in these times of change. . . We invite them to establish themselves as witnesses and promoters of new evangelization in the various fields to which the charism of each their institutes assigns them”²

Dr. (Fr.) M. K. George is the Director of Indian Social Institute, Bangalore. Earlier, he was the Principal of the Loyola college of Social Sciences, Trivandrum, Kerala, India. He was a visiting fellow at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, USA. His research interests are Sociology of Education, Adult Education, Social Analysis and Family counseling.

How do the consecrated people live out this mandate of the Synod? The following ways are indicative of the ways in which the consecrated can respond. They need to bring the Gospel in dialogue with human culture and experience and with religions. The means are: dialogue with cultures, education and culture, formation and research, world of social communication, dialogue with scientific knowledge, taking care of the sick, being at the side of the poor, becoming partners in dialogue, and contemplating the Mystery.

Ultimately the authenticity of the New Evangelization by the Consecrated men and women will be their closeness to the poor. Placing ourselves side by side with those who are wounded by life is not only a social exercise, but above all a spiritual act because it is Christ's face that shines in the face of the poor (Mt 25: 40).

2. THE INDIAN CONTEXT

To locate our call to New Evangelization, we must necessarily look at the social context where we are placed. Obviously, no simple descriptions can capture the complexity and contradictions of a society like India. With twenty eight states and seven union territories, 18 scheduled languages, 114 other languages, 216 mother tongues, 96 non-specified languages and with innumerable dialects running into thousands of languages, other cultural diversities and geographical variations, India defies any simple descriptions. Slated to the third or fourth largest economy in the world, India is enviously looked up to even by the West.

But contradictions rule this country. While one third of this country goes to bed hungry every night, the rich class is building *Antilas*. (Antila is incidentally the billion dollar home of Mr. Ambani of the Reliance Industries in Mumbai). We could summarize the Indian reality in four critical issues: Displacement, Disparity, Distress and Discrimination.

2.1. The Story of Displacement

Between 60 and 65 million people are estimated to have been displaced in India since Independence, the highest number of people uprooted in the name of development in the world. According to a report, 'this amounts to around one million displaced every year since Independence. Of these displaced, over 40 percent are tribals and another 40 percent consists of dalits and other rural poor.³ The story of most displacement is a story of betrayal by the state, total pauperization and destruction of communities and cultures, in spite of some compensation. Case after case illustrates this. The latest and closest of experience (to Bangaloreans) is the very recent eviction of over 5000 poor living in the

quarters for the Economically Weaker Sections in Ejipura, Bangalore. Overnight with hardly any warning, over 1000 families were made homeless by the state. Million stories of displacement question the very identity of our country. It is only about 20-25 percent of the displaced who are ever resettled. In fact many of them are victims of multiple displacements.

2.2. Disparity

There are two Indias: the *Shining India* and a *Slimy India*. While the first is in a rush to develop more and have already achieved the fourth or third place economically, the latter is invisible and suffering. India has such striking disparity. Even by government count, India has 29.8 per cent of her population below poverty line (BPL). Other researchers put the data even higher. For instance, the Tendulkar committee put the number of really poor at 37 per cent. The saddest part of the poor is that they are almost invisible. Indians can live without ever meeting a poor man or woman. They are segregated in the slums in cities, villages or tribal areas. Harsh Mander (2012) in his recent work *Ash in the Belly* recounts the stories of the starving millions of India.⁴

2.3. Distress

Such disparity is bound to create distress among people. Think of the poor denied of their basic survival needs, think of the tribals who even after 66 years of Independence have no land of their own. Think of the women who are victims of violence by a patriarchal society. The recent gang rape of the young student in Delhi is representative of the distress experienced by women in general in India. Reports say that violence against women is on the increase. “Violence against women is the fastest growing crime in India”, a recent study concluded. Every 26 minutes a woman is molested, every 34 minutes, a rape takes place and every 43 minutes, a woman is kidnapped, according to Home Ministry’s National Crime Records Bureau.⁵

2.4. Discrimination

Behind the distress referred to above is the root cause of discrimination and exclusion. Look at the national data. Almost 40 – 50 per cent of Indian population, women, children, Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes and other minorities, are discriminated against at every stage of life. Children who cannot go to school because they are of so-called lower castes, women who cannot go out for work fearing for their safety, the hundreds and thousands of men and women hounded by the state alleging them to be Maoists, the list can go on. India’s reality is a predominantly discriminated reality. Discrimination is injustice and the people are already in revolt in many areas of our life.

2.5. Globalization and its Impact

One of the defining realities in the changing world today is the phenomenon of Globalization. In fact the problems identified above are so intricately related to the intensified globalization processes that one cannot understand or deal with them without a critical knowledge of globalization and its impact.

The term globalization is relatively new, but the reality has existed from the expeditions of Christopher Columbus and of Vasco da Gama.⁶ However, what is new is the intensity and scale of globalization assisted by the unimaginable growth in technology. Historians identify three stages of globalization: the age of direct colonialism, the period of cold war and the third phase of direct globalization.

Globalization per se is not problematic. What makes it so is the colonial or neo-liberal agenda that accompany them. In fact, there are a substantial number of people who will talk about the positive side of globalization, while another vocal group would say there is nothing positive about the globalization process itself. “Neo-Liberalism is the dominating political and economic theory in support of globalization. Central tenants of neo-liberal economic policies include the securing free trade, cultivating private ownership, supporting economic deregulation and decentralization, and fostering economic efficiency to maximize profits. Neo-liberal organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, argue that free trade raises incomes, cuts the cost of living, and stimulates economic growth.”⁷

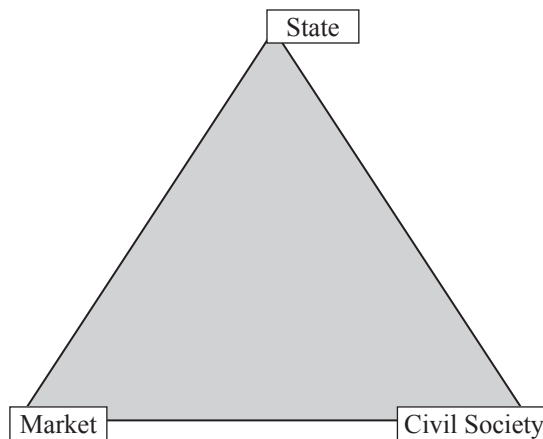
The critics of globalization, on the other hand, point out the enormous harm the globalization processes have done. For instance, Joseph Stiglitz, one of the most prominent critiques of globalization argues that that “globalization has not been pushed carefully, or fairly. On the contrary, liberalization policies have been implemented too fast, in the wrong order, and often using inadequate--or plainly wrong--economic analysis. As a consequence, he argues, we now face terrible results, including increases in destitution and social conflict, and generalized frustration. The culprits are the IMF and its ‘market fundamentalists,’ the ‘Washington Consensus,’ and the US Treasury.”⁸

In the midst of such contradictory opinions and experiences, the Church also has taken differing stands. While the official church has been by and large silent about the processes and even benefitting from the rather dubious gains of globalization processes, there have always been prophetic voices challenging the evils brought about by uncontrolled globalization process and the unleashing of neo-liberal policies.

3. AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

For a meaningful involvement in the socio-political context narrated above, it is important to have a critical analytical understanding of the same. It is in the spirit of Vatican II that we do this analysis. “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”⁹

While a variety of models are available, I would like to propose the tri-polar model of understanding social structure and its functioning. It is not as a fool proof or undebated model that this is proposed. In fact, there are questions on the very definition of civil society and controversies on its usage. For our use, we are proposing that a human society is built on a tri-polar structure: the State, Market and Civil Society.



State, in this case, refers to the instruments of ruling used by a society like the Legislature, Judiciary, Executive and their various arms. The Market refers to ‘an actual or nominal place where forces of demand and supply operate, and where buyers and sellers interact (directly or through intermediaries) to trade goods, services, or contracts or instruments, for money or barter.

Markets include mechanisms or means for (1) determining price of the traded item, (2) communicating the price information, (3) facilitating deals and transactions, and (4) effecting distribution. For our discussion, Market refers to the full world of economic transactions by which any society is sustained. And finally according to the World Bank, civil society refers to “the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the

interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), therefore, refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.”¹⁰

In a situation where the state dominates, we talk of a totalitarian state, where Market dominates we refer to a liberal capitalist society and critique the extreme forms of profit making at the cost of people. The argument is that both the State and Market have the tendencies of spinning off on their own, at the cost of people’s interests. The State and the Market seem to be operating increasingly for the benefit of a few. The ideological base of neo-liberalism or market fundamentalism argues for the liberation of the market from political interference. They argue that the state should only defend private property and remove barriers to business.

As we look at the Indian polity through this model, we see increasingly collusion between the State and the Market causing enormous hardships to the ordinary people. Just one statistics, while India had growth rates around 8-9 per cent, its poor kept increasing. Even as per the official statistics, which many will argue is under stated, 25 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line. So the question is for whose interest is the state working? It is in this context that the Civil Society should act as a corrective mechanism to the wayward ways of the State and the Market. Whether the fractured nature of civil society itself makes it fit to be one corrective force is a question debated. However the argument in this paper is that Church as a member of the Civil Society has the power and responsibility to be a corrective force to the greedy market and totalitarian state. The call to the new evangelization which invariably involves work for Justice, demands of us this role. The hope that sustains us is manifested in the following quote:

“Diverse units of social identity and interest... independent of the state..., not only can restrain the arbitrary actions of rulers, but can also contribute to forming better citizens who are more aware of the preferences of others, more self-confident in their actions, and more civic-minded in their willingness to sacrifice for the common good. At its best, civil society provides an intermediate layer of governance between the individual and the state that is capable of resolving conflicts and controlling the behavior of members without public coercion ... A viable civil society can mitigate conflicts.”¹¹

4. THE CHALLENGE OF NEW EVANGELIZATION AND THE CONSECRATED

The consecrated by their very vocation are exhorted to recognize the privileged place of the poor in our communities, a place that does not exclude anyone, but wants to reflect how Jesus bound himself to them. The presence of the poor in our communities is mysteriously powerful; it changes persons more than a discourse does; it teaches fidelity and makes us understand the fragility of life; it asks for prayer; in short, it brings us to Christ.

The consecrated communities are known for their charitable response to the Indian reality as manifested by almost 40 per cent of religious in India (CRI Data) involved in social work. However, the documents remind us that the gesture of charity, on the other hand, must also be accompanied by commitment to Justice, with an appeal that concerns all, poor and rich. Hence, the social doctrine of the Church is integral to the pathways of the new evangelization, as well as the formation of Christians to dedicate themselves to serve the human community in social and political life.

The challenge then is to integrate a social analysis which is critical and political with our faith mandate of new evangelization.

5. CONCLUSION

We live at a time when severe crises affect the life of the consecrated men and women. The crises are of social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural dimensions. However, history tells us that crises faced by the consecrated are mostly creations of their own. In fact, the solution to these problems is to shift their focus of attention from their own navels to the concerns of the poor and marginalized. The clarion call of the New Evangelization is indeed just that. The New Evangelization calls for creative ways of proclaiming the good news, serving the poor and working for justice. This response has to be backed by sound social analysis and theories of praxis.

Finally let us remember the words from Pope Benedict XVI: “Evangelizing is not merely a way of speaking, but a form of living: living in the listening and giving voice to the father. Can anyone doubt that consecrated life is a pre-eminent mode of evangelizing?”¹²

Endnotes

- 1 *Gilbert Choondal, Why, What, When and How of the Year of faith*, (Chennai : New Leader Publications, 2012 Sept 16-30) 10-13.

- 2 Synod2012.org/2012/10/26/the-message-of-the-synod-a-syn.
- 3 AnahitaMukherji. India uproots most people for progresses in TNN June 4, 2012.
- 4 Mander, Harsh. *Ash in the Belly: India's Unfinished Battle against Hunger*, (Delhi: Penguin publishers 2012)
- 5 Ms. GeetanjaliMisra Executive Director, CREA, <http://web.creaworld.org/files/CREA%20%20Geetanjali%20Mishra%20speech.pdf> Accessed on 20 March, 2013
- 6 Samir Amin quoted in Walter Fernandes, *Globalisation in India: The Response of the Churches*. Unpublished paper, April 2013.
- 7 Jennifer Murray, *The Two Faces of Globalization: the Case of Women in Asia*, <http://lilt.ilstu.edu/critique/fall%202005/jennifer%20murray.pdf>. Accessed on March 20,2013.
- 8 Sebastian Edwards. Review of Joseph E. Stiglitz's *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, New York) <http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/faculty/sebastian.edwards/Stiglitz.pdf> Accessed on 20 March, 2013.
- 9 Vatican II, GE. 1.
- 10 <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/market.html> Accessed on 20 March, 2013.
- 11 Bowen L. Gordon. 2006. 'Concepts in Political Science- Civil Society'<http://www.mbc.edu/faculty/gbowen/civilSociety.htm>
- 12 Benedict XVI. 2001, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/cardinal-ratzinger-on-the-new-evangelization>

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES OF NEW EVANGELISM: NEW AND LIVING WAYS

Cynthia Stephen

The life of faith of the individual Christian can be unique and different in each case. But it is still possible to draw out universal principles which could help us understand the broader contours of a life of consecration.

In his presentation, Fr. George Mutholil highlighted a number of important ways in which this can be lived out, including ways in which the Gospel can interact with the wider society. These included: dialogue with cultures, education and culture, formation and research, world of social communication, dialogue with scientific knowledge, taking care of the sick, right involvement in politics, being at the side of the poor, partners in dialogue and contemplating the Mystery.

These have been ways in which the church in general and the religious in particular, have worked to further the coming of God's kingdom, and created multiple interfaces between the Gospel and the world at large. While Fr. George has the privilege of working with the poor as the most important part of this process, with the emphasis on the social context of ministry, I would like to speak about more clearly the tools of interaction and the ways in which these can be deployed in ministry at various levels by the Church, by the religious and by individuals, whether lay or religious.

I use the term "consecration" in a wider sense than it has been used in this conference which refers more specifically to the life of dedication through poverty, chastity and obedience of the religious in the context of the Catholic Church. I use it in the sense of the daily walk of faith of the individual believer, religious, ordained or lay, in experiencing and living out an ongoing consciousness of God's presence in his or her life. I believe our exemplar is Christ himself, who while living in this world, spent thirty years in preparation for his ministry not

Cynthia Stephen is an independent writer and researcher working on issues of gender, poverty, development and identity. Presently she is the State Programme Director, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, which is a Government of India project working for the empowerment of women through education.

only through interacting with his family, his community but also by working with his hands for a living and supporting the family, even as he spent time in study, in contemplation and in prayer. Once individuals, with full self-awareness, choose to identify with a life of faith and service, whether as religious or lay, their lives are to be considered consecrated to service. Because “man looks on the outward appearance but God looks upon the heart” (1Sam. 16:7). Thus all work of building the Kingdom, whether it relates to raising children with the best Christian values within the four walls of the home by a stay-at-home mother, ‘shepherding the sheep’ on the part of the ordained priesthood, or serving the poor, needy and underprivileged/marginalised by the women religious – is valuable in the sight of God.

But what of those who work in other spheres – such as the academic world, in publishing, in the media, the performing arts, in political leadership, in governance, the law, policy making, finance, management, agriculture, industry – all of which have profound impact on the way people can have and exercise influence in the world? What are the challenges one faces in these areas even as one tries to function in a manner befitting the high calling of being ‘salt and light’ in the world, of being a part of those with the work of the evangelization? And what will characterise the *new evangelisation* and constitute the challenges to it?

1. EVANGELIZING: A CALL TO RENEWED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD

In an address to the students of Mundelein Seminary, Chicago, Fr. Robert Barron listed seven qualities of someone living out the *new evangelisation*. Needless to say, this applies to Christians across the spectrum – whether Catholic or Protestant, lay or religious. I have ventured to paraphrase his ideas. According to him, one needs: (a) a relationship with Jesus Christ, because evangelism is about sharing a relationship, not ideas; (b) to be excited about your message, because ultimately people only listen to a message from someone who is excited about it; (c) to know the story of the people of Israel in the Old Testament, so that you connect the history; (d) to know the culture in which you evangelise so that you reach out to people in their social and cultural locations; (e) to know and value the heritage of faith, of Scripture and its scholars and their lives and work; (f) to have a missionary heart, to reach out to those who have lost contact with God, who may include those in the Church too; (g) to use various media including the new media to reach out to people as technology can be harnessed to communicate and build and nurture relationships across space and time – the *sine qua non* of evangelical work.¹

The challenges being faced by the ministers, the religious and those who have a calling to family life or singlehood either by choice or circumstances, would be different both in degree and complexity from those encountered by those engaged in the wider social, economic, political, cultural, economic spheres. The former may face interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges within themselves, their institutions and related circumstances. But they can also call upon spiritual, institutional and structural resources to overcome these challenges. They may operate in a less ambiguous situation vis-à-vis in their roles and responsibilities. Expectations may be straight-forward and clear; norms well set.

However, for the laity, the diversity of circumstances faced on a regular working day – for instance, in the media, as a manager in a private manufacturing or marketing firm, or as a creative artist – are vastly more complex; the outcomes could have a profound influence for good or ill on a larger number of stakeholders including a large number of publics. It must be admitted, however, that there are specific situations in which the religious might be severely targeted, such as when religious persecution breaks out.

2. INDIAN REALITY TODAY

The ground reality in India places a special challenge in this context, due to its complexities. Being a multi-cultural society, full of diversities in language, food cultures, different castes, communities, regions, religions, agro-climatic zones, ethnicity, etc., there are powerful social forces such as communalism, regionalism, fundamentalism, etc operating in Indian society in an unprecedented manner. It is no longer possible, for instance, to write a story or produce a film including content that has religious overtones without being subjected to hostile receptions from a small but highly visible and noisy section of a group who will do their best to occupy the mind-space of the public by claiming to be very ‘offended’ at the manner in which certain scenes, conversations or visual content ‘misrepresent’ their religion. They are also ably aided by sections of the media, who are always willing to play along for the sensational value of such happenings, because they are spared of the need to work at producing high-quality content. This is the equivalent of a parent feeding a child potato chips and chocolate cake at every meal, because ‘the child likes it’ – essentially an abdication of its responsibility to produce and transmit high-quality credible content to its readers/viewers. Therefore, a high-decibel media campaign is mounted before the ever-willing TV cameras against the writer/producer/artiste till changes are forced in the content.

This is not to deny, however, the legitimate concerns of a section of Christians who have, in 2012 and later, been active in successfully resisting hate-inspired visual representations which stereotype commonly recognised ‘Christian’ images of, for instance, one picture depicting Jesus with a cigarette in one hand and a can of beer in the other – which were found, shockingly, in school textbooks in a BJP-ruled state (not Karnataka) and in a calendar distributed by a Mumbai politician, or in film scenes depicting cassocked priests as indulging in violence and worse.

Another more disturbing situation is that of ‘paid news’, which means that commercial and political interests are likely to overrule public interest in the media, but do great harm in the sense that the credibility and independence of the press and electronic media is undermined. This leaves the entire society poorer as another important pillar of secular democracy is rendered less able to carry out its mandate as carrier of credible information and shaper of the public discourse.

In much the same way, there are concerted efforts in our society to deny the realities of structured injustice against large sections of society, including most women, the marginalised groups including dalits and tribals, children, the disabled, etc. in our society. While some sections of the Church have responded to the situation in their own way by reaching out to them, providing essential relief and longer-term support through interventions like organising them, providing educational facilities, supporting vocational education and employment, etc., there are vested interests who view this work of mercy and justice with suspicion. They feel that this is an ‘underhand’ method employed by mostly Christians who seek to inveigle these sections into abandoning the religion and converting to Christianity. This is not to deny some mistakes on the part of enthusiastic ‘missionaries’ who may employ hard-sell techniques to promote the spread of the ‘Gospel.’

3. THE WAY FORWARD: A PATH OF FAITH, WORSHIP AND WITNESS

According to the website of the United States Catholic Bishops “The *New Evangelization* as a journey of faith, worship and witness, presents three opportunities or audiences for the transmission of the Christian faith. They are: to engage more intently those who are faithful and need to be renewed with increased catechesis; to reach out to those who have never heard the gospel proclaimed; and to re-engage those who are baptized but have lost a living sense of the faith in their daily lives.”²²

In other words, it is an outreach to those who are already a part of the Church but need to be renewed, to those who are faithful, and also to those who have

never heard the Gospel. The three words Faith, Worship and Witness sum up very well the essence of the New Evangelisation. But how are we to accomplish this task?

Coming from the family which prays “Our Father”, adding that we want his Kingdom to come, it is inevitable that we have to address ourselves to the work of preaching good news to the poor, healing the broken-hearted, setting the captives free, bringing sight to the blind, and proclaiming liberation to those who are oppressed (Lk 4: 18-19). In our present-day world, this is easier said than done, given the climate of mistrust and ill-will generated by our detractors. This does not mean that we give up on our charism; but rather, it means examining ourselves to find out if we have in any way contributed, knowingly or unknowingly, to the mistrust, and correcting ourselves if the criticism is warranted.

In a lecture titled “Christian Witness in a multi-religious context,” Rev. Dr. Thomas Thangaraj says: “We bear witness by living *our commitment to cruciform responsibility, liberative solidarity, and eschatological mutuality*. By cruciform responsibility, we mean our readiness to take responsibility for all that happens around us the joys and sorrows of human life. It also involves seeing ourselves as partners with God . . . acknowledging that ultimate responsibility for this universe rests in God. (This) relativizes human responsibility and transforms our witness into processes of humanisation. Liberative solidarity calls us to work for the liberation of all through the liberation of those who are in bondages of all kinds – socio-political, cultural, economic, and spiritual factors . . . with a bias for those in the margins of society and politics. Eschatological mutuality points to the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing us all towards fullness to exercise mutuality in the light of the eschaton. . . By adding mutuality to solidarity we accomplish two things – we are able to see the people of other religions as those who bear witness to us . . . rescuing solidarity from any form of condescension and make it cognizant of the agency of those with whom we express solidarity.”³

4. RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

In light of the above, perhaps, we need to recognise that the challenges to the New evangelism are three-fold: internal to the person; structural, in terms of the Church; and external, in the circumstances around us and in which we operate.

4.1. Internal Challenges

In the Indian context, characterised by ancient cultural moorings, multiple languages, and a multi-religious, multi-cultural milieu, there is need for a more informed and involved approach. As Rev. Thangaraj points out, the Christian faith is a universalising religion with a clear mission to invite all others to join

its faith community. He cites Rita Gross, a scholar of religion, who says there are two types of religions: ethno religions and universalising religions. In a context of religious diversity in India which includes both kinds, there is a need to revisit the idea of Christian witness in a more pragmatic and realistic manner.

We could begin with a critical examination of our ‘religious imagination,’⁷⁴ our usage of words and language (perhaps characterising/stereotyping sections of society as ignorant, misinformed, misled, pagan?). We need to bring these ideas in line with the unconditional love, respect and acceptance of the fellow human being, exemplified by Christ. If there is no fit, we must be bold enough to apologise for these unseemly traits of thinking and change them. We need to work on our personal lives, examine and correct patterns of thought and speech which may reveal our subconscious sense of superiority over those who “do not know the Truth.” We need to address this in our institutions, the churches and in our public utterances; we need to examine the language used in our publications, which could be heard or read by anyone. It is the way in which we relate to our neighbour. Are we as accepting, open and humble as befits a Christian?

4.2. Structural Challenges

The second challenge is structural. As a church, are we exclusionary in our approach? Do we call impure that which God has called pure? Do we need to re-examine some of our claims and recognise that they can be termed absolutist in the eyes of one from a different religious tradition? Do we come across as people who have the principal agenda of setting up the Christian faith – and the Church – as supreme, or as those who are inviting people into a personal relationship with a loving and personal God?

4.3. External Challenges

As already pointed out, the third challenge is external, and varied in its manifestations. One of the chief reasons for this is because we as a church have, in many senses, withdrawn from the public sphere. Perhaps we are not fully in touch with the realities of the lives of people and institutions today. We used to be a group able to boldly speak truth to the powers that be, due to our moral stature in the public eye, especially, as people and institutions committed to the public good, delivering quality education and services to the public at large. But at the present time, we have gone into a shell. We are now guilty of retreating into elitist ivory towers, or perhaps retreated too much into the contemplative life and not identified sufficiently with the little, the least and the lost. We have not been sufficiently self-reflexive, critiquing (in a positive sense) our internal practices, norms and the quality of leadership of our institutions.

We have, most of all, not sufficiently valued the work of the faithful, the mothers, the women religious, and those who work in the frontline, struggling with “Principalities and Powers.” We have privileged the faith, scholarship and religious experience of some categories in terms of gender, class, national identity over the experiences of other. In other words, as James says in the Bible, we have been guilty of showing favouritism (James 2:3,4), even while claiming to be worshippers of the God who does not discriminate against anyone. The world sees and judges us harshly, and rightly so. Because even the Bible says that those who have spiritual authority are judged differently from those who do not.

As a result, we have ceded moral ground and this space which has been taken over by New age gurus, politicians, scholars and other opinion leaders including the secular media. We have thus become sitting ducks for the pot-shots of numerous critics, both justified and unjustified. The outcome has been the loss of moral and ethical voice in society especially in India, causing alienation that has manifested in an increasing number of attacks on Christian missions and missionaries, places of worship and service, even homes, in India recently. Some of these attacks were so severe that they could be termed pogroms, as in the Kandhamal district of Orissa.

The challenge, therefore, is to live lives true to Christian belief and practice, which show enough love, enough ‘difference’, enough hope and faith to enable a glimpse of the divine to those who see us, among whom we live and work. Perhaps, in the end, the challenge is to each individual - lay or religious - to be a channel of blessing and hope, a “stained glass window” through which “the Light can shine.” And more importantly to recognise that we are all engaged in spiritual warfare whose outcome has been predetermined, but which we nevertheless have to engage as individuals and institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

In closing, I could do no better than to quote portions from a homily of Pope Benedict XVI himself: “I believe we are at the beginning of a great resurgence in the Catholic Church precisely for this new missionary age. Just when her opponents are ready to count the Catholic Church out, the sleeping giant is rising. Along with the needed purification of the Church, the seeds of a new springtime are beginning to sprout. For example, the ecclesial movements are flourishing; new and renewed religious communities are growing and new and renewed Colleges and Universities, desirous of being fully and faithfully Catholic, are sending out missionaries into every segment of the fields which are ripe for

harvest. There is a growing dynamically orthodox Catholic faith and life being manifested among the lay faithful. The movement of our Anglican friends into full communion, the growing number of other Christians' coming home to the full communion of the Catholic Church, the movement toward the healing of the division between East and West, are all signs of a resurgent Catholic Church at the dawn of a new missionary age.

The Lord who birthed the Church from His wounded side on Golgotha's Hill her and died for her is purifying her and renewing her by His Spirit to continue his redemptive work until he returns to bring it to completion. He has been raised from the dead and walks with our feet. This is the Dawn of a New Missionary Age. We are all missionaries. He still sends us out two by two and - equips us with all we need to continue His mission."⁵ The Challenge is to walk that Emmaus road, knowing that the Saviour is by our side.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.osv.com/tabid/7621/itemid/10311/Father-Barrons-seven-tips-for-New-Evangelization.aspx>, accessed on 8th Feb 2013.
- 2 <http://www.usccb.org/about/strategic-plan.cfm>, accessed on 11th March 2013. See also *Disciples Called to Witness the New Evangelisation*, (Washington DC.: US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012)
- 3 Dr. Thangaraj, formerly of Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, is now Visiting Professor of World Christianity, at Boston University School of Theology, and is working on a book, *Journeying through Diversity: Crossing Boundaries as a Spiritual Practice*. See M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task*, (London: Abington Press, 1999).
- 4 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), .6.
- 5 <http://www.catholic.org/homily/yearoffaith/story.php?id=49628>, accessed on 8th Feb 2013

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

A biannual published by Sanyasa Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore

Sanyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life is a biannual publication of scholarly reflections committed to the Re-visioning and Renewal of Consecrated Life.

It welcomes the contributors with openness to express their views freely and responsibly.

Views expressed by the contributors are their own and do not necessarily manifest the view of the Editor and the Editorial Board.

The editors are indeed grateful to all the Priests and Religious for your encouragement and support and above all looking forward to your patronage.

Manuscripts for publication and books for review should be addressed to: **The Editor**, and business communications (correspondence, subscription, change of address) to: **The Administrator**

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Sanyasa

Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944

E-mail: sjbancmf@gmail.com / sanyasac@gmail.com

Web: www.sanyasa.com

Dear Subscribers:

Kindly note the change in the rate of subscription of the Sanyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life. Since the beginning of the publication of this Journal in January 2006, we have been keeping the same rate. Now due to the escalation of the costs involved, we have decided to increase the rate of subscription minimally. We hope that our subscribers will understand this change and support this only Journal on Consecrated Life, published in India.

The new rates of subscription are as follows:

INDIA		SRI LANKA		OTHER COUNTRIES	
One year	₹ 120	One year	₹ 285	One year	US\$ 30
Two years	₹ 220	Two years	₹ 520	Two years	US\$ 50
Three years	₹ 320	Three years	₹ 755	Three years	US\$ 70

Yes! I wish to subscribe to

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

I am enclosing DD / Cheque no. dated drawn on (specify bank) favoring SANYASA for ₹ (add ₹ 15/- for non Bangalore cheques).

Name: _____

Address: _____

Pin: _____

Tel: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____