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Consecrated for Mission:  
Emerging Horizons in the Church and the World

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## **SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE**

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Sanyasa

Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944

E-mail: [sanyasac@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasac@gmail.com) / [sanyasa.in@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasa.in@gmail.com)

Web: [www.sanyasa.com](http://www.sanyasa.com)

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## EDITORIAL

Church exists to evangelize and consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element of her mission. Therefore, the “sense of mission is at the heart of every form of consecrated life,” states Pope John Paul II (VC. 25). No religious community, including the contemplative ones, is turned in on itself; rather it is announcement, *diakonia*, and prophetic witness. It is critical presence of service in the world—witness of Christian fraternity, the active ministry, or a community of prayer.

We are consecrated for mission not only in what we do and but also in what we are. Not only directly in works of announcing the Gospel but even more forcefully in the very way that we live, we need to be voices that affirm with confidence and conviction: We have seen the Lord. He is risen. We have heard his word.

Collectively, mission undertaken by consecrated men and women is under stress due to several reasons: the complexities of the globalized world to be evangelized, the dilemma involved in witnessing and proclaiming in the midst of the diversity of religions, cultures and languages proper to our nation, rise of regionalism, diminishment of a vision for mission proper to us as religious, lack of respect for and appreciation of the varied charisms and ministries in the Church, resistance to work collaboratively in shared mission, and, above all, the reluctance to move on to the frontiers from our comfortable zones.

Added to this, there could be a temptation to want to do everything. Looking for what is prestigious and rewarding, can also make religious to leave works which are genuine expressions of the institute’s charism for others which seem to be more attractive and self-serving. More comforts and pleasures that come through a compromised living in this globalised world also tend to snip out the missionary fervor and make us settle down in ministries that are comfortable and easy. In all these instances, the effects are not immediate but, in the long run, what will suffer is the missionary vitality which will be a loss to the Church and to its mission.

Mission has to be renewed and revitalized and it calls for a new way of seeing and doing our mission. It is in this context that Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life has chosen the theme, **Consecrated for Mission: Emerging Horizons in the Church and the World**, in its annual *Consecrated Life Week Seminar*, conducted at the Institute on February 01-03, 2012. This issue of the Journal brings together the reflections offered by a panel of the resource persons who spoke at the seminar. Coming from different sections of the Church (priests, religious and lay), drawing from their own expertise and experience in mission, each of them dealt with various aspects of the theme.

The world needs to be evangelized. **Dexter S. Maben** invites us to look at this world through an evangelical key drawn from Acts 8: 4-25 and presents the challenges we face in the call to evangelize our present day world. In analyzing a few major challenges, he calls for a shifting of paradigms in world evangelization by helping us question some of the assumptions that we, as evangelizers may have assimilated uncritically. He also helps us discover the possibilities in terms of a call to repentance, not only as agents of mission, but also in the methods and goals, to see witnessing as a local possibility to witness with other faiths about the common challenges and evils that confront us and to see proclamation of the Good News not just towards the conversion of the individuals, but towards transformation of societies.

Having explored some of the challenges and possibilities, **Joseph Francis** brings us to the mission call of Jesus to which we are called to respond. He takes us through the understanding of mission in Pre-Vatican times and explores its biblical, ecclesial and theological horizons as spelt out in the Vatican II and Post Conciliar documents of the Church. His assertion is that God's choice of us for mission is both a privilege and a burden; we are chosen for the mission only because God loves all to whom we are being sent.

Listening to the call to mission, how we, as consecrated men and women, are invited to respond? Why are we in the Church and what is the mission proper to us? **Xavier E. Manavath** looks into this question by searching for the common thread that binds and unites the mission proper to different forms of consecrated life and also in dialogue with the mission proper to other different Christian vocations in the Church. Drawing on two complementary movements—a going up and coming down—that are essential to consecrated life, he elucidates the mission of the consecrated flowing from its symbolic-charismatic-prophetic identity (being) and political-mystical involvement (doing) in the Church and the world.

No one can deny that shared mission is an inherently foundational element of the Church's mission which we are re-discovering in our globalized world. **Paulson Veliyanoor** systematically explores the foundations of shared mission at different levels and the salient features of a spirituality that ferments it. Showing how “doing with others” is so foundational to the presence and action of consecrated men and women, he goes on to share certain areas where shared mission becomes an urgency and offers two models that could be emulated by the religious congregations. It is high time that we broaden our perception of communion in mission.

Through a personal sharing, **Jacob Jose**, takes us to heart of a Christian lay professional, called to evangelize in the context of marriage, family and professional life. His sharing helps us to rediscover the mission of Christian lay faithful, the challenges that they face and the immense possibilities for evangelization they encounter in their own life-world.

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While coining the term, “consecrated religious life (CRL), in an attempt to delve into the deeper and wider meaning that this combined expression would bring, **Helen Dantis**, quite prophetically brings out some of the major challenges to the mission of the CRL in the Indian context. Drawing from a variety of sources, she analyzes the major challenges of growing institutionalization, cultural alienation, social isolation and shallow God-experience that confront the Indian religious men and women and offers liberating pathways that call us to be authentic evangelizers.

Seeking to assist us with a spirituality that is wide and deep enough to animate our mission in this “Year of Faith,” **Jose Kumbolickal**, brings out some models of missionary spirituality from the New Testament. He also presents us with a vibrant and effective missionary spirituality drawn from the charismatic heritage of Saint Francis de Sales and details out its significant features. He argues that personal transformation and personal witness that marked out the missionary spirituality of Francis de Sales will stir missionary fervor in this year of faith and New Evangelization.

Radical discipleship to Jesus calls for pioneering and prophetic initiatives in religious life and mission. **Mathew Perumpil**, by placing this radicality of the call of Jesus in the present day context, provides us with some daring and effective models of radical religious living and mission that deserve special attention. His goal is to awaken our own slumbering spirits and challenge religious individually and collectively to make their charisms more relevant, meaningful and effective in responding to the crying needs in the broken areas of human existence.

May this issue of the Journal stir up our missionary spirit and alert us to the challenges hidden in the complexities of our modern world so as to discover in them the possibilities to make God’s love more visible and experiential in the lives of those to whom we are sent.

**Xavier E. Manavath, CMF**  
(Chief Editor)

## THE WORLD TO BE EVANGELIZED: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Dexter S. Maben

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Christianity right from its inception was intended to be a movement and not a structured religion. Evangelization was considered as inherently focal to the very nature of the Christian faith. Paradigms of evangelization were primarily drawn from the Christian scriptures, with its interpretation being varied according to the contexts. However it must be mentioned, that for a long time, evangelization was viewed as an extension or related activity of colonization. Evangelization post-reformation also was narrowed to enlarging confessional churches, rather than visualizing a world beyond the confessional boundaries. The agenda was decided by mostly western churches, with the global south being the object of evangelization. The goal was to see that most of, if not the whole world, would be Christian in faith. Let us just take the World Missionary Conference which was held at Edinburgh in 1910. The theme brought together 11215 delegates with the key theme, ‘the evangelization of the world in this generation.’ Fast forward to the jubilee celebrations is 2010, when the theme in Edinburgh was, “witnessing for Christ today.” The Conference brought together nearly 300 delegates from some 60 nations and representatives from the Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Independent churches came together. To mark the centenary, an affirmation known as COMMON CALL was issued by the delegates.

I want to highlight three shifts in Edinburgh 2010, which deserves mention. Firstly, the emphasis on God’s mission (*Missio Dei*), which was different from the earlier, mission of the churches. Secondly, the ecumenical character of the gathering, particularly the participation of the official representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, with participation and cooperation clearly missing in 1910. Cardinal O’Brien in his welcome address, said as a reflection about 1910: “There were no Roman Catholics at all present at the Conference,

*Dexter S. Maben, is a priest of the Church of the South India, Karnataka Central Diocese. He has a Doctorate in New Testament from the Kirchliche Hochschule, Bethel, Bielefeld, Germany. He is one of the authors of the South Asia Biblical Commentary project, on Mark. Currently he is teaching in the Department of Biblical Studies (New Testament) at the United Theological College, Bangalore and serves as a member of the executive committee of the Society of Biblical Studies in India (SBSI). He is available at: dextermaben17@gmail.com.*

and the thought of a Roman Catholic Cardinal being invited to speak at the Opening Service would have been unthinkable.”<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, most of the representatives were from the global south, with the deliberations not ignoring the concerns of the global south. Lastly, the agenda of doing evangelization is understood as witnessing for Christ in a changed context. *In my opinion, it is important to continue to ponder, on how, the church began locally and shared a global witness, and how a witnessing global church manifests itself locally?* In order to make a beginning, the history of evangelization is associated with the history of the early church and its mission. And I want to focus on the Book of Acts, which describes the history of the early church, though they are surrounded by traditions. My focus will be on Acts 8:4-25, which focuses on the mission in Samaria. In my opinion, the mission to Samaria is led by Philip and has not received as much attention as it deserves. If at all world evangelization began, it began with Samaria as the focus of the earliest mission of the early church. Let us discover the challenges and later the possibilities.

## 2. CHALLENGES

### 2.1. Identity

The mission of the Early Church makes an interesting study of the understanding and realization of identities. The task of evangelization given to disciples was challenging because of the assurance and the challenge posed. The question asked by the apostles at the beginning of their world mission is an interesting question of identity: “Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom of Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Even at that point, the questions were not about evangelization or proclaiming the gospel, but about restoring the religious, ethnic, cultural and political identity of a particular group of people. But the assurance given was one of “power” (*dynmais*) and “to be” witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is interesting that he includes the aspect of “World Evangelization” before the beginnings of the description of the Pauline mission in chapter 9. Paul in his efforts of world evangelization, does include visits to several global centers, but does not mention about the local mission in Samaria or to the Samaritans. Most writers of the Scripture do not mention about Samaria and Samaritans, assuming the need to subsume them under the global Jewish identity. The Jewish identity is a “kingdom identity” because of the proliferation of political and economic identity. Evangelization outside Jerusalem began with Philip, whose identity subverts many of the established identities. He was not one of the apostles, but was a Greek-speaking Jew, who was one of the seven men chosen to distribute food in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5). The text indicates that Philip “went down” to the city of Samaria, indicating that the Samaritans lived not in the privileged places in the hills, but lived in the valleys. In that sense, Philip is the first evangelist to go outside Jerusalem, to move from the center to the periphery.

Indian society is primarily an identity-based society. The identity of an individual stems from multiple factors like caste, ethnicity, religion, linguistic and regional boundaries, gender

among others. Thus, the identity of a person is systematically constructed and determines the social conduct of an individual to a large extent. In India, there is a growing attempt to deconstruct existing 'marginal' and 'multiple' identities and form 'fundamental' identities based on religion, caste, class and gender. Multiple identities are denied and singular identities are being formed. Ideology and identity are convenient bedfellows. In recent years, the debate about nationalism has taken centre-stage with the re-emergence of the hindutva ideology, which is systematically but dynamically enforcing a homogeneous identity. What we are witnessing is an organized attempt to re-interpret political power structure, capitalist economy and cultural homogeneity. Hindutva which began as a religious and political ideology realized its limitations and is subtly promoting "cultural nationalism" in order to construct new identities of a homogeneous nation. This shift is more dangerous than a 'pure hindutva', because it is convincing the upper, dominant and backward castes to move towards a cohesive structure that suits them socially, politically and culturally. This dominant, confident and assertive Hindutva has become more aggressive and less tolerant in the post-Godhra scenario in the country and attacks on religious minorities is on the increase.

To cite the example of Karnataka, attacks on religious minorities has increased in the districts of Mysore, Belgaum and Hubli. But the brunt of the hindutva ideology has been felt in coastal Karnataka, particularly in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, where particularly the attacks on churches has been out in the open and continuing. Religious Mutts are providing the ideological impetus to the debate of hindutva identity. In the case of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, the presence of diverse cultural symbols is part of the cultural roots of the region. What the hindutva ideology has done is to adapt to a three-pronged strategy. On the one side, it has used religious mutts to mobilize the Brahmins, upper castes, dominant castes and backward castes and forged them into a 'group identity' based on several cultural factors like language, art festivals and religious festivals, and helped them to perceive the cultural threat from Christianity as a manifestation of western culture. On the other hand, it has interpreted the globalized threat from the point of view of the 'war on terror' from Islamic groups, while on the other hand provided the positive possibilities for merchants and traders to be part of global capitalism. Apart from these two, it has utilized a sense of insecurity among certain groups like the fishermen community and the Muslims, because of their trade interests, to widen the gap. A combination of all these strategies has resulted in the consolidation of political power. In recent years the BJP has hardly left any chances of victory for the other national or regional parties, at the local, assembly or elections to the parliament. Vote-bank politics has marginalized the minority communities of any possibility of influencing the electoral results and thereby made them voiceless and helpless. What we are witnessing is the 'ideologization' of the state machinery and the bureaucracy. Therefore when the attacks happened on the Christians, the response of the police and bureaucracy has been either lethargic or supportive. The deconstruction of multiple identities into a singular identity has been part of the several cultures and civilizations, and the construction of dominant group identities

has marginalized the individual identities. Any talk of evangelization should take the issue of identity and its debate seriously.

The Samaritan identity was a marginal identity, which received prejudiced attention all through the scriptures. Samaritan identity was also subsumed under the garb of cultural nationalism. One of the major challenges of evangelization today, is to deal with the effort to homogenize singular identities into a group identity in the name of any factor. Multiple identities need to be accepted and appreciated. It is time also to search beyond the Jewish-gentile divide, to multiple identities among nations.

## **2.2. Plurality**

Human civilization is inherently plural with a constant attempt to include some and exclude the 'other.' The direct outcome of reconstructing identities is the acceptance or denial of plurality. Pluralism is not a theoretical entity, but a living reality, which is accepted by some cultures, while some cultures are compelled to accept and appreciate. A careful reading of the Scriptures, demands that we identify the pluralistic nature of the communities that were evangelized. Coming back to the text, it is evident that Samaria, was not only related to a people group, but were isolated and discriminated as a geographical entity. Samaria was an area north of Jerusalem. The first mention of Samaria in the Bible is I Kings 13:32, which discusses a pronouncement from "a man of God" (v.31). "For the saying that he called out by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass (v.32). This is a complaint against false worship. After Israel lost a major war, Samaria became inhabited primarily by non-Israeleites, "Then the King of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel" (2 Kings 17:24). In the New Testament, in one of the major conversations between a Male Jew and a Samaritan woman, it is said : "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9). In the Acts texts, it becomes evident that the shift from Jerusalem to Samaria is a shift from one geographical area to another, from universality to the reality of plurality. The Samaritans had their own scriptures, the Samaritan Pentateuch, worship in Mount Gerizim, and had religious practices which were religiously and culturally distinct and different from the majority Jewish community.

For example, in the Acts text, we see Simon was practicing magic, or something supernatural. It is no wonder that Simon had "amazed them with his magic" (8:11). We can be immediately judgmental about magic as something evil, but people of other faiths may also look at the miracles of Jesus to be some form of magic. What we can imagine, is that the Samaritan community was excluded from other communities and somebody who went into their communities would have misunderstood them and their practices. The gospel can be universalized, without being sensitive to the pluralistic nature of the communities. Every effort to marginalize pluralism by the dominant religious and cultural groups is used to marginalize marginal identities and subsume them under a dominant identity. Collective identities are negated to establish universal identities. Judaism was not

a collective identity, but realized that a competitive collective identity like the Samaritan identity would pose a challenge. Common identity markers are denied. In the case of the Jews and the Samaritans, there were many common identity markers, but were denied and the pluralistic nature of the Jewish religion left without. Judaism has constantly attempted to display a monolithic religious structure, which has no place for the marginal groups like the Samaritans. Any non-acceptance of the dominant ideology is met with oppression and violence and the effort to relegate them to ghettos. Today, the Samaritans number just about 700 people and limited to the city of Nablus in Israel and struggling to keep their identity alive for the next generations.

Let us take the example of Dalit, Adivasi and tribal communities who are forced to stay in excluded communities, because it is easy to victimize and marginalize as “subaltern” communities. The word “subaltern” refers to people of inferior rank and it is often used to refer to the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way. Subaltern religion which is folk religion, has tried to develop its own pluralistic identity. We need paradigms of binaries of major/minor, traditional/modern in terms of religious practices, but need to move beyond the binaries to deal with marginal communities who are marginal in faith and practice. We seemed to be caught up with the rhetoric about the statistically large religions in the world. In his *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) David Barrett identifies 10,000 distinct religions, 150 of which have a million or more followers. Evangelization is not about proclaiming the gospel from the centers, but to move into the periphery’s of the marginal communities. We need to ask, whether religion is or will remain an important element in the social movement of the marginalized? Does evangelization provide an important source of dignified religious identity and thereby ensure well-being and development. Does evangelization make collective subaltern identities as exclusive and more marginal? Is there not a need to practice a culture-sensitive evangelism, which liberates people from multiple bondages? Does evangelization perpetuate marginalization of marginal identities?

The denial of pluralistic identities has led to communal violence. In effect, it is the subaltern communities who bear the brunt of the communal violence. The poor are victimized on two fronts, the loss of lives and property on the one side and the silence of the dominant and rich communities, because of the promise of development. The Post-Godhra paradigm in Gujarat is a classic text case. The communal polarization denied the existence of pluralistic identities and subtly, but systematically victimized the minority communities, and on the other hand silenced the dominant communities and the nation, by promising development. It is in this context that the Sachar Commission deserves appreciation. Though the Government of India, has offered programmes for the scheduled castes the scheduled tribes, the discourse on development did not directly include religion. By accepting the recommendations of the Sachar Commission, the Government, probably for the first time, accepted the exclusion and discrimination, based on religious affiliation.

Therefore, plurality and the challenges posed to it are directly or indirectly related to poverty and its perpetuation. The denial of plurality is an attempt to consolidate economic capital among the dominant class and the difficulty to share it with others.

### **2.3. Poverty**

We see a clear connection between identity and plurality. But what is most striking is the connection between identity, plurality and its direct influence on the sustenance of poverty. The promise of development to a few deprives the good news to the majority. The Scriptures not only talk of excluded communities, but demonstrates that the excluded communities are poor communities who are economically disadvantaged. It is evident that almost all the Samaritans that we encounter are poor and marginalized. The desire of a poor person to move towards economic mobility is inherently human. Therefore, when Simon offers money to the apostles to be baptized (v.18), it is not surprising. It may have given him the possibility to earn more money, by baptizing more people. His request, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (v.19), may be seen as a desire to gain power (*dunamis*) in order to further his own interests within his community. It is evident that when one community is deprived of equal opportunities to participate, when their support structures are withdrawn and when they are limited to a particular geographical region, it is evident that they are poor. In many of the regions that Jesus encountered the poor, they were excluded communities and deprived communities.

The Scriptures demonstrates that the existence of poor communities is intrinsically related to the geographical location of the communities, which is true even today. The Palestinians are a classic text case in Israel, who have been walled and deprived and ‘become’ poor over time and are deprived of being participants in the national life. Evangelization today has been challenged to promise “temporary prosperity” to the converts on the one side, and blind to the exclusion of communities and denial of ‘collective identities’ as marginal communities. The critic about western evangelization in India was the promise of food and money to the new converts. Even today, some western evangelistic organizations tend to emphasize the good news in terms of materialism. Does proclaiming the good news really mean sharing the mystery of the “power” of the Holy Spirit or in other words, empowering the people who receive the good news? Any evangelization needs to assess the poverty of subaltern communities and aims at empowering them to participate in the socio-economic progress.

The estimation of poverty is as difficult in India, as it is elsewhere in the world and as it was a paradox in assessing poverty among the first evangelized communities found in the scripture. The task of identifying and countering poverty and hunger has been one of the most intricate tasks for thinkers and analysts alike. Conventional methods do not fully answer regarding how many were born poor or how many became poor over the course of time? There is no one single factor like economic to determine the nature and extent of

poverty in a given geographical region or given community. But what is striking is the growing inequalities among the people in income generation and income distribution. Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze ask in a recent article: “Is India doing marvelously well, or is it failing miserably”? They go on to assess that even after 20 years of rapid growth, India is still one of the poorest countries in the world.<sup>2</sup> According to World Development indicators 2011, only 16 countries outside Africa had a lower “gross national per capita” than India in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

In India, poverty has been an issue that demands urgent attention. To add salt to the wounds, the planning commission informed the Supreme Court that anyone earning more than Rs. 32 in urban areas and Rs. 26 in rural areas per day is considered above the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> The concept of poverty line has got its own history with its criterion being debated.<sup>5</sup> The poverty line is an important concept not just for economics, but from the point of view of social justice, because it will decide as to how many Indians are poor and the benefits they are entitled in terms of subsidies like food. India’s Constitution lays down that the state “shall endeavour to secure by suitable legislation or economic organisation or in any other way to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities.” India’s low ranking in human development substantiates the fact that the majority of the population continue to be denied this conceptualisation of a “fair wage” and raises serious questions with regard to the official perspective on poverty. The consumer price index is at complete disagreement with the Planning Commission’s definition of poverty line. While there is a basic flaw in the conceptualization of poverty line, I do not see much possibility in the conceptual interpretation and implementation at the grass roots.

The inequalities of income is also being echoed with the protests known as the “Occupy Wall Street,” which began in New York, showing signs of becoming worldwide, are only indicators of the redefining of the ‘political.’ It is protest against the neo-colonial tendencies of furthering vested interests, perpetuating injustice and the insensitivity to the common good. The slogan “We are the 99%” seems to have caught the attention of people outside America, with reports indicating 1500 protests in 82 countries (October 15, 2011). The imperial alliance of economical interests with political agendas is being questioned as “corporate greed.” What the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ campaign has done is to question the foundations of the global capitalist system, and the inadequacy of the traditional democratic forms which are inadequate to cope with the wider and basic interests of the masses. The voices being echoes in many countries around the world, only underline the common thread of inequality and injustice being experienced by people across the global spectrum, but occurring locally.

We need to interpret the times, and cannot miss opportunities, just because of the problems. If we do not interpret the time, the time will interpret us in a wrong way. Christian life is a life to re-discover the possibilities in the midst of challenges.

### 3. POSSIBILITIES

#### 3.1. Repentance (*Metanoein*)

Repentance is a possibility that deserves attention in world evangelization. Repentance is a recurring theme both in the Old Testament and the New Testaments. In the NT, repentance is generally expressed through forms of the verb *metanoein*, which means, 'to change one's mind.' In the Old Testament, God who in the face of sin and evil, challenges people to respond to judgment, and delights when people do respond to the voice of God. In the Book of Jonah, God changes his stand on the Ninevites and treats them with mercy and forgiveness and changes his original plan of destruction. The story of the Pentecost (Acts 2) and the miracle by the apostles in the temple (Acts 3) show that the call to repentance and the call to faith are both intrinsically linked to one another. A person is baptized following repentance and faith. However in Acts 8, we see that the call to repentance comes after baptism, after praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This indicates that repentance is not just for the one who has not yet believed, but is needed for all. It is a continuous process, which can happen, and this is the important possibility for the church. Evangelization is not about quantitative mission, but about qualitative paradigm of mission.

Today the Church needs repentance on two fronts, the first being, the historical. The Church has always believed that it is the other, who needs repentance, but it is time that the church repents for its historical past - a past that is colored with colonialism, and a sense of superiority in doing missions. Historically evangelization has assumed that the baptized is righteous and all others need to become righteous. The significance of the Pentecost is not just the number of believers that were added to the church; the amazing aspect of Pentecost is that several diverse people with diverse cultures were in harmony with each other. Secondly, it is theological. The church has over the year's dichotomized mission and theology, and allowed mission to be part of the church, and theology to be a function of the academia. In the process there is a total disconnection between what is happening in theory and what is happening in praxis. We have always believed that the people of other faiths need to hear the gospel and understand the gospel. In the case of Samaria, it was Philip who was with Stephen, who sent down to Samaria. Is it not striking, that we never see any of the twelve apostles entering Samaritan territory during or after the resurrection of Jesus? The apostles were caught up with their Jewish identity, or accepted the fact that the Samaritans were gentiles. Even before the "Christian identity" was shaped, it is evident that the leaders of the early church were comfortable with their own identities. In Mark's Gospel, it is remarkable that the narrative does not begin with birth or genealogy, but begins with the call to "repent" because the "Kingdom of God is at hand" and the call was to believe in the gospel and was not necessarily a call to be baptized. It is time that we assume that baptizing large numbers is a guarantee for repentance. It is a sad story that many who are baptized in large numbers are done so, in

order to obtain benefits from the west, and who are never cared for after the photograph. We need theological foundations for doing mission and mission needs to explain this theology to the people.

We need the humility and the sincerity to interact with people of other faiths, who may accept the good news and yet not been baptized. I know of several people who have repented, but are not particular about baptism. Repentance is the not the end of evangelization, but the beginning of evangelization.

### **3.2. Bearing Witnessing (*Martureō*)**

The basic purpose of any mission is said to “bear witness.” The Greek original *marturein* basically means to “to confirm or attest something on the basis of personal knowledge or belief.”<sup>6</sup> It indicates that we testify to something that we have seen and experienced. Witnessing is synonymously used with proclamation or even used interchangeably. In my opinion, they seem to be similar, but are essentially different. The basis of proclamation does not emphasize the experiential or relational element. Proclamation can be based on the word, and in essence has to be spoken, but witnessing, can be silent, in community and relational. The call to witness in Acts 1:8, suggests that we need to be “witnesses,” and we need to be global witnesses and also local witnesses. The incident following the call during the time of selecting a replacement for Judas is clear. The choice is between two men, Joseph and Matthias. However, when the criterion for selection was pointed out, “One of these men must become a witness with us to his resurrection” (Acts 1:22). Similarly, in his first address to a large crowd, a bold Peter proclaimed, “This Jesus God has raised up, and of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). The shift from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, indicates that witness should be global, but cannot be centered in Jerusalem. In the case of Acts 8, when “Samaria had received the word of God” (Acts 8:14), Peter and John came down from Jerusalem to pray for them “that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15), though they were already baptized.

Witnessing today is global, but is not centered, witnessing needs to be de-centered. The centers are not just Canterbury, Rome, or Damascus; it is Bangalore, Manila, Nairobi, and Buenos Aires. Even today, it is sad that large gatherings are held and we have “Apostles from the west” coming to promise baptism of the Holy Spirit. If Peter and John needed to come, it was not because of apostolicity, but because of ethnicity; it is not because of mutuality, but superiority. If Philip can witness about the word, he can also baptize the Samaritans in the Holy Spirit. This clearly indicates the obvious bias of the biblical authors to the work and promise of the Holy Spirit in the world. Acts 1:8 clearly indicates that the promise of the Holy Spirit was to all to be witnesses. So when Simon offered money, it is no surprise, because it came from individuals who were foreign to his own culture and context. Many of the witnessing programs are conducted in India, because huge sums of money is spent and promised to local individuals. It is time that the church

views witnessing as a local possibility with a global witness, instead of a global possibility with a local witness. Witnessing is not about proclaiming what we understand about the life and resurrection of Christ, rather witnessing is about listening to the ‘others’ as to how they understand this Christ that we are talking about. Christian witness has assumed the patented right to exegete the meaning of Christ and God to others, and at the same time, tend to understand the meaning of God in other faiths and scriptures.

Christian witness has not been patient to ‘listen’ to others about their interpretation of Theology and Christology. Witnessing is not just about understanding the good news, but it is also about the method of communicating it. The resurrected Christ is not the sole possession of Christianity. Witnessing needs to begin with conversations with other faiths and cultures. Witnessing comes before proclamation, because understanding of the context should precede interpretation and proclamation of the text.

Multi-faith conversations have been on the global ecumenical agenda, but have never become an agenda for ministry by and large in the local churches in our country. The identity of the subaltern is what is going to unite people in the coming years. The “Arab Spring” in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, have shown that all identities and pluralities can be overcome, with a subaltern identity, because of the common oppression and marginalization. In Egypt, every effort was made to divide them on the lines of ethnicity, tribes and even religion and also to provoke the protesters to turn violent. But a common evil and a desire for liberation held them together. What we need today, is to witness about the good and to counter the evil, to initiate counter-cultures and not to succumb to dominant cultures that impose singular identities as against the reality of plurality. Witnessing in India, is not just about being ecumenical in outlook, but is to witness with other faiths about the common challenges and evils affecting us. While we need theoretical or ideological engagement, this engagement should result in praxis. Issues like HIV/AIDS, poverty, human rights or alcoholism, cannot be dealt by the church alone. If at all the church is making any such claim, then the church is either naïve, ignorant or arrogant. It is time that the church sees the signs of the times and be involved in the process of liberation.

### **3.3. Proclaiming the Good News (*Euangelizō*)**

The logical step of repenting and witnessing is the proclamation of the good news, which is from the Greek word *euangelizō*. It is mentioned thrice in Acts 8:4, 12, 25 and later also in 8: 35, 40. Interestingly the author uses *kērussō* in v.5, which can be translated as preaching. The author uses *euangelizō* to make a distinction between preaching and proclamation. The word *kērussō* focuses on the person who is preaching and the content of the proclamation, and generally indicates a limited context. The term *euangelizō* or evangelization indicates proclaiming the good news to a broader audience in a broader context. The content of the message of the early church was termed as *euangelion*, which was itself not original in terminology, but was made original to the early church. In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus using a passage from Isaiah, describes the good news as identifying

with the poor, bringing release to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberation to the oppressed. Here evangelization is not just about proclamation towards conversion of individuals, but proclamation towards transformation of communities. Today evangelization is limited to proclamation of doctrines, rather than proclamation of good news. The original use of the word *euangelion* was in the political context of the Roman Empire, when the Emperor declared his victory and announced the extension of his kingdom and the marginalization of all the voices of protest and rebellion.

The early Christian church by adopting the word *euangelion* consciously used it by altering its content, and made it the good news about Jesus Christ, not in the sense of the Empire, but in the sense of the solidarity of God becoming and identifying as human and dwelling among human beings. Today evangelization needs to move beyond preaching, must move beyond the closed churches as boundary markers. Evangelization means identifying with oppressed communities, or the subaltern communities and understanding their needs and then proclaiming. Proclamation of the good news does not happen by 'word' alone, it can happen by silently listening, identifying and being part of the process of liberation. Subaltern communities need proclamation in terms of solidarity. The early Christian mission ensured that the Church was Samaritan, as much as it is Jewish or church of the nations. Simon, the Samaritan understood the good news, because Philip and the other apostles went down to Samaria, and he said, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me" (Acts 8:24). Jesus reminds us that inauguration of the Kingdom indicates inclusion not exclusion, dignity, not defamation, empowerment rather than exploitation and affirmation rather than marginalization.

We can only imagine about the first Samaritan church. The Samaritans in the later history of the church did not accept the good news or even identified with the early Christian communities. Probably we have never asked these questions, because they are uncomfortable ones. My only assumption is that the bias we see in the representation of the Samaritans in the Scriptures must have continued even in the process of evangelization. If more efforts were made to evangelize the Samaritans, probably more Samaritans would have survived the onslaught down the centuries, and more would have survived as Samaritan Christians, with their own identity. Do we not face the same danger today? If we do not proclaim the good news, probably many will not have the opportunity to believe. If they do not, "they may perish" and do not experience eternal life or even abundant life as the writer to the fourth gospel mentions.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Evangelization is slowly but steadily understood as God's mission and the church as participating in this mission. Evangelization is no longer seen as moving from the 'center' to the 'margins' but is the displacement of the center and the rediscovery of the margins who are in conversation. A struggle for justice and peace cannot be detached from the very basic concerns of evangelization. Evangelization in its own contexts entails its own

challenges, but also possibilities. Paradigms of world evangelization cannot be universal in its claims and application, but needs to be sensitive to the contextual needs and be cross-cultural in perspective. The Scriptures can continue to be essential sources of paradigms for being engaged in evangelization, but also needs to be interpreted and applied to the local contexts. The global south is not only going to be the future of world evangelization, but also can provide useful sources for world evangelization. World evangelization needs to be primarily conversational before it can be conversional in nature, engagement and relevance.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> [www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org)
- <sup>2</sup> Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, "Putting Growth in Its Place" *Outlook* 14 November 2011, 50-59, 50, 52.
- <sup>3</sup> World Development indicators, 2011
- <sup>4</sup> *Times of India* Sep 24 2011.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. The poverty line was first conceived in 1973-4 when it was decided to classify the poor on the basis of calories intake – anyone consuming less than 2.100 calories per day and spending less than Rs. 55 per month. In 2004-5 the poverty line was pushed up to Rs. 524.60 per month – roughly less than Rs. 20 a day.
- <sup>6</sup> BDAG, 617.

## **CALLED TO RESPOND TO THE MISSION CALL: THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIAL HORIZONS**

**B. Joseph Francis**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One could in continuation with the previous topic in this seminar entitled challenges speak of response to the challenges but I prefer to turn it round on its head and make it as a clarion call for the Mission by the Lord Jesus Christ who came on a mission from the Father; the Holy Spirit continues the same one conjoined mission from the Father through the Son; and it is to this call, we i.e., the Church, is called to respond moved by the same Holy Spirit and sent out to proclaim establishing the Kingdom of God in all its intensity and extension. I would not like to trumpet my own views but I intend to keep as closely as possible to the Church documents and so you would find in this paper more references to the Church documents. In this way we avoid wide speculation (e.g., inclusivism, exclusivism, regnocentrism, anonymous Christian/Christianity, theocentrism, pneumatocentrism, Cosmic Christ etc.) and attempt rather to try and understand what God in Christ through his Holy Spirit is trying to tell us today in the present world situation.

An interesting point should be kept in mind even as we enter into this topic. In the field of Missiology in the understanding of the Mission, practice has preceded theory or in other words praxis has gone before the creed<sup>1</sup>. It is also a fact of history that periodically new visions in the Missions have come along with new movements or *kairos* moments in history. One big event that set many in the West sit up and think is the discovery of new lands until then unknown or scarcely known in Europe.<sup>2</sup> The vastness of the world and the sheer variety of nations, languages, cultures set thinking Christians to ponder about the Missions. Unfortunately the Missions in some places rode piggyback on colonizers, expansionists and exploiters of men and materials. This gave a bad name and also a thorough misunderstanding of the Christian Missions. The colonizers also used the missionaries for their own interests.

*B. Joseph Francis is an emeritus professor at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute. After some years of teaching theology, philosophy and at times Church History as well as Patrology at the Institute, he obtained a Ph.D., in Religious Sciences and a Doctorate in theology at the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium in 1989. He has authored numbers 1-3,5,7 & 8 in the Guide Book Series of the Institute. He is at present at the St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary and continues his teaching work at the Institute.*

## 2. “MISSION” AND WHAT IT MEANS IN PRE-VATICAN II TIMES

### 2.1. Historical Notions

Here I examine very briefly a few historical notions which we should be aware of, if we wish to make a meaningful reflection about the question. The word “Mission” we are told was introduced by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)<sup>3</sup>, a contemporary of Martin Luther. Militarily understood it meant being sent to accomplish a task in a particular place. Later the word developed further to mean being sent out to distant places away from one’s native land. Slowly the concept came to mean a number of things. The motivation was to save souls from going to hell. St. Francis Xavier is reported to have said: “*Da mihi animas; coetera tolle*” (give me souls; take away everything else [from me]). He scourged himself with the discipline and prayed for the conversion of souls and was ready for any sacrifice. He understood that if the Gospel was not preached to the millions who did not know Christ, then it would be his fault that they go to hell. This thought is not unusual but persisted well into the XX century. Pope Benedict XV says in 1919: “He (ambassador of Christ) will face all hardship and difficulties, work, insults, poverty, hunger and even death however cruel, as long as he can snatch a soul from the mouth of hell.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly Pope Pius XI in *Rerum Ecclesiae*, encyclical Letter in 1926 asks: “Can we vouchsafe to our neighbours a greater or more signal charity than that of having them withdrawn from the darkness of superstition, and instructed in the true faith of Christ?”<sup>5</sup> Notice that behind this, there is the underlying thought that there is no other way besides Christ and his Church.<sup>6</sup> The Pope was also considered as the ultimate person responsible in the Church for sending missionaries. Pope St. Gregory the Great sent in 590 AD St. Augustine of Canterbury to England.<sup>7</sup> Another Pope Gregory II sent St. Boniface in 718 AD to Germany.<sup>8</sup> And though originally sent by the Byzantine emperor Michael III, Pope Nicholas I (858-867 AD) and Pope Adrian sent Sts. Cyril and Methodius to evangelize the Slavs.<sup>9</sup> It was also a pope, Alexander VI who allotted Mission areas to the Portuguese and Spaniards so that they do not quarrel.<sup>10</sup> Even as late as Pope Pius XI the claim was that the pope was the primary person responsible for the Mission while others in the Church including the bishops only help the pope in this task.<sup>11</sup> It was also generally considered that priests and Religious are the persons who should be sent on these Missions, at least, this was the practical understanding till the end of the XVIII c., if not even till the beginning of the XX c.<sup>12</sup> The Missions also evoked in the popular imagination distant places with many hardships, including the call to lay down one’s life if it became necessary.

### 2.2. The Notion of “Giving countries and “Receiving countries”

Slowly also developed in the course of XVIII to XX centuries the notion of “Giving” countries or benefactors and “Receiving” countries which received all sorts of help including buildings, equipments, monetary help besides the missionaries themselves sent to them. This also led to a sense of dependence on the donor countries who dictated terms whenever and as they chose. This would even include photo-copying of the “Giving” nations in

every respect. No value was perceived in the non-Christian religion. In some extreme cases they were even considered as devilish. But this cannot be overstressed because there were missionaries who learnt the local languages and adapted themselves to the native cultures and even achieved literary success.<sup>13</sup> But this was not the general thrust. By far, most of the converts were taught to abhor their past.<sup>14</sup> Genuine Mission should have been a two way process between the Giver and the Receiver because both are dignified persons. But the Mission was often one way affair: the rich, powerful benefactor nations helped the poor, ignorant receiving nation or peoples. A spirit of condescension prevailed.

### **2.3. The Scandal of Division among Christians**

There was also no ecumenical cooperation but only hatred, jealousy and misunderstanding which were transported from Western countries to the East for whom this Christian division was not only a scandal but also created confusion in the minds of the non-Christians. Some Catholics were even saying that Protestant groups were all the results of the devil's evil plans to destroy the Church.

### **2.4. Entry Points for Evangelization**

All the works of charity done by the missionaries e.g., education, social up-lift, economic growth were all considered by the missionaries as entry point for evangelization<sup>15</sup> and the receiving countries looked on these activities with suspicion as destroying their status, culture and practices.

### **2.5. Respect for the Culture of Nations**

However there were many enlightened, sporadic attempts here and there, down the centuries, to respect the cultures of the nations, and genuine attempts to understand them and identify oneself with the people.<sup>16</sup> But by far, in practice, the Church in the second half of the second millennium seemed to be interested in trying to Romanize and centralize. All these changed with the coming of Vatican II but the nagging question is: is the spirit of Vatican II understood properly? We notice in the history of the Church that after every important ecumenical council, it took many decades for the council to be properly understood and implemented. The fate of Vatican II also at times appears to be the same though the succeeding popes have been trying to clarify the issues through timely encyclicals and pronouncements.

## **3. VATICAN II COUNCIL DOCUMENTS ON MISSION**

In general what Vatican II tells us about the Mission and missionary activity is a radical change of attitude which may be spelt out in the following points:

- a) It was a shift from ghetto mentality to a universal spirit.
- b) It was a change from a grandiose vision of knowing all the truths to one of being a humble seeker to understand these better.

- c) Though the Church of God subsists in the Catholic Church as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG 8) mentions, it extends beyond its borders. Protestants are no longer considered as heretics but as Separated Brethren.
- d) God is the author, source of all the peoples of the world.
- e) God has his own mysterious ways of leading the people. The Church founded by Jesus Christ is the universal sacrament of salvation. Universal here means for ALL. Sacrament would mean visible, tangible, existential reality and one meant to make the divine life available to all even as Jesus Christ himself is the sacrament (primordial sacrament) since he is both God and man. In him and through his visible, tangible humanity and acceptance of him in his totality as God and man from God brings the desired salvation. The purpose of the Church is precisely to work towards helping people to accept and acknowledge Jesus Christ as saviour and not to seek glory for itself, seek power or wealth but to work humbly, like her master for the salvation of all.
- f) Formerly mission was thought to be a task committed to the pope (please refer what was noted earlier in end note number 9) and the hierarchy as well as the laity only assisted the pope and participated in the work by contributing money and praying for the Mission.<sup>17</sup> Now there was a big revolution in the way we understand the Church. The Church does not mean only the hierarchy. All the baptized are the Church. The Church is the people of God. The commission to evangelize is given to ALL the people of God. The hierarchy only provides the leadership, the guidance for this task.
- g) The Church is essentially missionary in its being and in action. If it gives up this task, it loses its reason for existence. The Church will last till the end of the world, not only because Jesus said so and assured his presence to be with the Church, (Mt 28.20) but also because till the end of the world there would be people who have to be helped to find the way of the Lord. So shall we conclude that the Mission will last till the end of the world?

### **3.1. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) Nos.13, 16 & 17**

We offer here a few comments on 3 numbers of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG) Vatican II 1964<sup>18</sup>

#### **3.1.1. No. 13**

This section gives a sweeping picture of who are called to be the new people of God and gives the answer that ALL are called. The people of God is one though spread all over the world and belonging to diverse cultures and peoples.

Jesus was sent to gather all the scattered people of God. The Holy Spirit continues this task today. We are gathered into (i) union of Word (doctrine of the Apostles) (ii) a union Sacrament (the Breaking of Eucharistic Bread) (iii) union of prayer (the Communion of Saints). The number goes on to stress that the Church does not destroy cultures but

fosters, takes what is good, purifies what can be purified, strengthens and elevates the cultures as a humble servant/ handmaid. This is its catholicity.

The number goes on to expand on the various gifts in the Church and among these gifts is mentioned especially Religious Life and many other charism, all of which go up to form the one Church, the one people of God and its one rich Mission.

### **3.1.2. Number 16**

This number has a beautiful imagery which can be cast into concentric circles of peoples who belong to or related to the people of God. The core of the course is Christ with the Faithful, then the circle representing the Jews, then the Moslems followed by circle of those belonging to other religions and what may come as a surprise, even agnostics. All human beings therefore are in some way or other related to the Church; and God in his Providence prepares them to come closer and closer to him.

### **3.1.3. Number 17**

This number forms the last number in the chapter on the people of God and is dense with theological statements about Missions which will be expanded in the later decree of Vatican II on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*), 1965. We shall present it in its dense form here and expand it while discussing *Ad Gentes*.

### **3.1.4. Conclusions**

The mission is from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Apostles (Please refer Mt 28.18-20. Observe here the correct sequence: make disciples first, only subsequently baptize and further teach them to observe the commandments). The Mission is same one Mission. The sustenance of the Mission is the Lord's presence. The Church having received it through the Apostles continues the task of announcing the Gospel. The Church sends missionaries and continues to send them till the young churches could stand on their own legs and in their turn continue the Mission by sending others further.

What is the method envisaged? First by proclaiming the Gospel to draw the hearers: (i) to receive (ii) to profess the faith (iii) to be readied for baptism. Here, unfortunately the document drifts into old expressions e.g. snatch them from error and attach them to Christ so that they may grow to the full maturity in Christ.

Fortunately such old expressions are followed by more modern statements. Whatever is good in the people's culture should be: (i) preserved (ii) if needed purified (iii) raised up and (iv) perfected for the glory of God and "confusion of the devil" (an old expression which saw that all imperfections and errors were due to the devil misleading the people). One should remember that in the council there were divergent ideas which had to be accommodated and the Council did so where it did not affect the core of the doctrines.

Finally, every Christian is obliged to spread the faith to the best of his ability. In fact any believer can baptize in an emergency but only the priest can help them to be built up through the Eucharist. This is an echo of the two schools of missiology: proclamation and

implantation which would be taken up at the *Ad Gentes* no.6. The final statement in the number exhorts us to pray for more labourers to be sent into the vineyard of the Lord since the harvest is great. Before examining the decree *Ad Gentes* we have a brief interlude to reflect on a few scriptural points which I consider as important.

#### **4. A GLOBAL PICTURE OF EVANGELIZATION IN SCRIPTURE<sup>19</sup>**

Instead of flooding you with a plethora of scriptural texts which you could easily find in the books cited in the end notes, I restrict myself to give the salient points before passing on to theological reflections in the next section while commenting on *Ad Gentes*.

4.1. The situation of the world in sin is brought out in the Genesis story of creation and fall and the often repeated story of human misery (Genesis 1-11). There is a real change in Genesis 12 with the Abraham cycle. Here we find the election of Abraham and the many promises to Abraham (Gen 12.1-3+7; 15.18-21; 17. 1-8; 22,15-18). The story of the election and covenant reaches a turning point with the covenant on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20.1-26; 24.1-11). This covenant was constantly renewed on the day of atonement (Lev 16.1-34). It was also remembered during the annual paschal meal.

4.2. But there is a question of the so-called scandal of particularity. Why did God choose Israel? Why not any other nation? If God enters history of the human beings he has to make an entry somewhere or other. He chose Abraham and his descendents not because of their merits but because of his goodness and generosity. But the question, one could still insist, is not answered. To answer properly consider it this way: if "A" loves "C" and chooses "B" his best friend to go to "C" and plead his case, it is obvious that the choice of "B" was only because of "C". So there is no partiality in God's choice of Israel but a burden laid on it and God's love for the whole world is obvious. Similarly in the New Testament, if we Christians are specially chosen, elected and baptized and fed with the Eucharist, it is only because God wants us to go and announce his Good News of Salvation to the whole world and you could easily notice in this God's love for all the peoples of the world whose salvation he earnestly desires (1 Tim 2.1-4; Jn 3.16).

4.3. In the Old Testament we find the 4 Servant Songs: Is 42.1-9; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12. Who is this mysterious servant and why should he suffer? Is it Israel or the prophet or the future Messiah? His suffering is certainly not for his benefit. It is for the sake of others. The interpretation that sees Israel in this suffering servant explains it this way: the people taken into Babylonian exile through their suffering have to bear witness to God by their perseverance and faith. When God will take them back to their land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, the peoples of the world will come to know the power of the God of Israel (Ps 47.1; Is 55. 12-13) but until then they have to suffer the exile in Babylon and bear patiently the taunt of their neighbours.

4.4. Jesus, the Almighty Word of God was born of a woman Mary (Gal 4.4-6), and hence truly human, identified himself with all the human beings and lived a human life to the full, drinking the chalice to the dregs (Lk 22.42). He chose the 12 representing the 12

tribes of Israel (Lk 6.12-16) and sent them on a mission (Lk 9.1-6) to announce the Good News to the people. Not satisfied, he sent 70 other disciples [representing all the peoples of the world besides the 12 tribes?] to do the same (Lk 10.1-12). He sealed his life by his humble obedient death; even a death on the cross and the Father raised him up and constituted him as the Lord (Phil 2.6-11; Rm 1.3-4). He as the Risen Lord commissions the Apostles to preach as he preached (Mk 1.15). Note here the four elements: (i) the time is fulfilled (ii) the Kingdom of God is at hand (iii) repent and (iv) believe in the Gospel (Good News) i.e., allow God to take control of your life; you have tried and repeatedly failed (Rm 7. 15-24). Give up the centre and primacy to God to whom alone it belongs by right. Love also your neighbour to show that you are other oriented and not self-centred, closed in upon yourself unlike the Trinitarian persons open to one another and in whose image you as a person have been fashioned! Be ready therefore for humble service like Jesus (Lk 22.25-27; Jn 13. 12-17). His commissioning is not only to preach but also to make disciples and then to baptize (Mt 28. 18-20). For this task, he himself would be with them till the close of the age through the Holy Spirit whom he promised (Lk 24.46-52; Jn 14.26; 15.26) and as he promised he sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost while they prayed in the company of Mary, a continuation of incarnation in a new fashion by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1ff.).

4.5. In the subsequent narration of the Acts we hear of the Apostles and disciples fanning out to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom as Jesus taught and signs followed even as the words of Jesus were confirmed by his deeds. Many Fathers of the Church cite Cornelius' story (Acts 10.1ff.) from which a number of lessons could be learnt. What is of relevance for us today is that the Holy Spirit has been active in Cornelius even before Peter could come to him or announce the Gospel. So the question often asked is: are we going to people who were not touched by God's Grace or people on whom the Holy Spirit has already started to work? This should make us humble in our proclamation and learn to appreciate the way in which God has prepared and is preparing the people for the Gospel. We are only gathering in the harvest (Jn 4. 35-38). This indeed is the eschatological aspect of the Mission. This is the gathering of the scattered people of God. In a way this is symbolised by the 10 lost tribes returning to the finale God is beckoning: not only the 10 lost tribes but all the lost peoples of the world, each in his own way and in his own time. The Church i.e., you and I are only carrying out this eschatological task entrusted to us by the Lord who will be with us till the end.

Now we return to the theological reflections provoked by Vatican II's decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (AG)

## **5. THE THEOLOGICAL VISION IN THE DECREE ON THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY ACTIVITY (AG) 1965<sup>20</sup>**

### **5.1. The Circumstances of the Document**

The Vatican Council II's document *Ad Gentes* had gone through many drafts. The Fathers of the council had wanted a more comprehensive document on the Missions

instead of the dense LG 17. The document prepared was found to be too long and the next version was too short giving only 14 bare-bone truncated principles of Mission work. Finally a document of moderate length came out but since it was hurried there were repetitions and juxtapositions. Chapter I of the document gives the detailed theology of the Missions which I shall try to explain in my own way, especially the dense no.2.

## **5.2. Theological Background of No.2**

The Mission of the Church should be located in the Most Blessed Trinity and in the conjoined mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. It starts from the Father who is the Sourceless Source of the Inner Trinity. The theologians normally explain it this way: the Inner Trinitarian mystery consists of 2 Processions. The Source, however, is the one and only Sourceless Source, the Father. From him proceeds the Son by eternal Generation. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) would say "Light from Light". The Father is not diminished by this Generation but is turned in Love to the Son and the Son is also turned to the Father in Love. The second Inner Procession in the Trinity is called Spiration. The Father loves the Son totally and has given himself totally to the Son. The Son in his turn gives himself back to the Father in love. While the Father is constantly turned to the Son saying "My Son, My Son" and the Son is turned to the Father in love crying out "My Father, My Abba, Father". The Love that is Spirated from the One Source, the Sourceless Source that is the Father comes to the Son and through the Son returns to the Father in Love. This Subsistent Love is the Holy Spirit. This is what is going on inside the Trinity from all eternity. This is also "proper" to each Person i.e., Father to be Father, Son to be Son and the Holy Spirit to be Holy Spirit.

But in anything and in everything they do outside of themselves is common to all the 3 Divine Persons. Thus in creation: the Father creates, the Son too creates and the Holy Spirit also creates but we all attribute it to the Father because it is more fitting to him.<sup>21</sup>

When we consider this carefully we find that the world was created by the Father in the Image of the Son and in Love i.e., in the Holy Spirit. Just as the architect before building draws up a blue print and if the person who ordered it likes it and provides the fund he starts to build according to the plan. Here in creation: in front of the Father there is only the Son and so the Father sees the whole world, including you and me in the Son and seeing he loved i.e., in the Holy Spirit and the Father creates. Having been made in the Image of the Son, it is but natural for us to turn back to the Father through the Son in the Spirit to say Abba Father using our intelligence and free will. But the human being did not do that (while all other creatures who do not have intelligence and free will praise God automatically) and in sinning tarnished the Image of God, the Image the Father loves. But God's Mercy was such that he willed that he would bring us back to him restoring our being God's sons and daughters in a more intense and intimate a manner through his Son. And through him (who is both God and man united in his one Person) to make all in all (*Panta en pasin* Cf. I Cor 15.28) the whole universe so closely united to him through his humanity by which he entered this material universe in a wondrous manner.

### **5.3. Number 3 of the Document**

This section has incarnation as the central point of reflection. God could, if he had wished, have saved all in a silent and secret manner, in his own way touching the consciences of peoples so that somehow they come into contact with God and thus be saved. But God chose the method of Incarnation. God the Son became human, became one of us having entered into history born of a woman (Gal 4.4-6). He identified himself with the poor and announced liberty (Lk 4.18-19). In him there is now salvation for all because being truly human, all human beings are united to him and he is at the same time God. So in his one Person God and man are united and so salvation/redemption is achieved but it has to be freely and willingly acknowledged. So missionary activity helps those who have not heard or acknowledged him to come to accept him and make their union through his humanity which they already enjoy, to be fruitful (this is because God respects our person and will not force anyone to accept him against his/ her will). Such acceptance makes the divine life that is in Jesus as God, flow into them. This is why in the Gospel of John we hear so many times that he who believes i.e., acknowledges Jesus, has come from the Father and has made the transition from death to life (Jn 5.24; 8.51-52).

### **5.4. Number 4 of the Document**

This number concentrates on the Holy Spirit. In order to fulfil his Mission, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on them clarifying, enlightening the message. Now the disciples went forth to proclaim. Notice here two things: (i) the Holy Spirit's Mission is not a new Mission. It is the same one conjoined Mission of bringing us back to the Father. What the Lord Jesus did exteriorly, the Holy Spirit does interiorly moving the listeners to listen to the message; (ii) he carries conviction to them and (iii) having entered the Church, the Holy Spirit endows them with enough gifts to be built up in the Lord.

### **5.5. Number 5 of the Document**

This section is predominantly an ecclesial number. Jesus called his disciples, trained them and sent them to continue his Mission. The Church continues to do the same even today. That is why the Church is essentially missionary. It means: called together, to be trained and sent out to proclaim. If the Church does not do this, it ceases to exist.

The pattern of the Mission seems to be: Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit on a conjoined Mission. They send the Apostles and the apostles the Bishops and the bishops their priests and people.<sup>22</sup> We should here pay attention to an important aspect of the Mission. One does not send oneself on the Mission. You need to be sent. We can see how in the Acts of the Apostles at Antioch the Holy Spirit asks that Paul and Barnabas be set apart for the Mission and even then it is the community that approves the call, lay hands on them and send them along and they when they come back after a successful mission with much adventure, gave a report to the assembled community (Acts 13.2-3 & 14.26-27) The method is the same as Jesus' method who worked for the poor, in the way of poverty and obedience and readiness to suffer. The method however needs to be changed

according to circumstances. Nor can the Church use all methods at its disposal. The bishops under the leadership of the Pope encourage these various methods according to situations.

### **5.6. Number 6 of the Document**

Finally in this number a descriptive definition of Mission is attempted. The missiologists in the past decades have tried to hammer out a concept of the Mission but have not succeeded in giving one accepted concept of Mission. There are 2 attitudes or views regarding the concept of Mission and both have stood opposed to one another. They have been categorized as 2 schools of Missiological thought: (i) The concept of Mission according to Munster school represented by J. Schmidlin and others; (ii) The curial and canonist concept of Mission represented by P. Charles, A. Seumois and others.

Schmidlin's concept stresses the aspect of proclamation of the Gospel,<sup>23</sup> followed by conversion of mankind and salvation of non-Christian; it is Christocentric in approach. The curial and canonist approach represented by A. Seumois and P. Charles emphasized rather the implantation of the church, the establishment of the hierarchy, the foundation of particular native churches, winning over of the non-Catholics to the established i.e., the implanted Church; it is ecclesial and territorial in vision.

The normal practice of the Church is not to decide one way or another when there is a dispute between 2 theological schools within orthodoxy of the Church.<sup>24</sup> So the document tried to synthesize both the views. What is the use of trying to implant the Church with ill-instructed or nominal Christians? On the other hand what is the use of proclaiming the Gospel and leaving everything in mid-air?

The Council describes the Mission as "the special undertaking in which preachers of the Gospel, sent by the Church, and going into the whole world carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the church among people who do not yet believe in Christ."<sup>25</sup> So you notice here the attempt at putting both views side by side in such a way that one leads to the other or the other implies the first. Preaching leads to implantation and implantation presupposes preaching that went before it. Note also the element that the Missionary is one who is sent by the Church, not going on his own. However, in a sense, every baptized Christian is by baptism and confirmation commissioned and sent on basic mission of bearing witness to the Gospel.

The last 3 paragraphs are interesting. The first of these take the curial position, namely, announcing the Gospel is not enough. The Church must be set up. Once it is sufficiently set up, this young community should in its turn proclaim the Gospel. So you see how the attempt is made to synthesize the two views without trying to favour one or other opinion.

The last but one paragraph tells us that it can happen that sometimes it is not possible to proclaim the Gospel publicly due to adverse circumstances. In those occasions we should patiently wait and engage ourselves in preaching by silent example, show by our

acts of charity and compassion the love and kindness of Christ. In this manner we would prepare for the way of the Lord.

The last paragraph concludes this number by pointing out that the Church is missionary by nature i.e., proclaiming and further proclaim along with the local Church. If it stops to do that, it will cease to be.

### **5.7. The Number 7 of the Document**

Here the council tries to allay the fear and concern of some of the Fathers from the mission lands who were disturbed by LG 16 and NA 2<sup>26</sup> which seem to speak of value to be accorded to non-Christian religions. So they wanted some clear expression in *Ad Gentes* about the necessity of Christ and the Church for salvation. This number asserts the traditional views regarding the 2 necessities (Christ & the Church) for salvation; yet is constrained to explain it better in the changed modern context.

This number is predominantly Christological. If numbers 3 & 4 were intensely Trinitarian as we noted above, this is Christological. It locates missionary activity in the **WILL** of God who has willed that all find salvation in and through Jesus Christ the one and only mediator between God and humans. He belongs to God one hundred percent and is at the same time genuinely human, being born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore he belongs to both sides and as such only he can unite the scattered human beings with God.

Missionary activity by its preaching brings all to Christ and having brought them, baptizes them and incorporates them into Christ and his Church. The first paragraph recognizes the position of the non-Christian who through no fault of his own, does not know Christ and whom God could save in his own mysterious way but the normal is to accept Jesus Christ and be incorporated into him and his Church. And in their turn they bring in others to Christ to share in what they have discovered and enjoy.

So when Christ has been accepted in this fashion, the will of God will be glorified and fulfilled because then there will be ONE people of God. All who share in the ONE humanity are to be ONE family calling God “Our Father” in Christ through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **5.8. The Number 8 of the Document**

This section is also Christological. It describes the missionary activity to make human beings understand and realize their own weakness, inadequacy and the need to have Christ with them. No one, we know, can justify himself. So Jesus Christ is presented as the great answer to human beings broken and searching. He is the Truth and the way. In him God and the human are perfectly reconciled in his one person and so union with Jesus leads to the fulfilment of the longing of the human beings for the wholeness. Therefore all need Jesus Christ as model, master, liberator, saviour and giver of life (One could profitably reflect on each of these items). Jesus is the “hope of all nations” and “their saviour” since his principles would lead to progress of all human beings and the world

itself because it would have paved the way for the all round development of the human beings.

### **5.9. The Last Number of the Document's First Chapter**

This sets before us the eschatological aspect of missionary activity which we mentioned earlier in our reflections on Scripture. It is to gather the scattered people of God into one for the coming of the Lord. So the missionary period extends from the Lord's first coming right up to his coming at the end of time (or between Easter and Parousia). This is the Epiphania i.e., manifestation of God's great plan of salvation for all human kind. All the activities of the church fall in line with this: dispensation of Sacraments (especially Eucharist), clearing of all evil from society; purifying and raising people to higher levels, overthrowing the rule of the devil, all evil etc. We can notice from this how broad is the missionary activity from the simple proclamation to the establishment of one people of God awaiting the Lord.<sup>27</sup>The rest of the document speaks of practical issues which other papers in the seminar would deal with at length.

## **6. AN OVERVIEW OF TWO POST-CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS**

### **6.1. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) Pope Paul VI in 1975<sup>28</sup>**

This was issued subsequent to the synod on Evangelization held in 1974. The document gives a very broad view about evangelization. It is the proclamation of the kingdom of God in its length and breadth. So evangelization is not to be viewed in the following manner. Some thought that it consists in going to Non-Christians in distant lands and announcing the Gospel to those who have not heard of it; or announcing it to those who have not become aware of it. They forget that it could also include all that is done to allow the kingdom of God to take hold of all peoples, including even the evangelizers themselves who also need to understand what the gospel of the kingdom preached by Jesus demands of us today.

### **6.2. *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) Pope John Paul II in 1990<sup>29</sup>**

Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* insists on Jesus Christ being preached because in him is revealed what it is to be human. This is a favourite idea of John Paul II and found in GS 22 and also repeated by the pope in a number of documents e.g., *Redemptor Hominis* 10-11 ND 678-9; *Incarnationis Mysterium* 1-2; *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 23. In Jesus Christ is revealed what it is to be human. This means that he is the one who is perfectly open to God and fellow human beings and so he is perfectly human whereas we are all trying to be human. There is so much inhumanity in us: selfishness, quarrels, jealousies, bitterness etc. Whereas Jesus is himself the one who shows us the way to God the Father in the Spirit and also the way to find one another!

## **7. CONCLUSION**

We have spelt out some of the elements of the theological and ecclesial elements of the Mission theology. It is above all based on the Trinitarian Mission which is a reflection

of the Inner Trinitarian Processions. The ecclesial dimension follows the mystery of Incarnation which is based on the truth of Jesus being truly God and human and so belonging both to God and man and in whom all humans are united and the mission would be to bring to awareness what has been granted in Incarnation itself. The Mission is to go announce, make aware, lead from *avidya* to *vidya*, from darkness to light and help all consciously to accept Jesus and let the union bear fruit. Our being chosen to carry the message is not only a privilege but also a burden. Our choice is only because God loves all those to whom we are being sent. I cannot send myself. I have to be sent by the community to which I am responsible. The Church continues to send out people on Mission and it will do so till the end of the ages because there would be humans till the end of ages and the Lord has promised to be with his church till the very end!

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> E.g., even before the doctrine on Purgatory could be developed there was the practice in the Church of praying for the Dead
- <sup>2</sup> The unknown here refers to the Americas and the scarcely known refers to the East, South East and the Far East.
- <sup>3</sup> Caesare Baldi, *The Mission of the church*, in ed. Karl Becker & Ilaria Morali: *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*, (Bangalore: TPI , 2011) Chapter 13, p.285
- <sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, *Apostolic Letter*, November 1919, para 34, p. 68 in “*Mission*” in *the documents of Catholic Church*, (Shillong: Vendarme Institute Publications, 1997). Hereafter this document will be abbreviated as VD.
- <sup>5</sup> VD paragraph 9, p.78.
- <sup>6</sup> Ilaria Morali in Karl J. Becher & Ilaria Morali eds. *Catholic Engagement with World Religions* (Bangalore: TPI Publications, 2011), pp.69-88. It is a very comprehensive study of the Early Modern Period (1453-1650) understanding of the Mission and Salvation among theologians of the time belonging to many schools of theology of that time.
- <sup>7</sup> Jacques Dupuis, ed. *The Christian Faith*, (Bangalore: TPI publications, 2008), pp 464-465, no. 1102. This volume will be hereafter referred to as ND and the numbers denoted therein.
- <sup>8</sup> Christopher O’Mahony OCD, *Church History Vol I*, (Alwaye: 1974), p.218.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.236.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., Vol II, p.170.
- <sup>11</sup> Pope Pius XI *Rerum Ecclesiae*, encyclical letter February 1926, paragraph 9 in VD p.78 where he says addressing the bishops: “For we read that Christ enjoined not only Peter, whose Chair we occupy, but all the apostles whose successors you are: ‘Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature’ (Mk 16.15). It is evident from this that the responsibility of propagating the faith belongs to us, on condition that you must unhesitatingly share the work with us and help us as much as your own particular pastoral duties will permit”
- <sup>12</sup> Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, *Apostolic Letter* , paragraph 36, in VD, p. 69.

- <sup>13</sup> Christopher O'Mahony OCD vol. II, pp. 290-292. The Madura Mission tried its hand at adaptation; Beschi was a Tamil literary giant; so were many other Christian missionaries in other languages.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp.185-186 where the author says the Portuguese encouraged intermarriages of Christian merchants and soldiers with the locals thus establishing Christian enclaves
- <sup>15</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, June 1951 in VD paragraph 51-56, pp. 112-113.
- <sup>16</sup> ND 1102, 1108-9, 1113-4, 1121, 1129.
- <sup>17</sup> Benedict XV *Maximum Illud*, apostolic letter 1919, Pius XII *Evangelii Praecones*, encyclical 1951. All routinely have sections appealing for prayer funds.
- <sup>18</sup> Aloys Grillmeier's commentary in Vorgrimler, ed. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II Vol I* pp.138 ff., (New York: London, Burns & Oates/ Herder and Herder, 1967).
- <sup>19</sup> There are very many books on this topic. Let me mention only one or two as samples: Lucien Legrand: *Mission in the Bible—Unity and Plurality* (tr.) Robert R. Barr, (Pune: Ishvani Publications, 1992); L.Legrand, J. Pathrapankal & M. Velanickal: *Good News and witness—the New Testament Understanding of Evangelization*, (Bangalore: TPI Publications, 1973); J. Pathrapankal ed. *Service and Salvation, Nagpur Theological Conference on evangelization* (Bangalore: TPI publications, 1973) pp.53-164; many newer books with newer insights are readily available.
- <sup>20</sup> Suso Brechter's commentary in Vorgrimler, ed. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II Vol II*, pp.87 ff., (New York: London, Burns & Oates/ Herder and Herder, 1969).
- <sup>21</sup> An example could be: when the school gets 100% pass at the Public Exams, we congratulate the headmaster though the success belongs to the teachers and the students also. We attribute it to the headmaster.
- <sup>22</sup> The last item "people" was not explicitly mentioned. To the query of the Fathers regarding its omission, the reply was given that it is understood as found in the quote Eph 4.16 and they did not want to repeat LG. So take it as said.
- <sup>23</sup> *Kerygma* stressed by Protestant groups especially Karl Barth and G. Warneck
- <sup>24</sup> Council of Trent refused to side with Dominicans or Franciscans on the question of knowledge of Justification. Similarly the question of 2 Sources or 1 Source of Revelation (DV)
- <sup>25</sup> Austin Flannery OP ed. *Vatican Council II—The conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bandra, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1989), AG p.736 paragraph 3.
- <sup>26</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions no.2 & *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church no 16.
- <sup>27</sup> Notice again the double thrust announcing (*kerygma*) followed by setting up (implantation)
- <sup>28</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI, (Bangalore: NBCLC Publications 1976), [abbreviated as EN].
- <sup>29</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II, (Bangalore: Archdiocesan Communication Centre publication, [no date]); Cf. Also ND 1165-1175.

## SEARCHING FOR THE MISSION PROPER TO THE CONSECRATED

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

Let us begin with the question: why are we in the Church and what is our mission? Looking at the various forms of consecrated life and the corresponding mission they exercised in different periods of history, what is the common thread that binds all these and unites our mission proper? We are not discussing here the mission proper to a particular form or to a specific institute. Our concern is to articulate the mission proper and foundational to us as the consecrated men and women.

This question must be approached in a broader way so that we take into account not only our mission but also the mission proper to laity and priests in the one over all mission of the Church. There are different christian vocations in the Church. Because of the pioneering work of a few theologians, today we have a theology of the “Different Christian forms of life” corresponding to the different christian vocations in the Church.<sup>1</sup> We need to know the mission proper to consecrated life. It is also equally important that we know the mission proper to the other forms also so that we can respect, appreciate, foster, support and encourage one another, and pool and blend our charisms in a collaborative way for the mission of the Church. In isolation, there is no grace. One form cannot exist except in relation to the other. We cannot define one without the other. All are inter-relational and complementary. Only then, we will be, as the Vision Statement of KRPP reads, “bound together in Christ towards a Spirit-filled communion of communities based on reconciliation, unity and love.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it is important that we know our own and of others; we neither feel like encroaching into others work nor do we need to let someone stifle ours. Nor do we have to stand in the shadow of someone else. Every form of Christian life has a mission proper to its own and has a right to exist on its own as is the case with other forms. Moreover, a learning about the various forms of christian vocation is necessary for the formation for pastoral collaboration.<sup>3</sup>

*Xavier E. Manavath, cmf 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*

## **1. DIFFERENT VOCATIONS: UNIQUENESS AND COMPLEMENTARITY**

By virtue of our rebirth in Christ through baptism, all the faithful (Lay, Priestly and Religious) share a common dignity. All are called to holiness and all cooperate in the building up of the one Body of Christ, each in accordance with the proper vocation and the gift which he or she has received from the Spirit (Rom 12:3-8). All are called, consecrated and sent in mission. There is a co-responsibility of all the members in the life, mission and government of the Church. At the same time, if equal dignity of all the members of the Church is the work of the Spirit, the same is also true about their diversity. It is the Spirit who establishes the Church as an organic communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries.<sup>4</sup>

In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II states: “In the unity of the Christian life, the various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ, whose radiance brightens the countenance of the Church.”<sup>5</sup> The light of Christ with its different rays falls on every one of us, and the same light evokes us differently and calls us to respond to him in different ways. Hence corresponding to the different vocations, we have different forms of life with a particular way of service in the Church. John Paul writes: “The vocations to the lay life, to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life can be considered paradigmatic, inasmuch as all particular vocations, considered separately or as a whole, are in one way or another derived from them or lead back to them, in accordance with the richness of God’s gift.”<sup>6</sup> These vocations are also at the service of one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world. Everyone in the Church is consecrated in baptism and confirmation, but this consecration develops itself into a specific form of consecration in tune with the distinct vocation, with a view to particular mission. “Although these different categories are a manifestation of the one mystery of Christ, the lay faithful have as their specific but not exclusive characteristic, activity in the world; the clergy, ministry; consecrated men and women, special conformity to Christ, chaste, poor and obedient.”<sup>7</sup> This is how we are called to exercise our specific mission in the Church and, at the same time, complement one another, foster collaboration and build a fruitful and ordered ecclesial communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. Now let us explore a bit more deeply into the mission specific to each form of Christian life.

### **1.1. Mission of the Lay Faithful**

The proper mission of the lay faithful, in the words of the Holy Father, is to “seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.”<sup>8</sup> Their mission is to engage the world at all different levels (agriculturally, economically, socially, industrially, technologically, politically etc), reform, transform and make the world a better place for all us to live, recognizing that Christ is the “Alpha and the Omega of the world, the foundation and measure of the value of all created things.”<sup>9</sup> They are called to transform the world at all levels permeating them with the values of

the Gospel. They do this work of reformation and transformation of the world interdependently and collaboratively. Thus, they participate in the ongoing re-creative work of God. Without this contribution proper to them, the world will come to a standstill.

We need to be indebted to the work of the laity who are engaged in so many different ways of reforming and transforming the world and we all enjoy the fruits of their labors. This toil of reformation and transformation has to go on jointly and continuously in partnership with others at various levels. That is the reason why most of the lay people choose a partner, marry, settle down in a covenantal love, trust and fidelity, and bring forth children as a creative expression of their fruitful and collaborative love. Finally as they age, the fruits of their labours are passed on to the children so that the next generation can carry on the work of reformation and transformation of the world. The world goes on and we need successive generations of people to sustain it and take care of it. I do not know whether our marriage preparation courses address this larger dimension of life with cosmic implications. There are also those among the laity (including those who are widowed or separated) who feel called to a single life. They also labour and do the work of reformation and transformation of the world, but pass the fruits of their labours on to their families, community or to the wider society. This has tremendous implications for the way we prepare lay people for their professional, marital or single life.

## **1.2. Mission of the Priests**

Priests, on their part, are called to engage in pastoral ministry, first of all, to the Christian community. By virtue of their vocation, they are called to lead, guide, animate, instruct, serve and sanctify the community both by word and sacraments. In this sense, they are called to be leaders of the Church, and as such, belong to its hierarchy. They take up celibacy as in the catholic tradition (but not the evangelical counsel of chastity which is proper to the religious) as a means towards greater freedom for pastoral ministry. They assist the laity in the discernment and execution of the mission proper to them by enabling them to listen to God and transform the world in accordance with God's plan. They recognize, respect, appeal, foster, pool together and coordinate the charisms of the religious communities for an effective pastoral mission of the Church.<sup>10</sup> The consecrated persons, while remaining faithful to their founding charism, open themselves to the spiritual and pastoral initiatives and cooperate generously with the particular churches, working in communion with the leaders of the local churches.

At the same time, priests and religious themselves need to be complemented by the practical wisdom and expertise of the lay faithful in their attempt to make the mission of the church more incarnational and effective. This endows the priests and the religious with a active commitment to listen to the lay faithful. The laity, on its part, can mediate to the clerics and religious the wisdom that come from their direct engagement in the secular spheres of the world where the Gospel need to be proclaimed in new "wine skins." Because of their greater accessibility, the laity can dare in where religious and priests are often hesitant to enter.

### 1.3. Mission of the Consecrated

Consecrated persons who embrace the evangelical counsels, takes up a mission, which, “without being sacramental, commits them to **making their own—chastity, poverty and obedience—the way of life practiced personally by Jesus** and proposed by him to his disciples.”<sup>11</sup> In consecrated life, therefore, it is not just a matter of following Christ, with one’s whole heart, of loving him “more than father or mother, more than son or daughter” (cf. Mt 10:37)—as this is required of every disciple—but of “living and expressing this by conforming one’s whole existence to the person of Christ in an all encompassing commitment.”<sup>12</sup> With its commitment to be “in but not of the world,” it is the duty of the consecrated life to show that the Incarnate Son of God is the real “treasure hidden in the field,” the “eschatological goal towards which all things tend, the splendour before which every other light pales, and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart.”<sup>13</sup>

Call to consecrated life is essentially a commitment to conform to and transmit the person of Christ. The purpose of the counsels that they embrace is not only to make Christ the whole meaning of their lives, but also to “reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world.”<sup>14</sup> The mission then is two-fold: to conform and to represent, namely, to assimilate and appropriate personally the very life, vision and mission that Jesus lived, expressed, symbolized and mediated in the Gospel, and to represent and re-incarnate this life and mission meaningfully, contextually and relevantly in a variety of ways, styles, and forms in the changing situations of the Church and the world. It is both *being* and *doing*. We are bound to proclaim Christ by being Christ-like. This is the burden and the privilege of consecrated life. This is what we have seen all throughout the history of consecrated life in its complementary movements and varied forms.

Understanding the mission of the consecrated in the above two-fold ways, it becomes clear that we must speak about it more symbolically rather than functionally.<sup>15</sup> Mission is more than the sum total of apostolic activities. Moreover, proclamation of Christ through being Christ-like also means that the mission flows from the very identity of consecrated life as “conformity with Christ.”

## 2. NECESSITY OF SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

Frequently religious life is understood more in terms of what it does (function) than for what it is (symbol). We cannot separate *being* from *doing*. “Only by way of a synthesis of being and doing, of life and mission, of contemplation and apostolate can we identify religious life and mission.”<sup>16</sup> From the historic overview, we have already seen the two complementary movements, a “going up and coming down” that are essential to consecrated life. These movements sum up the whole process of growing in conformity with Christ and returning to the world to love and serve in a Christ-like manner. In order to arrive at an overall picture of the essential characteristic of Consecrated Life, John

Paul II tells us that we must learn to “fix our gaze on Christ’s radiant face in the mystery of the transfiguration.” Bringing together the contemplative and active dimensions of consecrated life in this ancient icon of transfiguration, he states that it is not only “the revelation of Christ’s glory but also a preparation for facing Christ’s Cross. It involves both ‘going up the mountain’ and ‘coming down the mountain.’”<sup>17</sup>

If the mission of consecrated life involves both “going up and coming down,” the only solution is to rescue the “symbolic-charismatic aspects of its identity” along with its “politico-mystical aspects.”<sup>18</sup> Actual theology defines the essential mission of religious life in these symbolic-political dimensions. Here are some synthesized theological descriptions: Consecrated Life is: “an existential parable of discipleship of Jesus” (V. Codina); “parable narrated by the Spirit” (J.C.R. Gracia Paredes); “powerful sign” (W. Pannenberg); “radical symbol of discipleship” (J.B. Metz); “sign of the Kingdom of God in the world” (H. Fries); “sketch of the Kingdom” (T. Matura); “existential sign of messianic hope” (J. Moltmann); “parable of communion” (R. Schutz); “living memory of eschatology” (F. Durrwell); form of any ecclesial community” (B. Forte); “memorial of faith” (J. M. Tillard).<sup>19</sup>

In order that we may not get lost in the poetic language of these descriptions, let me put it formatively the essential mission of religious as follows: As religious, we are called not only to follow Christ, but also called and bound in a very special way to conform our whole existence to that of him by personally assimilating, appropriating (symbolic-charismatic-prophetic mission), and then, re-presenting and radiating contextually, meaningfully and relevantly (politico-mystical mission) the very life and mission that Jesus himself lived in the Gospel.

## **2.1. The Mission Flowing from its Symbolic-Charismatic-Prophetic Identity**

In an entrenched living of religious life, what suffers most is the mission flowing from this symbolic-charismatic and prophetic dimension.<sup>20</sup> The core of religious life is a radical experience of faith, a mystical experience of God and God’s Kingdom revealed in Christ of the Gospel. This experience precedes and is interior to all being or doing in religious life. It is an experience of the All Holy—an immersion in the primordial sources of being, life, truth and feeling which transcends the superficial layers of reality. The fundamental mission of religious life in different cultures and religions has been to remind such societies and cultures of the deepest levels of being, and of life and to give testimony to the mystical dimension of reality.

### **2.1.1. Living the “Liminality” of the Gospel**

The best way to explain this would be through the concept of “liminality.”<sup>21</sup> Liminal person or groups manifest a special experience or dedication to the All Holy. They symbolize, re-present, articulate and mediate certain highest sacred values which the wider society admires but often fails to live. They are no longer seduced by the immediate nor dissipated into the ordinary values. The reaction of society towards liminal groups is

ambivalent. At times it admires them and hopes that they inject life and meaning and at other times it considers them irrelevant or dangerous. With their ideologies and institutions, “liminal groups are radical critiques of the status quo.”<sup>22</sup> They question its forms of thinking and doing and urge deep and radical changes in the established order and in its values and structures. Thus, they work as a corrective and re-vitalizing element for the established order itself. They throw the structures of the society into sharp relief, illustrating its deficiencies and stress points, and thus become instrumental in bringing out change.

There exists a relationship between the “liminal” and the “institutional.” They are complementary poles. Human beings need both; society needs both. The liminal element impedes the institution from becoming stuffy and incapable of change or regeneration. The institutional element prevents the liminal from dissipation or self-destruction caused by an uncontrolled race for novelty, experimentation and visionary dreams. Normally these groups are considered minorities, but their mission has a universal projection and concerns the whole society.

Consecrated Life belongs to a “*liminal threshold*.” Christ of the Gospel is indeed, a liminal person par excellence. The early Church was a liminal group. In relation to the wider society, the early church exercised a liminal and prophetic witnessing to Christ and the kingdom. It was only when the Church began losing this liminality due to the Constantine freedom that religious life emerges expressing this liminality in its most original form of the desert movement. Religious life as a liminal group arises in every culture and religion. As history has shown us, it was born within the threshold of geography (desert) and culture (as a counter cultural movement). At the same time, its mission is directed towards the heart of society because it reminds, testifies, and urges society of the deepest values of being human which are, at the same time, values of the Gospel. Hence consecrated life in all its varied forms throughout history has been one of the most pervasive forms of liminality, mediating to the Church and the world, periodically the deepest values of the Gospel.

Mission proper to consecrated Life, therefore, is a call to live the liminality of the Gospel, the ability to symbolize, embody, express and mediate for the society at large, the gospel values, which the society deeply admires and cherishes, but often fails to live. As Consecrated men and women, we are called to be a “liminal group,” a group on the limits, on the frontiers, on the margins of the society at large, not allowing ourselves to be domesticated by crowd, collectivity and convention. It is a call to a qualitatively different way of being, acting, relating and signifying just in the way Christ did in the heart of the Church and world. The challenge is to offer a Christ-like personal presence to the world.

Liminality will challenge us, at times, to position ourselves in a radically different way from that of conventional christianity and the bourgeois world. Thus, we are called to be a “kind of shock therapy instituted by the Holy Spirit in relation to the Church and the world.”<sup>23</sup> It is true that institutional religion or organized christianity attempts to articulate

them but frequently fails as it suffocates them by the weight of institutionalism, formal ritual, activism and accommodation to secular values of money, pleasure, power.<sup>24</sup>

There are two things that need special attention. Liminality is not something that one sets out to invent or create. It is a graced expression of the faithful contemplation of the Gospel and its ramifications on the socio-political and religious context one lives in. Secondly, liminal positioning is not out of anger, but out of compassion and love for scandalous brokenness of our world.<sup>25</sup> The concern is neither seeking the approval of the contemporaries nor provoking their disapproval, but to be genuinely committed to emergence of the Reign of God as in the case of St. Francis of Assisi.

### ***2.1.2. Embodying a Counter-Cultural Sensitivity***

Living the liminality of the Gospel, we are called to symbolize, communicate, provoke and offer alternatives on the basis of the Gospel demands, thus providing socio-cultural-religious critique and thus to live a “prophetic abnormality.” This explains the counter-cultural sensitivity which should be inherent to Consecrated life.<sup>26</sup> When consecrated life becomes entrenched or institutionalized, it begins to accommodate itself to the status quo and ceases to fulfil its counter cultural mission. Then it is pushed aside by other groups. This, in fact, is the actual situation of religious life. Excessive institutionalization and adaptation to the liberal culture has weakened its symbolic and prophetic mission and contributes to the weakening and loss of meaning of Christian religious life. Other groups have taken its place and function in the Church and in society. These groups include new Christian communities, new religious groups, sects, para-religious movements, counter-cultural movements, ecologists, feminists etc.<sup>27</sup>

### ***2.1.3. Becoming a Parable of the Kingdom of God***

The symbolic mission of religious life consists in giving testimony, articulating and activating “archetypal” values that are foundational to religions and cultures. The expression “Kingdom of God” in the Gospel summarizes all the archetypal values of Christian experience. The fundamental mission of religious life is to be a symbol or a parable of the Kingdom, to testify and articulate its values. Priority value of the Kingdom is the experience of God as the only Absolute against other relative and transitory values. The words and deeds of Jesus reveal the Absolute as God the Father. The fundamental mission of consecrated life is to show to humanity the absolute value of the Kingdom, in the way we “live the beatitudes” and thus to sow the seeds of the Kingdom to sprout and grow. We are called to exercise that creative and innovative function to symbolize and express the values of the Kingdom especially for the “poor of Yahweh,” the lonely, the lost and the least.<sup>28</sup>

We know that the Kingdom of God manifests a series of values contrary to that of the liberal consumeristic culture.<sup>29</sup> Religious radiates and proclaims values which are antidotes to secularism. Fraternity, solidarity and compassion stand against hierarchy, competition and discrimination; free, inclusive and respectful love stands against a possessive, excluding

and exploitative love of persons; participation stands against exclusion; the sacredness of the earth and of the cosmos stands against the greed of a system which endangers the future of the planet; acceptance stands against discrimination; intercultural living stands against regionalism; and loyalty to the Kingdom as primordial in comparison to all other loyalties of cast, culture, language and rite.<sup>30</sup> These are manifold ways of living as modern parables of the Kingdom. If the cause of the Kingdom does not stir up mission in religious communities, mission will degrade itself into professionalism and careerism.

All these have tremendous implications for the way we understand and live out the evangelical counsels. The practice of the evangelical counsels should witness to and make plain these kingdom values. The vows are not a program of private religion. Nor are they to be understood and lived negatively and depreciatively in terms of denial or hatred to life and world. They are symbols which have public, political and cosmic implications. In order that consecrated life may exercise its symbolic-political mission and function as a counter cultural movement, it should give free reign to its charismatic and prophetic dynamism. We cannot fulfil this mission if we allow ourselves to be trapped by the “weight of institutionalism, by the rigidity of legalism, by ritual formalism, by empty activism and by the seduction of unworthy liberties.”<sup>31</sup>

#### ***2.1.4. Readiness to be on the “Frontiers”***

To fulfil this primary mission, both liminal and archetypal, religious life must be at the periphery or on the frontiers where the world is questioned and shocked. To be prophetic, it must be at the frontiers. Only then it gains the capacity to evoke, foster and nurture a consciousness and perception that lies in the direction of the Kingdom as different from the dominant consciousness and perception. It is significant that historically religious life originated in the desert, at the periphery and on the frontiers. Every successive form also originated at the frontiers so as to provoke and mediate an alternative consciousness that emerged from faithful contemplation of the Gospel. Practically, it means to be on the periphery with those who are powerless because of their distance from the centres of power, a distance marked by geography, economic disparity, social inequality and discrimination. The cries of suffering and the songs of hope of people on the periphery have always called forth new visions of religious life. It is there that they founded communities with a way of life that would make a peripheral social reality the central concern of their lives. It is also quite significant that a new vision was born out of a new way of being with God and a corresponding new way of being with others. To regenerate itself, religious life needs to return there and overcome its entrenchment in the middle stream.

#### ***2.1.5. Mission in and Mission to the Church***

Furthermore, consecrated life should be a symbol for the Church. We must show through our religious community what it means to be a church of Jesus. It should be a

laboratory ecclesiology that will clearly show forth the nature of the Church and how it is constituted; listening to the Word and faith, faithful practice of the discipleship of Jesus, testimony of charity and communion, assistance of ministries and the members in shared mission. Consecrated life represents the charismatic and prophetic dimension of the Church. By being a testimony of the Church's single-minded fidelity to the Lord, it also becomes a reminder to the Church of this fidelity in the midst of her other institutional and hierarchical loyalties.

Thus we realize that the symbolic-charismatic-prophetic identity of religious life is eminently testimonial. It is not about doing much or functioning well, but about having depth and transparent meaning; in prayer and work, in silence and parable, in solitude and community, in liturgical celebration and apostolic commitment. To rescue this primary mission, each religious must be spiritually perceptive. Each community must be grounded in a source of spirituality for a world in which, paradoxically, unbelief and nostalgia for what is sacred go together. The transparency of its experience of God and of his Reign is itself a proclamation. "A religious is a witness or a reminder of what it means to follow radically, to live in evangelical radicalism. It is only from these levels that we can resolve many dichotomies which religious life have been accused of: solitude and community, escape from and immersion into the world, contemplation and action, personal sanctification and salvation of souls, love of God and love of neighbour."<sup>32</sup>

Besides being a sign for the Church, our contribution to the Church is also unique. We are, called to make the richness of our charisms to bear their fruits in the local churches towards the "organic development of diocesan pastoral life."<sup>33</sup> The supra-diocesan character, proper to Institutes of Pontifical rite, is to be seen as a means to facilitate cooperation between particular churches since such institutes can effectively promote an "exchange of gifts" among them and, thus, contribute to an inculturation of the Gospel which purifies, strengthens and ennobles the treasures found in the cultures of all peoples.<sup>34</sup> While being rooted in the local churches, they are also called to break through the exclusivism and regionalism that could be prevalent in the local churches, including *sui juri* Churches by building bridges of dialogue, reconciliation and collaboration among the local churches.

A diocese which lacked the consecrated life, according to the Holy Father, would "not only be deprived of many spiritual gifts, of suitable places for people to seek God, of specific apostolic activities and pastoral approaches, but it would also risk a great weakening of that missionary spirit which is characteristic of majority of Institutes."<sup>35</sup> Special attention by the pastors to the vocation and mission of religious institutes and respect by the latter for the ministry of leadership by the pastors: these are two intimately linked expressions of that one ecclesial charity through which all work together to build up the organic communion (charismatic and hierarchically structured) of the people of God.

We can also look at these intimate links in terms of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God. If priests are called and bound primarily to be servants of the Church, the religious are so, primarily to be mediators and servants, “signs and parables” of the Kingdom of God. Because of this, there is room for healthy tension between the religious and the hierarchy.

## **2.2. The Politico-Mystical Mission of Religious Life**

The symbolic-charismatic-prophetic mission of religious life has its own political repercussions, giving rise to various forms of apostolate aimed to make God’s Kingdom present in a given historical and social context. It calls for a return to the world to incarnate his presence contextually, meaningfully and relevantly. All Christians are called to live evangelical life, but religious commit themselves to it publicly through the profession of the evangelical counsels. This public profession gives religious life a dimension which is politico-mystical. Growing into conformity with Christ and the Kingdom (mystical), its mission is to make present the Kingdom in the midst of human history (political). All religious congregations are called to fulfil their politico-mystical mission in tune with their own charisms which are all non-sacramental ways of bringing alive the presence and action of Christ. This is true even in the case of contemplative congregations. They have the mission of witnessing with their lives to the importance of silence, prayer and contemplation in humanity’s way towards its full realization. They are witnesses to that liberating facet which the experience of God bears in the Church and in society. They have a deep prophetic and counter-cultural value.

The essential elements of the politico-mystical mission are: proclamation of the word and the practice of liberating signs. In a world full of false words and empty rhetoric, the Word has been discredited or subsumed under too many noises and voices. Though this situation renders the task of evangelization more difficult, at the same time, it also gives an opportunity and a challenge. We need to be innovative and creative. We must know how to give the Word in “new wineskins” rather than resorting to stereotyped ministries that have no relevance. Proclamation of the Word must critique all practices and structures which are anti-kingdom and propose alternatives. We must learn to do “spy work” for God and his Kingdom. If we do not, who else will do it? In these attempts, we could be labeled as “imprudent.” Sometimes, the urgency of our mission demands that we be imprudent. The boldness which characterized the first Christian evangelists should not be replaced with timidity. The priority of evangelization should be fundamental criterion in all decisions concerning our apostolic involvements. It is not easy today to legitimize works without an evangelical thrust even though such works may enjoy social prestige and function effectively at the institutional level.

The frontiers of the system and institutions are also the places for prophecy and charisma. These are also places of evangelization or places from which we have to evangelize everyone. The liminal character of religious life demands that we discern the

“seeds of the Word” which exist and grow beyond the institutional centres of the Church: new communities of laity, new religious movements, new experiences of God in social groups and marginal social culture. Ecumenical dialogue with other religions and Christian traditions is a privileged place for evangelizing mission. We need to remember, however, that these are not frontiers of expansion, conquest or domination, but places of dialogue for evangelization.

Proclamation, however, must be accompanied by signs to make the liberating power of the Word credible. Solidarity with the poor and commitments for justice, human rights and integrity of creation are especially significant signs. We need to have profound compassion for the world and for the victims of the system in order to exercise our mission. It must be characterized by passion for God and passion for the world. “Compassion means being willing to suffer with the world, to take up the burden of its suffering and sin, to respond to its miseries with mercy. Compassion transforms evangelization into a proclamation of the Good News to the poor. It makes possible the miracle of sharing bread and rehabilitating those who have fallen.”<sup>36</sup> It can be called the evangelical yardstick of religious life, which liberates it from narcissistic tendencies and institutional hang ups.

To opt for the poor and to fight for justice call for a more radical evangelical motive. Mere ideological motives are insufficient. Many activists have come to disillusionment due to the weakness of their motives. It must spring from an authentic spirituality and from the experimental knowledge of the sin of the world, with its consequences of sin and death. We should be able to sense that at stake are evangelical values of the Gospel of Jesus and God’s liberating plan. It is the way towards discipleship of Jesus, involving even the giving up of one’s life. The charismatic and prophetic strength of religious life must be expressed in these commitments to uphold and live out those values, revealing their liberating power and complete evangelical meaning.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

If we glance through the history of consecrated life, various founders, foundresses, their institutes along with their varied charisms, we cannot but marvel at the way, these charisms have represented and reincarnated the varied aspects of the life and mission of Jesus contextually, meaningfully and relevantly in manifold ways, styles and forms throughout the history of the Church. It is no wonder that Holy Father affirms this as he compares it to a “plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruits in every season of the Church’s life. What an extraordinary richness!”<sup>37</sup>

Our efforts must be to re-vision and rediscover this “extraordinary richness” that consecrated life can bring into the Church and the world of our times. Towards this goal, we must be and do the mission proper to us as Religious in the Church while discovering, respecting and nurturing the vocations and missions proper to the other forms of life in

the Church and in the world. This is how we must facilitate the emergence of God's Reign. This can only be the work of the Spirit. "I watch in admiration at what comes forth from her mind: a thousand designs being created and not a single model from which to copy the marvellous cloth with which she will dress the companion of the True and Faithful One. All of her weavings are original, there are no repeated patterns . . . Whatever comes forth, comes forth but she who is will make it."<sup>38</sup>

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de las Formas de Vida Christiana*, Vol.I-III (ITVR: Madrid, 200
- <sup>2</sup> *Karnataka Regional Pastoral Plan*, formulated by a Joint Committee of Karnataka Regional Catholic Bishops' Conference (KRCBC) and Karnataka Regional Conference of Religious (KRCR), 2006, p.19.
- <sup>3</sup> Such a "learning about various forms of Christian vocation," is made mandatory in the regional formation programs formulated in by a joint body of Conferences of Bishops and of Religious. Cf. KRPP (16.2.1).
- <sup>4</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 4.
- <sup>5</sup> *Vita Consecrata*,16. Hereafter abbreviated as *VC*.
- <sup>6</sup> *VC*. 31
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>8</sup> *VC*. 31, *Lumen Gentium*, 31
- <sup>9</sup> *VC*. 16
- <sup>10</sup> *VC*. 49
- <sup>11</sup> *VC*. 31.
- <sup>12</sup> *VC*. 16
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>15</sup> It is just that a symbol is never limited to any one historical understanding. Symbolic way of speaking can contain a "surcharge of meaning" that liberates new ways of acting and living.
- <sup>16</sup> Felicisimo Diez Martinz, *Refounding Religious Life*, (Manila: HRP & ICLA, 2000), p. 274.
- <sup>17</sup> *VC*.14.
- <sup>18</sup> Martinez draws this synthesis based on the solution offered by St. Thomas Aquinas who speaks about the "political" projection of christian contemplation and the "mystic" dimension of apostolic activity. Cf. *Refounding Religious Life*, pp. 287-301; *Summa Theologica* (II-II, 182, 1-4 and 188, 6)

- <sup>19</sup> Cf. ViRel 60, Madrid (1986). This number of the review details the views of European theologians on religious life.
- <sup>20</sup> The symptoms manifested from a decline in these aspects are: institutional success, activism, satisfaction with the achievement of one's work, community inertia, weakening of prayer and of mystical experience, affluent life style, resistance to change, accumulation of wealth, the giving up of simplicity and poverty, the accommodation to secular values of the status quo etc. Cf. R. Hostie, *Vida y muerie de las ordenes religiosas*, DDB: Bilbao, 1973; L. Cada, *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).
- <sup>21</sup> The word "liminality" is a concept coined by anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep, to denote the periodic separation of a person from her family and is developed in recent times by Victor and Edith Turner (1969, 1974, 1978, 1985) and given a whole meaning to explain features of small groups and communities in their relationship to and interaction with, mainstream society. "Liminality" can be described as a "an ambiguous, sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structures of society . . . Every society has a structure, and a liminal community both clarifies the structure of society and can be instrumental in changing it" (Richard Endress, "The monastery as a liminal Community" in *American Benedictine Review*, vol. 26, pp.142-158). See also O'Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, pp. 33-41
- <sup>22</sup> Martinez, *Refounding Religious Life*, p. 291.
- <sup>23</sup> Johannes Baptist Metz, *Followers of Christ: The Religious Life and the Church* (New York: Search Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 12-13. See also VC. 15 & 87.
- <sup>24</sup> O'Murchu, *Religious Life: A Prophetic Vision*, pp. 38-41.
- <sup>25</sup> VC. 84.
- <sup>26</sup> VC. 79 & 80.
- <sup>27</sup> It must be understood that the liminal experience is not the monopoly of the Religious. Liminal experience emerge everywhere in diverse spheres and different groups. There is a new exodus. Being dissatisfied with the present world order, many people are searching for new ways of transformation. So there are "liminal politicians, liminal scientists, liminal thinkers, and liminal religious" J.C.R. Garcia Paredes, *Theology of Religious Life: Covenant and Mission*, (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2006), p. 201.
- <sup>28</sup> VC. 82 & 90.
- <sup>29</sup> Consumerism as a materialistic way of life rests and thrives on a fundamental inversion of the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. There are two books that are particularly enlightening to the readers in this aspect. They are: Mary Jo Leddy, *Reweaving Religious Life: Beyond the Liberal Model* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990) & John J. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2006).

SANYASA, *Journal of Consecrated Life*

<sup>30</sup> Martinez, *Refounding Religious Life*, p.293.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 294.

<sup>32</sup> Martinez, *Refounding Religious Life*, p. 296.

<sup>33</sup> VC. 48.

<sup>34</sup> LG. 13.

<sup>35</sup> VC. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Martinez, *Refounding Religious Life*, p. 301.

<sup>37</sup> VC. 5. Cf. Also *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, Document from the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (1990), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> From the Poem “Indian Tapestry” by Julia Esquivel as quoted in *Reweaving Religious Life* by Mary Jo Leddy.

## **DOING WITH OTHERS: WORKING COLLABORATIVELY FOR *MISSIO DEI***

**Paulson Varkey Veliyannoor, CMF**

On August 12, 1849, Father Anthony Claret, the founder of the Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (presently known as Claretian Missionaries), wrote a letter to His Excellency Rev. Dr. Giovanni Brunelli, the Apostolic Nuncio to the dominions of Her Majesty, Isabella II of Spain. Claret had been “struck dead”<sup>1</sup> by the news of his nomination as the Archbishop of Cuba, and hence, the letter was an honest confession of his utmost reluctance to accept the nomination. In it he wrote thus: “Your Excellency can have no idea of the pain that rent my heart at this nomination, and that for two reasons: first, because I have neither the taste nor sufficiency for dignities; second, because it overthrows all my apostolic plans, which I will share with Your Excellency confidentially in a few words. Seeing the great lack of evangelical and apostolic preachers in our Spanish territories, the people’s great desire to hear the Word of God, and the many requests that I have received from all parts of Spain to go and preach the Gospel there, I determined to gather and instruct some zealous companions, so as to be able to *do with others* [emphasis added] what I could not do by myself alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the expression used in the title of this article—“doing with others”—derives from this letter of Father Claret. As is evident from Claret’s expression, doing with others was an integral component of his charism, and thus “a form of being and doing.”<sup>3</sup> His ministry was invariably one of collaboration and sharing with others.

However, the concept of shared mission that underlies the phrase “doing with others” is neither an invention of Claret nor a unique trait of any religious order, but an inherently foundational element of the Church’s Mission itself. The Mission the Church has received is in itself a sharing in the Mission of Christ and is meant to be exercised in a shared act with other agents of mission. Thus, the dynamic of shared mission is a *sine qua non*,

*Paulson V. Veliyannoor, CMF, holds a Master’s Degree in clinical psychology from Bangalore University, and a Doctorate in clinical psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute, California. He is the founding principal of St. Claret College, Ziro and currently serves as its associate professor. His research interests are Eucharistic psychology, depth phenomenology, mimetic theory, and formative dynamics in consecrated life and priesthood. He may be contacted at frpaulson@gmail.com*

constitutive of the Church. This article is an attempt to elucidate the dynamics of shared mission within the context of the vocation and mission of men and women in consecrated life. I will discuss its foundations, spirituality, focus areas, and challenges as well as a couple of exemplary models of shared mission undertaken in the secular and the religious worlds.

## 1. FOUNDATIONS OF SHARED MISSION

The ideal of shared mission rests on six foundations: anthropological, Trinitarian, Christological, ecclesial, charismatic, and Eucharistic.

### 1.1. Anthropological Foundation

Philosophers and social scientists have sought to define human beings based on what they consider to be their essence. Thus we have several designations for human being: *homo sapiens*,<sup>4</sup> referring to human rationality; *homo faber*,<sup>5</sup> referring to creative intelligence; *homo ludens*,<sup>6</sup> indicating his playfulness; *homo viator*,<sup>7</sup> suggestive of human being as a pilgrim in life, and *homo religious* with meaning ranging from having a religious personality<sup>8</sup> to the entire humanity being essentially religious.<sup>9</sup> Whereas these labels, especially the final one, capture essential elements of human nature, further foundational to them as their rhizome is the dynamic of relationality. Thus, human being, in her deepest essence, could be defined as relational being.<sup>10</sup> We are not bounded beings meant to live in isolation, but are essentially and integrally created as organisms open towards the other. Research in social sciences has shown that this capacity to relate is evident even when the baby is in the womb of the mother.<sup>11</sup> We seem to be born with a “phylogenetic inheritance”<sup>12</sup> of a capacity for relatedness. Trevarthen speaks of alteroception, an innate ability in an infant to perceive the other, an instinct for intersubjective attunement.<sup>13</sup> Even the generative grammar and linguistic deep structure<sup>14</sup> that Chomsky identifies in infants are indicative of an inborn need to relate and communicate, to be related and communicated to. Indeed, we are constituted with a spiritual deep structure that links us with the other.

In more fundamental terms, human beings are constituted by desire, a desire for the other. There is a hierarchization and subordination of this desire in terms of its object. The famous Augustinian prayer, “Lord, you have created us for you, our hearts are restless until they rest in you” is indicative of the primary object (subject) of the constitutive desire in us.<sup>15</sup> In and through the desire for God, we order our desire for created beings around us. But when this desire gets dis-ordered, envy and rivalry enter our lives as we see in the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-24) and as discussed by Paul in Rom 5:12-21.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, reflecting in terms of theological anthropology, we know that when God created us, he created us with a mission to grow and multiply (Gen 1:28). This mission must not and cannot be exercised in isolation from each other, but as a community. God found that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18) and created for him a companion, thus demanding him to fulfill God’s vision for the world as a shared mission. As Martin Buber

writes: “In the beginning is the relation.”<sup>17</sup> We are constitutionally relational to God, other human beings, and the whole creation; and we are created with a mission that must be realized collectively.

### **1.2. Trinitarian Foundation**

We are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), after God’s own nature. Thanks to the biblical revelation, we know that our God is a community of persons—the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit—three persons, but one God. Though the primordial creation is the act of this community of persons, such communal action is explicitly emphasized in the creation of human beings. For God says: “Let *us*[emphasis added] create man in our own image and likeness” (Gen 1:26). This community of persons then endows humanity with the mission of co-creation: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen 1:28). Thus, we have been created in a shared act by the Trinitarian God, in God’s own image and likeness, to share in God’s mission for the world. Thus, our authentic way of being and doing must flow integrally from the source of our being. If God’s own nature is that of shared mission, then our mission must indeed be one of doing with others.

The Church has no mission of her own. Though in the past mission was understood in variety of ways, there is a renewed and revised understanding of mission as “*missio Dei*.” There is only one mission—God’s Mission. This mission “takes its birth in the womb of God, Father-Mother,”<sup>18</sup> and the Church is called to share in it: “The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. . . . Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission, not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone.”<sup>19</sup>

### **1.3. Christological Foundation**

Christ receives his mission from God the Father, thus sharing in the Father’s mission, and in turn shares it with a community of disciples and bequeaths it to the whole Church. At his baptism, Jesus is publicly commissioned by the Father and anointed by the Spirit to embark on his mission (Matt 3:13-17). Given that Jesus was God, he could have realized his mission all by himself, without any help from other human beings. However, he chose not to do so, and instead, from the very beginning of his public ministry, called and constituted a community of disciples to share in his mission. During his public ministry, he sent them two by two—in itself a demonstration of shared mission—to go into towns and villages and to preach the Gospel (Luke 10:1). At his ascension, he mandates his community of disciples, the Church, to continue his mission (Mk 16:15-18). His promise of the presence and guidance of the Spirit in their mission is yet another affirmation of the shared nature of the mission (Jn 14:15-27). He also promises them his own accompaniment in realizing

their mission which is his, and which he in turn, received from the Father, and hence is a shared mission from the very beginning.

#### **1.4. Ecclesial Foundation**

The Church is missionary in nature. The only reason for the Church to exist is the mission given to her.<sup>20</sup> Without her mission, she ceases to exist. Thus, her identity and mission are one and the same and are grammatically passive. As the bride of Christ, she is not called to exercise her ministry through a handful of privileged members; rather, she is called to realize the mission in shared responsibility. When Jesus asked Peter to put out into the deep—*duc in altum*(Lk 5:4)—he wasn't commanding a single individual, but the collective. Peter calls out for the help of everyone around: "They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink" (Lk 5:7). As Paul reminds us forcefully, the Church consists of many members integrally united as one body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12). Vatican II affirms that though there is a diversity of ministries, there is only a single mission for the Church and every member shares in it by virtue of baptism: "The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate, which the Church carries on in various ways through all her members. For the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate. No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but has a share in the functions as well as life of the body: so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church . . . . Indeed, the organic union in this body and the structure of the members are so compact that the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself."<sup>21</sup>

This sharing in mission is not even limited to the formal members of the Church, as is evidenced by Jesus' remarks to John when John reported that they silenced a person who evidently did not belong to their group, but was casting out devils in Jesus' name: "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in my name can soon after speak evil of me. For whoever is not against us is for us" (Mk 9:40). We share God's mission with anyone who wishes to do so in Christ's name.

#### **1.5. Charismatic Foundation**

The one mission is exercised through different ministries that require various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Though we are one body of Christ, as each part of the body has unique gifts and functions, each member of the Church has his or her own gifts and charism that are to be used at the service of one mission (Eph 4:7; 11-13; Rom 12). Every member integrally shares in the one mission given to the Church by virtue of the gifts from the Holy Spirit. Thus, shared mission rests on charismatic foundations as well.

The charismatic foundation is also evident from the founding of religious orders: even when a saint is given a particular grace and charism to serve the Gospel in a unique way in accordance with the needs of the times, she gathers around her a group of like-minded, but differentially gifted individuals to realize the mission. The foundations of the ministries of religious orders are charismatically ordained at the service of one mission.

### **1.6. Eucharistic Foundation**

Our mission is Eucharistic and our Eucharist is missional because our Eucharistic practice emerges in response to Christ's mandate, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24). The Eucharist is the "sacrament of sacraments" and the sacrifice that cancels out every other sacrifice. As the hidden order of the universe,<sup>22</sup> sacrifice is foundational to human society and culture. Primitive societies mandated that every member of the society without exception should participate in the sacrifice, and thus, the sacrificial rituals were a shared responsibility.<sup>23</sup> The Eucharist, as a sacrifice, is thus a shared missional act of the Church wherein everyone participates as the one Body of Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist, both these come together as the true body of Christ—in the species of bread and wine, we have the mystical body of Christ and in the gathered assembly, the true body of Christ.<sup>24</sup> At the Rite of Dismissal, receiving the command *ite, missa est*, we walk out as One Body of Christ to exercise the mission of the Church in collective and shared responsibility. Having shared in the imagination of God in the Eucharist, we walk out to realize it in the world in shared mission.

## **2. SPIRITUALITY OF SHARED MISSION**

"Doing with others" is a form of being and doing. In order to exercise shared mission, one must have a certain way of being, for action follows being (*agere sequitur esse*). "It is important however that what we propose, with the help of God, should be profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer. Ours is a time of continual movement which often leads to restlessness, with the risk of "doing for the sake of doing". We must resist this temptation by trying "to be" before trying "to do". In this regard we should recall how Jesus reproved Martha: "You are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful" (Lk 10:41-42)."<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we must speak of a spirituality of shared mission. This spirituality would be characterized by Christocentricity, communion with the other, complementarity, co-responsibility, dialogical communication, and shared trust.

### **2.1. Christocentricity**

Any missional spirituality is Christocentric, by its very nature. In shared mission, we identify with the person and the mission of Jesus Christ who was the prophet and missionary par excellence (Lk 4:16-21) sent by the Father and who exercised his mission in partnership with his Father and the Spirit and with his community of disciples. Those who share in his ministry are called to follow him and be configured with him as St. Paul was configured

with him: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Our ultimate goal in mission is that Christ be all and in all (Col 3:11).

Some Greeks informed Philip during the Passover: “We wish to see Jesus” (John 12:21). Desire to see Jesus is a universal desire among peoples. Much more so should it be in consecrated men and women, for our life and ministry are to be modeled after that of Jesus. Thus, contemplation of the face of Christ is the primary spiritual component of our learning and doing of his mission in shared responsibility with one another. As John Paul II cautions us, “Our witness . . . would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first *contemplated his face*.”<sup>26</sup> We learn the dynamics of the shared mission from the face of the Master.

## 2.2. Communion with the Other

Sharing is impossible where communion does not exist and vice versa. “To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium,” writes John Paul II.<sup>27</sup> He goes on to define the spirituality of communion: “A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are a part of me”. This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a “gift for me”. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, “masks” of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.”<sup>28</sup>

Three traits of the spirituality of communion stand out in the above reflection: seeing the other as integral part of my life; acknowledging and valuing the talents and gifts in the other; sharing their burdens. Such communion is integral to the mission of the consecrated. *Vita Consecrata* (VC) identifies three cardinal traits of consecrated life—it originates in the Trinity and reflects its internal communion (*confession Trinitatis*), is a sign of communion in the Church (*signum fraternitatis*) and is the manifestation of God’s love in the world (*servitium caritatis*). All these imply a deep spirituality of communion, with God and with one another. Having such spirituality prepares us for shared exercise of ministries proper to consecrated life.

### 2.3. Complementarity

The second component in the above definition needs further reflection, as shared ministry requires sharing of each other's gifts and talents. The other is neither hell ("Hell is other people")<sup>29</sup> nor a rival (Girard),<sup>30</sup> but a respectful "Thou" (Marcel),<sup>31</sup> my precious brother or sister whom God has given as a companion whose resources complement my own, so that through the complementary use of our gifts, we can contribute to the building of the Kingdom. It is this idea that St. Paul expresses eloquently in 1 Cor 12 where he talks about our being integral parts of one body of Christ and the diversity of charisms given by one Spirit for the good of all. Thus, shared mission demands a spirituality of inclusive complementarity and militates against any exclusionary tendencies in our consecrated living and missionary apostolate. As a model for the whole world, consecrated people are very specially invited to move from a position of the "culture of the opponent" to the "culture of the other" which must be known, respected, accepted, and loved.<sup>32</sup> "Diversity cannot generate contraposition, discrimination or reciprocal exclusion; on the contrary, it is a blessing for the life and mission of the Church, since there is no charism, form of life or ministry that can contain the unfathomable richness of Christ; each person in his way signifies and expresses the unity and diversity that is Christ himself."<sup>33</sup>

### 2.4. Co-responsibility

When God inquired with Cain about Abel, Cain shrugged his shoulders and asked: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). The truth is, *he was*. We are all responsible for our sisters and brothers, and together with them, responsible for our mission at the service of the Kingdom. Responsibility is *response-ability*: the ability to respond to the needs of the other. Co-responsibility does not mean transfer of responsibility on to someone else, but an adequate distribution and owning up of responsibility in accordance with each one's complementary resources. Jesus made this evident when he washed the feet of his disciples and asked them to do so among themselves: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (Jn 13: 14-15). To Peter who was evidently not very comfortable with the act, Jesus emphatically declared that unless Peter allowed it, he would have no part in Jesus (Jn 13:6-8). John Paul II reminds us that "it is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the "washing of feet" (cf. Jn 13:1-20): by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, a core willingness to be responsible for the needs of the other justifies and completes the Eucharistic foundation of the shared mission.

### 2.5. Respectful and Receptive Communication

Once a distraught parent approached a counselor and complained: "I do not understand my son. He does not listen to me." The counselor responded: "Perhaps if you want to

understand your son, *you* must listen to *him*.” The same goes for shared mission. Respectful and receptive communication begins with empathic listening with a view to understanding the other and becomes an offering of one’s own story as a gift for the other. Such communication is in view of facilitating a deeper knowledge about the gifts and wounds, talents and burdens of each other, which in turn would facilitate mutual support and sharing of resources at the service of the mission. “Being with” is a necessary component of “doing with”: Jesus called the disciples “to be with him and to be sent out” (Mk 3:14). It heals the Babel split in communication where one could hardly understand the other and therefore could not undertake a common task (Gen 11:1-9), and facilitates the Pentecostal communication where the apostles’ words were natively understood by one and all present (Acts 2:1-12).

## **2.6. Shared Trust**

Shared mission requires a spirituality of shared trust. Jesus is the cardinal example of such trust. None of the disciples Jesus recruited had résumés worth crowing about. Despite Peter’s impulsivity and denials, Jesus would affirm him in the shared responsibility of feeding the sheep. In spite of the power-craziness of John and James, Jesus trusted them enough to be in his inner circle. This is in stark contrast to the “zero tolerance” policy many dioceses and religious orders have undertaken in the aftermath of the sex-abuse scandals, more out of fear and mistrust and less out of charity and sound application of Gospel values. But Jesus was able to trust his friends because he knew not only the actualities of the human heart (Jn 2:24), but its possibilities as well. In shared mission, there is no substitute for shared trust.

## **3. FOCUS AREAS OF SHARED MISSION**

Having reflected on the foundations and spirituality of shared mission, I now turn to the loci of its implementation.

### **3.1. Global socio-politic**

During my initial formation years, we had an anti-addiction action group, HOPE, working mainly in the field of primary prevention. In order to study the extent of alcoholism and addiction in society, HOPE once undertook an extensive survey of the problem in South India. As part of the survey, we visited offices of numerous governmental, educational, and non-governmental agencies. I was then amazed by the kind of cooperation and goodwill we received, and I still remember writing to the director of HOPE: “There are more good people in the world than we think there are.”

Ever since, I must confess, there are times I have wondered if there are more good people in the world than in our ecclesial and religious circles. Doing good or caring for humanity is no monopoly of the Church or her religious orders. There are thousands of individuals and hundreds of agencies in the world that have taken up such work as their mission. Some of them might be secular in their orientation or service philosophy; some

others might belong to other religions in the world; and still others might be some non-Catholic Christian groups with doctrinal differences with the Catholic Church. Whoever they might be, there is always the common ground of love of fellow human beings where the Church can meet them and work together for the creation of a civilization of love. We no longer believe that there is no salvation outside the institutional Church. What we do believe is that there is no salvation outside Christ, but Christ is a constant in every human life and our service with and to our fellow human beings helps them recognize Christ in us as well as in themselves.

### **3.2. Ecclesial, Inter-Congregational, Intra-Congregational**

“One who does not gather with me scatters,” said Jesus (Matt. 12:30). As Christ’s body and bride, the Church could also say the same to groups within the Church. For, some of them apparently live their lives at the service of the Gospel, but do so in opposition and noncooperation with other ecclesial agencies, effectively doing counter-witness to the Gospel. Don’t we sometimes find religious congregations enviously competing with one another in starting ministries or refusing to cooperate with one another in facilitating certain ministries? I personally know of a prestigious college (run by religious, of course) that refused to share its “strategic plan” with another budding college, for fear of losing the market. Do we not hear stories of vocation promotion where dioceses refuse permission for religious congregations, or one province refuses permission to another of the same Order to recruit students from their “catchment areas”? Some groups hold vocation promotion seminars, make their selections, and then leave the rejected candidates for others to pick and choose from. At times we find such divisive dynamics between various rites within the Church as well, creating their own cocooned communities, foreclosing any shared service of the Gospel. Such unhealthy practices seem to emerge more from feelings of insecurity and an obsession with unique identity that robs us of our shared humanity and discipleship in Christ with other groups and communities. Whereas each founder had a special charism and spiritual philosophy, I wonder if we go overboard in creating unique spiritualities in the name of our founders, which emerge more out of our own compulsions than genuine reality. For, there are more commonalities than differences in the spiritualities that are floated around us. It is time the various groups within the Church moved in the direction of shared ministry that facilitate optimal use of resources, and increase effectiveness and witness-value before the world.

*Vita Consecrata* reminds us that “the Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of *spreading the spirituality of communion*, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, “fraternal spiritual relations and mutual cooperation among different Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are sustained and nourished by the sense of ecclesial communion. Those who are united by a common commitment to the following of Christ and are inspired by the same Spirit cannot fail to manifest visibly, as branches of the one Vine, the fullness of the Gospel of love. Mindful of the spiritual friendship which often united founders and

foundresses during their lives, consecrated persons, while remaining faithful to the character of their own Institute, are called to practise a fraternity which is exemplary and which will serve to encourage the other members of the Church in the daily task of bearing witness to the Gospel.”<sup>36</sup>

Antipathy to shared mission can exist within a congregation or a province itself. There is a tendency to engage in individualized ministries that do not emerge from a shared discernment in and by the community. It is sometimes conveniently forgotten that a mission or ministry is received from the community and not grabbed on one’s own. Thus, what is quoted above from *Vita Consecrata* applies very well to individual religious as well.

### 3.3. With the Laity

A major focus area within the Church is shared mission between the laity and the religious. Following the reflections of Vatican II, there has been an increased understanding and appreciation of the role of the laity in the Church. “The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it.”<sup>37</sup> Whereas the laity fully participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ,<sup>38</sup> they fulfill them specifically in the secular domain, with a secular character. “The lay faithful’s position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their *newness in Christian life* and distinguished by their *secular character*.”<sup>39</sup> However, the domains of the laity and the religious intersect constantly as both work in the world, in ministries that serve physical, social, and spiritual needs of the people. Religious institutes have come to recognize that their charisms can be shared with the laity, as is evident from the emergence of Third Orders. The laity can serve as associates and lay volunteers in the religious orders, thus offering their gifts and skills that help fulfill the charismatic mission of the orders more effectively. VC reflects on the fruitfulness of such collaboration: “[It] can in fact give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the Institute, which will then be in a position to ensure the continuity in the Church of the services typical of the Institute. Another positive consequence will be to facilitate more intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the Institute’s mission. . . . The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate. In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate “the most precious gift: the spirit.” For their part, the laity should offer Religious families the invaluable contribution of their “being in the world” and their specific service.”<sup>40</sup>

### 3.4. With the Complementary Gender

Another area to focus is the shared ministry with the complementary gender. Though the gender as mentioned here could mean male or female, in the lived world of ecclesial life it is women who have been traditionally left out in shared mission. A couple of years

ago, watching the Good Friday liturgy at the Vatican on television, I was saddened to observe that no woman was assigned any role in the Passion Reading, a liturgical act which does not require an ordained minister. VC reflects aloud on the necessity and benefits of assigning women significant participation in any ministry: “Women’s new self-awareness also helps men to reconsider their way of looking at things, the way they understand themselves, where they place themselves in history and how they interpret it, and the way they organize social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life. . . . It is therefore urgently necessary to take certain concrete steps, beginning by *providing room for women to participate* in different fields and at all levels, including decision-making processes, above all in matters which concern women themselves.”<sup>41</sup>

Even when women—religious or lay—are invited into shared mission, it is not uncommon to observe that they are treated as second-class citizens. For example, in several missions in India, religious sisters are often at the mercy of priests and religious men, and are often paid poorly for their services. The scenario awaits much reform in habitual ways of thinking and doing mission.

### **3.5. With the Local Agents of Mission**

Every village or town has its own ingenious ways of solving its unique problems. Whereas some of these methods are harmful and unethical (e.g., female circumcision, infant sacrifice), many others are the products of practical intelligence and lived experience (e.g., cultivation habits of certain tribes, local medicinal remedies). Religious who pitch their tent in a particular place must co-opt local resources as well as local people who have the expertise and goodwill to care for the needs of the area. It not only makes the people own up the ministries of the missionaries who live in their midst, but prepares the ground for evangelization of cultures. Christian faith will no more be an imported foreign good, but an inculturated presence that honors, preserves, and enhances whatever is good and precious in the local traditions.

## **4. TWO MODELS OF SHARED MISSION**

Shared mission as discussed above is theoretically possible; but is it practically viable? It is and it must be. Looking around for models will convince us of its viability. Given the space limitations I briefly discuss just two projects as samplers. One of these is a local enterprise and unaffiliated with any religious order; the other is a joint project by several religious orders at an international scale.

### **4.1. Barefoot College**

The Barefoot College, situated in Tilonia in Rajasthan, is the brainchild of Bunker Roy who founded it in 1972 along Gandhian principles. The college is a classic example of shared mission with the local people—it is built for and by the poor people of the locality; it is owned and managed by them; it makes use of local expertise and know-how. Anyone who has a formal degree from a recognized university is not eligible to teach at this

college. The college seeks out community members rather than outside experts to help solve problems and teach at the college. Thus, it taps local expertise, insights, and solutions for local needs and problems. The “Barefoot Soldiers,” the network of rural men and women of the college, offer “Barefoot Solutions” in areas such as solar energy, drinking water, education, health care, wasteland development, women’s empowerment, and communication. Barely literate rural men and women are trained to work as solar panel engineers, mechanics, designers, midwives, health workers, water drillers, etc.

Their greatest achievement has been in the development of and training in alternative energy source. The whole campus is powered by solar energy, and the college has provided solar energy solutions to 90,000 poorest households in India. The rural solar engineers have trained more than 340 poor villagers from eight countries in Asia, Africa, and South America as Barefoot solar engineers who in turn offer their service in their respective countries. The college has also tapped local know-how to harvest rain water in water-starved Rajasthan. Consequently, they have succeeded in harvesting water that serves 470 schools and community centers.<sup>42</sup>

The key to the unique success of the Barefoot college is the implementation of the concept of shared mission by which local people and local know-how have been intelligently co-opted. It is no more a college imported to Tilonia from outside experts—it is a college owned and run by the very people that it serves. Consecrated men and women can learn much from the secular Barefoot initiative with regards the manner in which they run educational and social service centers.

#### **4.2. Solidarity with South Sudan (SSS)**

Ever since its independence in 1956, Sudan in Africa has been in the furnace of ethnic strife, much complicated by its history of slave trade. There were two major civil wars between the northern and the southern parts of Sudan, the second of which ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. The CPA was only a beginning, and a long and arduous task of rebuilding the nation that had been shred to pieces by hunger, poverty, war, fear, and death. In response to the invitation from the Bishops of South Sudan, a USG/UISG (Union of Superiors General/International Union of Superiors General) delegation visited the war-ravaged country and saw in person the desperate human needs of the place. The USG/UISG decided to create a landmark shared mission project that has come to be known as “Solidarity with South Sudan.” As of April 2011, 170 religious congregations have joined the project. There are currently five SSS communities where 25 religious from 14 different congregations and 13 nationalities engaged in active ministries, in collaboration with the Government of South Sudan. The SSS ministries are focused on the areas of health, educational and professional training, and pastoral activities. The SSS has become a powerful and successful force of social change and a prophetic and cost-effective model for congregations to consider projects in shared mission.<sup>43</sup>

Where did the inspiration come from, for SSS? The inspiring source was the 2004 International Congress on Consecrated Life *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity* that called for “creative fidelity” to the Gospel by means of courageous and innovative missionary efforts: “It is important to listen to the Spirit and discover where the Spirit is creating newness in religious life—especially in new opportunities for creative fidelity.”<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere it observed that “inter-congregational dialogue, and bridges of collaboration and integration are clear initiatives to which the Spirit is leading us.”<sup>45</sup> It demanded a new paradigm for consecrated life: “A new paradigm for consecrated life is being put together, born of compassion for the scarred and down-trodden of the earth, around new priorities, new models of organization and open and flexible collaboration with men and women of good will.”<sup>46</sup>

### **4.3. Looking Forward**

This “open and flexible collaboration” can become an everyday reality in our formative and apostolic ventures. Happily, such initiatives are on the increase. For example, it is heartening to see some novitiate communities that are spatially contiguous forming an alliance and pooling together their human and economic resources to launch common formative programs that have not only saved time, energy, and resources, but more importantly have created good will, openness, and cooperation among the formees across the orders as well. Similar initiatives for making use of existing philosophy and theology institutes instead of creating individualized and cocooned centers will be a welcome change. Shared ventures will be a blessing in the much constrained medical apostolate currently threatened by heightened financial investment and the influx of luxurious and cash-rich private medical hospitals. Co-operation and sharing of resources in social and educational apostolates, especially in challenging rural and remote areas, will help the religious orders serve the communities with better expertise, efficiency, and optimal resource mobilization. Common vocation promotion program is yet another area where shared efforts are beginning to sprout, and it is a welcome move as well.

However, paradigm shifts do not come easy. It is no easy task to change longstanding modes of thinking and doing in which we have comfortably nestled. Moreover, shared ministries run the risk of being orphans—everybody’s child is nobody’s child. Recently a religious sister working in a hospital run by an umbrella agency of the Catholic Church confided in me that several congregations who were “duty-bound” to send nursing personnel to this hospital often chose to send sickly sisters because of two factors—the hospital paid poor stipend to religious nurses, but covered all their medical expenses as perks! It is unfortunate that several joint ventures become the convenient dumping ground for getting rid of physically and psychologically “troubled souls” from the province or the order. An attitudinal change must precede any efforts at shared mission.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The 2004 International Congress on Consecrated Life presented the biblical figures of the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:4-26) and the Samaritan Man (Lk 10:25-37) as the icons for consecrated life. Indeed, they are the icons and models for shared mission as well. Both create a paradigm shift in ministry. They were willing to take risk. They were ready to stop what they were doing or where they were heading to, and respond to the challenging need before them. They changed the course of their travel and walked uncharted waters. They walked on the margins. They remind us “not to avoid dangerous roads because new things always emerge off the beaten path, away from the safe, protected everyday places.”<sup>47</sup> The Samaritan woman brings people to Jesus and makes sure that they collectively gaze on the face of Christ. The Samaritan man takes the wounded victim to the inn and invites the services of the staff at the inn in a shared mission of saving life. Both were apparently alone. But we find them moving to the midst of a community at the end, enlisting them in shared mission. May their examples inspire us to embrace the paradigm shift in favor of shared mission.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Anthony Mary Claret, *Autobiography*, trans. J. M. Viñas & J. Daries (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1976), n. 491.
- <sup>2</sup> Anthony Mary Claret, *The Selected Letters from the Correspondence of Saint Anthony Mary Claret. Volume 1: Letters of 1832-1857*, trans. J. C. Daries (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2007), n. 67.
- <sup>3</sup> Claretian Missionaries, *Do with Others*. (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2006), p. 30
- <sup>4</sup> Carl Linnaeus designated human being as *homo sapiens*. See G. D. Alles, *Homo Religiosus*. L. Jones, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 6, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), pp. 4109-4111. Retrieved from Gale Virtual Reference Library via Gale: <http://go.galegroup.com/pgi.idm.oclc.org/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=carp39441>
- <sup>5</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1913).
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- <sup>8</sup> M. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010).
- <sup>9</sup> W. Dupré, *Religion in Primitive Cultures: A study in Ethnophilosophy* (Paris: Mouton, 1975).
- <sup>10</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

- <sup>11</sup> F. Tustin, *Autistic States in Children* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- <sup>12</sup> Melanie Klein, "On Observing the Behavior of Young Infants." *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* vol. 3 (New York: Free Press, 1984), p. 117.
- <sup>13</sup> As cited in S. Bråten, "Infant Learning by Altercentric Participation: The Reverse of Egocentric Observation in Autism. S. Bråten, ed. *Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny* (New York: Cambridge, 2006), pp. 105-124.
- <sup>14</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002). Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- <sup>15</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 103.
- <sup>16</sup> James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), pp. 147-156.
- <sup>17</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregory Smith (New York: Scribner Classics, 2000), p. 31.
- <sup>18</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Passion for Jesus Passion for Humanity: Consecrated Life Born from the Spirit* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2005), p. 131.
- <sup>19</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), p. 390.
- <sup>20</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 14.
- <sup>21</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 2.
- <sup>22</sup> James Grotstein, a practicing psychoanalyst and former president of the International Psychoanalytic Society, in personal communication to the author.
- <sup>23</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
- <sup>24</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).
- <sup>25</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 15.
- <sup>26</sup> *op. cit.*, n. 16.
- <sup>27</sup> *op. cit.*, n. 43.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> This phrase from Jean Paul Sartre's "No Exit" (Huis clos) has not always been understood in context. Sartre himself has commented on the misunderstanding thus: "Hell is other people' has always been misunderstood. It has been thought that what I meant by that was that our relations with other people are always poisoned, that they are invariably hellish relations. But what I really mean is something totally different. I mean that if relations with someone else are twisted, vitiated, then that other person can only be hell." (Quoted from: Kirk Woodward, "The Most Famous Thing Jean-Paul Sartre Never Said." *Rick on Theater*. Retrieved from <http://rickonthetheater.blogspot.in/2010/07/most-famous-thing-jean-paul-sartre.html>. But the

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truth is, the relation with other people tend to get twisted and vitiated more often than not, if genuine care is not invested in the relationship.

- <sup>30</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore:: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
- <sup>31</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregory Smith (New York: Scribner Classics, 2000).
- <sup>32</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Passion for Jesus Passion for Humanity: Consecrated Life Born from the Spirit* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2005), p.157.
- <sup>33</sup> Claretian Missionaries, *Do with Others*. (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2006), p. 46.
- <sup>34</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n. 28.
- <sup>35</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 51.
- <sup>36</sup> *op. cit.*, n. 52.
- <sup>37</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 1.
- <sup>38</sup> *op. cit.*, n. 2; *Christifideles Laici*, n. 14.
- <sup>39</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, n.15.
- <sup>40</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 55.
- <sup>41</sup> *op. cit.*,nn. 57-58.
- <sup>42</sup> Sumithra Prasanna, *The Barefoot Approach*. Retrieved from <http://www.imow.org/economica/stories/viewStory?storyid=4525>
- <sup>43</sup> Solidarity with South Sudan, *White Paper on Solidarity with South Sudan*.(Juba: SSS, 2011).
- <sup>44</sup> International Congress on Consecrated Life, *Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity*, (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2005), n. 6.
- <sup>45</sup> *op. cit.*, n. 112
- <sup>46</sup> *op. cit.*, n. 43
- <sup>47</sup> Dolores Aleizandre, “Seekers of Wells and Roads” in International Congress on Consecrated Life, *Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity*, (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2005), p. 103.

## REVISITING THE MISSIONARY ROLE OF THE LAITY

Jacob Jose

The lay faithful along with priests and religious form part of the labour force Jesus sends forth into His vineyard (Mt. 20: 1-16). Everyone without an exception are called; some at the first hour, some at the third and some at the eleventh hour.

Blessed are the ones who are called at the first hour, because they have been granted 'bonus time' to spend with the Good Master. The labour in the vineyard becomes for them a fulfilling experience because they treasure the proximity of Jesus right here in this temporal world.

Jesus' mandate to preach the Good news to the ends of the earth has no exception. If one is not a missionary, he/she is either insensitive to the unconditional love and mercy of God or is too proud to admit the same. He/she has indeed turned a deaf ear to the call. St Paul in his letter to the Corinthians says "*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel*" (Col. 9:16).

Over the years, the role of laity has been understood as: pay, pray and obey. This understanding has not been completely wrong. It is our duty to support the church financially. It is crucial that we humble ourselves and plead before the Lord for we cannot do anything on our own and we ought to remain obedient to people in authority because Christ was obedient even unto death on the cross. But our role as laity does not stop here. We are called to tread deeper and farther.

The most essential duty of a Christian is to know, love and serve Christ. Every other duty stems from this. True knowledge of the person of Jesus is the beginning of it all. Once we know who He is and who we are, we will truly be drawn closer to Him. St Augustine *said*: "My heart will be restless until it rests in thee." The third step of serving the Lord is the natural response to the relationship we share with Him. This "serving" is what Jesus means when he gives His final mandate "Go and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15). In the gospel of Mathew Jesus says referring to the last judgment

*Jacob Jose is a design professional in the User Interface/Branding space, based out of Bangalore. He is married to Jino, a full time mother and they have 3 little children. He is a member of the Jesus youth movement and part of the catechetical team at St. Nibert Church, Kasavanahally. Contact him at [jekob@jekobdesignery.com](mailto:jekob@jekobdesignery.com)*

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Since we are unable to repay God for the great deeds He has dispensed to us, we are to dispense freely to “others.” Jesus said: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39). I would like to believe that Jesus is saying, “be concerned about my neighbor’s soul just as I’m concerned about my soul not perishing in hell” for the greatest of all failures is losing heaven.

## **1. THE CALL TO EVANGELIZE**

Evangelization is not a process of brain washing the other and driving home some ideology dear to me, screaming out loud in middle of the street with a microphone in hand. Instead it is the “expression” of the true awareness of God and self and the imminent transformation within. This expression is possible only to the one who “loves others as Christ loves” It is also, one’s loving response to the Father’s will that no one should be perished (2 Pet 3:9).

The laity has a unique and prominent role in the mission of the church - to evangelize. Having a family and having to toil hard to earn a living are additional responsibilities we undertake. These responsibilities do offer us great challenge, but at the same time are unique opportunities as missionaries.

St. Francis of Assisi said “preach always but use words if necessary”. Mother Teresa is a shining example of preaching without words. Our mothers too preach a silent sermon, sacrificing little by little her life nourishing the young ones, just as Christ did.

## **2. MISSION TO THE FAMILY**

The primary mission area of laity is family. The family offers far too many challenges that we often are tempted to quit rather than embrace it. The only role model before us is the Crucified Christ and the only rule is the rule of Love. St Paul in the letter to Ephesians reminds us: “Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her” (Eph 5:25).

Marriage is the divine call to a lifelong commitment to cohabit with the other despite any necessary common ground; for the sake of becoming ‘a gift’ to each other, just as Christ did. One ought to go through the painful process of “dying” on a daily basis in order to empty himself and be truly fruitful. Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24).

The only thing that is common between me and my wife is that we both do not have the habit of reading. In everything else we have contradicting opinions and tastes. We fall, fret and fight yet start all over again because at the altar we were entrusted to each other in a divine covenant to be Christ like and not quit. With the generous supply of

God's mercy family life is extremely fulfilling and joyful. As husband and wife, we enrich each other and grow as a single unit experiencing the true happiness and peace on a daily basis. Sincere perseverance despite growing challenges within marital covenant transforms the persons thoroughly to be Christ like. Such families are great source of encouragement for the generations to come.

### **3. RAISING CHILDREN**

The fruit of selfless love shared between couples is children. Children bring joy to every parent but at the same time demands an emptying similar to the one above. I must say the only private time my wife gets is when she is in the bathroom. Other times she is at work either for my children or for me.

No two children are the same though they are born of the same parents. No single tactic or diplomacy works for all but each one has to be dealt uniquely. Among the three children I have, the older one needs to be told things with the foot down. Second one needs little cajoling and petting to take a word seriously and with the third one, we are yet to figure out a tactic.

When children are young, we sincerely hope things would be better when they grow up. But we know as parents, no such time arrives. We are on our toes no matter what age they are in. Every age begets its own challenges. And after all this ordeal, as for parents we are only custodians of the children God gives us. Like Mary who raised the Son of God for a unique purpose, we too raise them for God and He does with them as He wishes.

The only model of instruction that works with children is a life of witness. They silently watch how we do things and emulate us. To a great extent what sticks on with them in the future is what they pick up from us at a tender age. Apart from creating a good, healthy atmosphere for children to grow up, and educating them, what must become the prime concern of every parent is the salvation of their children. We must be confident that if we introduce our children to the relating-interacting Jesus; they have it all and they will lack nothing in the days to come and to eternity. Remember Jesus said "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:33).

One child rightly cared for can bring many others to salvation when they mature. If we do that, our job as parents is well done.

### **4. WITNESSING AT WORK**

*Christifideles Laici* also notes: "It is necessary, then, to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrest and hopes, its defeats and triumphs: a world whose economic, social, political and cultural affairs pose problems and grave difficulties in light of the description provided by the council in the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (7). This, then, is the vineyard; this is the field in which the faithful are

called to fulfill their mission. Jesus wants them, as He wants all His disciples, to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Mt 5:13-14). But what is the actual state of affairs of the “earth” and the “world,” for which Christians ought to be “salt” and “light”? (CL. 3).

Having to work in the real world offers the faithful, tremendous opportunity as missionaries. They have access to where priests and the religious have limited access. If sensitive enough, he comes face to face with people who hunger and thirst for that ultimate Love which alone can satisfy. They unfortunately are ignorant or have their minds warped by worldly priorities. The laity awakened by the truth, propelled by His love, by the example of his life is truly effective in challenging people to rediscover God and be reconciled to His Church.

Humility, selfless love and availability are the keys to be effective instruments in hands of God. Jesus says in the gospel of Mathew “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:5).

Being in business, I get to acknowledge to my clients, my faith and reliance on God’s unfailing providence, its impact on my life and work. The conversations often tread beyond the official boundaries and linger in to the personal realm where life and relationships are discussed. My website does not hide my identity as a beloved of Christ and boldly acknowledge that I’m a pencil in the hands of God. In the 7 years of my business, I have never been without work and there has been not a single need that is not met though I never have surplus money in my bank account. Jesus says: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven” (Mt 10:32).

The uniqueness of a business built around Christ and Christian values, fares well in a world that is alien to such concepts. It’s “newness” often enthuse people to dialogue where one could share his dominating values and sow the seed of Christ. In such a business scenario, the dignity of the other person is upheld above all other worldly values. Money is a reward for sincere hard work and not the ultimate goal of business.

When we are driven by the Holy Spirit, we are raised above the law. Yet by being obedient to the authorities and by being honest in paying taxes, we impact the lives around.

Internet and mobile technologies throw open a unique world to the 21<sup>st</sup> century missionary to communicate beyond geographical boundaries. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, Instant Messaging tools like Skype, Gtalk etc are excellent platforms to engage with people. These tools offers us great opportunity if due respect is given and the dignity of the person is upheld at all times.

## **5. OTHER AREAS OF IMPORTANCE**

The role of the laity is to renew the temporal order. He must seek the Kingdom of God, engaging in the social, cultural and political affairs, ordering them according to the plan of God.

The world is where the laity fulfils his Christian vocation. Their vocation therefore is not to leave but to sanctify the world from within, like leaven, by fulfilling their particular duties - not merely in the anthropological or sociological reality, but also in the theological and ecclesiological reality, in the very sense that God handed over the world to them so that they may participate in the work of creation and free creation from the influence of sin.

Lay men and women may choose to work among teenagers, campus students, migrants, professionals, families and the aged; depending on the unique charism each has been given. People who are gifted with musical and artistic talents must use them to glorify God and to bring His kingdom down on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus said in “Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God’s saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. (Mt 6: 33)

The greatest service one could offer to our children is to give them an opportunity to experience Jesus as a living, interacting personal saviour and God whose love is unconditional and everlasting. And also to experience His Church as the ship they have embarked as they journey to the shore of eternity; where all the essential graces to strive forward are supplied limitlessly through Holy Sacraments. Laity therefore may entrust themselves to teaching catechism in their own parishes.

Driven by His love, people can dedicate themselves to care for the poor, marginalized and the downtrodden according to the measure of grace they have been given. In the gospel of Mathew, Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters; you were doing it to me” (Mt 25: 40).

Lay people also have the opportunity to be at decisive official positions to ensure social justice, not compromising Truth at any cost. Christian professionals especially in sports, music, art and cinema have a huge role to play as they have a big impact on common people. They could also present to their contemporaries, a transformed life style, challenging them to wiggle themselves out of the bohemian life styles they lead.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II writes about the two temptations laity have not always known how to avoid: “the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel’s acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world” (CL.2).

As laity, we are called and sent forth into the vineyard of the Lord as a “universal sacrament of salvation” to the people in the world. “The harvest is plentiful, but the



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workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Lk 10:2).

Evangelization is ineffective if it does not stem out from true love. The foundation is the desire to follow Christ, the decision to love Him above all and setting out to serve Him despite odds. Jesus asks us “Why do you stand here idle all day?” (Mt 20:6).

## CHALLENGES TO THE MISSION: THE INDIAN HORIZON

Helen Dantis, UFS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The current scenario of the life-and-death conditions of people obliges an interpretation of consecrated religious life in terms of its mission.<sup>1</sup> This is because consecrated religious by their particular form of consecration are necessarily and deeply committed to the mission of Christ; like him they are called for others. *Vita Consecrata* affirms: “The task of devoting themselves wholly to mission is therefore included in their call; indeed by the action of the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation and charism, consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus’ life.”<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the vows pronounced in public give the society a right to call vowed persons to accountability because the vows affect the person’s relationship to humankind.<sup>3</sup> Mission entails not merely one’s ‘doing’/ ‘action’ but also one’s ‘being’. While the ‘action’ of the consecrated religious is a reference to their way of life in the manner of the way of life of Jesus in his acts of healing, exorcising, resuscitating, performing nature wonders, embracing the unclean, their ‘being’ is an indication to following Jesus in his life-style – living as an itinerant sage by cutting oneself from home (Lk 9: 57), relativizing family ties (Mk 3: 31-35) in order to commit oneself fully to the pursuit of God’s will (Jn 4: 34) and the service of humankind (Mk 10: 45).<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, ‘being’ and ‘action’ are inseparably united in a dialectical relationship of mutual dependence: consecrated religious cannot be content with following Jesus merely by actualizing his way of life; they must also follow him by sharing in his mission.

We analyze four challenges that the consecrated religiousought to address in order to be effective in their mission, namely, excessive institutionalization, cultural alienation, social isolation and shallowness of God-experience. The analysis demonstrates that mission in view of the Kingdom of God demands addressing one’s tendency to distance oneself from the pursuit of establishing one’s own petty kingdoms and to assume the responsibility

*Helen Dantis, UFS, holds a Masters, Licentiate and Doctorate in Systematic Theology from the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium. She has taught theology in Institute Mater Dei, Goa and Sangam Goa. Currently, she is serves as the Registrar, vice Dean of studies and Professor at Institute Mater Dei, Goa. She is available at helendan@rediffmail.com*

of community building with special reference to the marginalized; the task is an effect of the personal relationship with Christ. The Latin root words of the term 'mission', *missio*, meaning 'sending' and *mittere* meaning 'to send', 'to throw', 'to hurl' definitely suggest that the one who binds her/himself to God/ Jesus ought to be prepared to be hurled into unjust, conflicting, agonizing and helpless situations. This is because the bonded person, as a consequence of his/her choice to continue the mission of Jesus, will be entrusted with a special task – it is a task, which others decline to carry out – to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, and to proclaim release to the oppressed (Lk 4: 18).

## 2. CHALLENGES TO MISSION

The term 'challenge' further explicates the sense of the term 'mission'. A 'challenge' is an objective that confronts one powerfully. Referring to an expression of 'face' in Immanuel Levinas,<sup>5</sup> Roger Burggraeve offers an elucidation in this regard. The 'face', according to R. Burggraeve, is the 'suffering other'; it is like the 'pebble in one's shoe.'<sup>6</sup> This is to state that the 'suffering other' causes a great deal of restlessness or challenges until he/she is attended to. This thought can be illustrated from the perspective of one of the leading theological categories of the Christian faith, namely, incarnation, a consequence of the restlessness/challenge the divine love experienced in the face of the 'suffering other.'

In the light of the foregoing discussions, we analyze four challenges a consecrated religious person ought to address in executing his/her mission for the Kingdom of God. The challenges relate to the presence of excessive institutionalization, isolation, alienation, and a lack of God-experience in the lives of consecrated religious; the challenges point to the presence of anti-Kingdom elements in CRL.

### 2.1. Growing Institutionalization

One of the commonly heard allegations regarding the consecrated religious people today is their passion for institutionalization. To institutionalize is to make something part of a structured and well-established system, which in itself is a positive factor. However, a passion for institutionalization has generated excessive institutionalization in CRL, which has devastating consequences. In order to understand the subject matter, we need to examine the meaning of the term 'institute'. It derives from the Latin word *institutum* meaning 'facility' or 'habit' and *instituere* meaning 'to build', 'to create', 'to raise' or 'to educate'. An 'institute' thereby is a permanent organizational body created for a certain purpose. CRL, in this sense is an institute; it acquires institutionalization due to its structured and well-established systems. One such system is its ministry demonstrated chiefly through gigantic institutions such as schools, hospitals etc. Consecrated religious today are so engrossed in the competent performance of their institutions. They run the risk of being identified with institutions that are highly institutionalized.

Excessive institutionalization and its negative impact are probably not a phenomenon of the recent years. A Catholic sociologist of the United States of America, Edward Wynne, in his attempt to investigate the reasons behind the amicable living of a group of nuns in his parish, also discovers through library research the dreadful things present in CRL.<sup>7</sup> He notes that in the eleventh century in particular, the pattern of monastic growth and dispersion impacted CRL so immensely that there came about a boom of monasteries. Furthermore, as the number of monasteries increased, their wealth also increased. The wealth of the monasteries came chiefly from the vast properties they had accumulated; as if to be considerably advantageous to monasteries, the church-related properties were exempted from taxes! The outsized properties required administrators, which generated role specialization, an attribute of communities and organizations in general. Roles were assigned for managing the internal and external affairs such as managing the property, procuring the daily necessities and the government of the institution. So much so, in the later stages of medieval life in England, in some monasteries, only twenty percent of persons associated with each monastery were full-pledged monks, regularly performing the Divine Office.<sup>8</sup> The description depicts clearly the impact of excessive institutionalization in CRL. In the opinion of Wynne, unwarranted institutionalization is the most dreadful thing of all – the ones choosing to abandon *Mammon*,<sup>9</sup> consenting to be seized by it totally.

In this connection, it seems appropriate to draw attention to a narration of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), a reformer from a non-Clunian monastery. He recounts the reality of the wealth and affiliates of the Clunian abbots that was truly abusive: “I have seen an abbot with sixty horses after him, and even more. Would you think, as you see them pass, that they were not fathers of monasteries, but lords of castles – not shepherds of souls, but princes of provinces? Then there is the baggage, containing tablecloths, and cups, and basins, and candlesticks, and well-filled wallets – not with the coverlets, but the ornaments of beds. My Lord Abbot can never go further than four leagues from his house without taking all his furniture with him, as if he were going to wars, or to cross a desert where necessaries cannot be had. Is it quite impossible to wash one’s hands in, and drink from, the same vessel? Will not your candle burn anywhere but in a silver or gold candlestick of yours which you carry with you? Is sleep impossible except upon a multicoloured mattress?”<sup>10</sup>

The Clunian abbot is an individual case of reference to attachment to personal possessions; similarly, the circumstances of CRL in the eleventh century are specific to that era; hence, they can be ignored. However, they claim our consideration for two reasons. The first rationale to consider them lies in the fact that individual or personal factors gradually form into a behavioural pattern or structure. In analyzing the impact of unjust social structures, social scientists report that “evil that emerges in the human heart is mediated through social structures that pattern human life as well as society.”<sup>11</sup>

Individual or stray cases, therefore, necessitate timely attention in order that the following of Christ to serve God and God's Kingdom is not thwarted.

Secondly, excessive institutionalization is linked to *Mammon*: institutionalization is linked to institutes and therefore to possessions. Possessions, besides being a contradiction to poverty-vowed CRL, are also an inconsistency with the way of life of their master, Jesus. He never gathered possessions, even the community of the Twelve he built was an itinerant movement. Besides, *Mammon* can have demoralizing effects on CRL such as, portraying the institutions themselves as the very objective of CRL,<sup>12</sup> considering vocation recruiting as a selection of professionals rather than assistance to young people to discern their call and respond to it, and ultimately, professionalizing even mission.<sup>13</sup> Above all, *Mammon* turns a blind eye to the disadvantaged, the poor. The medical institutes of the consecrated religious are never the last resort to the sick-poor when the doors of other medical institutes are closed to them for lack of financial support. The poor children cannot dream of receiving quality education in the educational institutes of the consecrated religious because they cannot afford to pay the school fees.

A. Kanjamala alerts the consecrated religious that in a condition where the oppressed and marginalized people challenge the consecrated religious to reach out to them, what is needed is not an image of the Church wherein the institutes of consecrated life run effective institutions and are caught up in professionalism, but rather there is need of "authentic consecrated persons who stand by and with the millions of poor and destitute ... irrespective of cast, colour, creed, sex."<sup>14</sup> This recounts to the consecrated religious that they are not proprietors of buildings, but rather their role is to reach out to people in need. An obsession of the consecrated religious for *Mammon* slackens off the 'bonding' created at the profession of the evangelical counsels.

The *Conference of Religious India* (CRI) opines that excessive institutionalization may fashion CRL into a body of rigid customs that is unmindful of the signs of the times. Due to institutionalization, it says: "The Christian radicalism of which the consecrated life ought to be an expression becomes difficult because in institutions, life may be excessively regulated by rules and rigid customs and the call to move into new areas of apostolic activities is often unheeded."<sup>15</sup> The consecrated religious ponder over the institutional weight that crushes 'the one thing' they ought to do/be: "Our ministries have become mere professionalism and not the continuation of the mission of Jesus. We are neither moved by the mystery of God, nor the misery of the people. We are busy doing something or many things but not the one thing that God wants of us – to be His Good News to the people."<sup>16</sup>

In being God's Good News to people, or in addressing the challenge of growing institutionalization in CRL, two proposals seem worth noting. Sandra Schneiders recommends that the consecrated religious refuse to undertake direct institutional responsibility in parishes, schools, hospitals, or other agencies run by the diocese, the

state, or secular organizations. She contends that such an option facilitates a wholehearted ministry rather than having to worry about keeping the project in existence financially or otherwise. It also creates avenues to leave the ministry when that becomes appropriate, without the fear that the people served will be abandoned.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Schneiders warns against a certain way of working with and in such institutions; nonetheless, it is indeed a valuable suggestion in addressing excessive institutionalization. The second proposal comes from an Indian SVD priest Augustine Kanjamala. While underlining the fact that the institutions owned by the Church/consecrated religious are a means to render effective and efficient service to society, he cautions that if these institutions do not bear witness to Jesus Christ, they will become mere means of power, money, and oppression.<sup>18</sup>

The above reflection guides us to focus not merely on excessive institutionalization but also on institutionalization that has lost its primary reference to Christ. When this line of thought is pursued, the focus is not on shunning institutions but on exploring and implementing measures to place the institutions of the consecrated religious at the service of the marginalized. Concretely, this means that the poor children do not hesitate to seek admissions in the schools administered by the consecrated religious and that they do not discontinue their education for being unable to pay the school fees. It also means that the sick-poor, in their inability to pay the medical bills, do not dither to seek medical assistance in the hospitals administered by the consecrated religious.

At the end of this analysis, we are not sure if we have a “positive alternative” to institutionalization that we would want for the consecrated religious people. Possibly, the tension of not owning institutions as an expression of a radical way of following Christ and the need to place the owned institutions at the service of the poor will continue to agitate those consecrated religious who re-define and re-orient themselves constantly. This being said, it can be ascertained that CRL, instead of establishing its own institutions,<sup>19</sup> builds communities of love and fraternity, settles itself voluntarily with those who are thrown on the margins and advocates on their behalf; it forms communities with them; educates them about their rights and organizes them to demand their rights. It means not just working for the poor, but freely choosing to enter the lives of the poor and share their poverty, insecurity, marginality, social discrimination, oppression, etc. In responding to these major concerns of the society, consecrated religious require openness to the dynamic instruction of the Holy Spirit; in brief, they need to restrain self-interest in the interest of the Kingdom of God.

## **2.2. Cultural Alienation**

Echoes of the consecrated religious’ recurrent cultural antagonism and alienation are customary today. In the Indian context, the cultural alienation of the consecrated religious has led to labelling them as ‘foreigners.’ It is indeed “tragic to be called a ‘foreigner’ in one’s own land,” laments J. P. Pinto.<sup>20</sup> The ‘foreignness’ of the consecrated religious in

their thought patterns, outlook and life-style can be traced back to their over-dependence on foreign funds on the one hand and on the other to the presence of foreign personnel in religious formation houses.<sup>21</sup> Two observations of the CRI assemblies shed light on the cultural alienation of the consecrated religious. The CRI remarks: “Religious life does not exist up in air. Just like a seed requires soil and moisture to germinate and grow, it needs to take root in a human environment. Unless and until the religious streamline their way of life according to the ethos and cultural milieu in which they live and ... adapt to some of the changing conditions in the world, religious life may become irrelevant.”<sup>22</sup>

This observation from the consecrated religious themselves is an endorsement to the necessity of their incorporation into the local culture; this is in view of effective mission. The second observation comes from the bishops of India. They point to a lack of commitment of the consecrated religious to inculturation, which in their view has led to the alienation of the consecrated religious in the country: “There can be no authentic Christian consecrated life without its being rooted in the Gospel and in the culture of the people. ... It is unfortunate that Christian consecrated life in India has largely ignored the religious traditions of this country. Many religious congregations that originated in India have taken inspiration for their spirituality and way of life more from the West than from India. As a result, they become alienated from this country.”<sup>23</sup>

From these observations, it is obvious that the consecrated religious ought to address the problem of their cultural alienation. For there can be no authentic Christian consecrated life without its roots in the Gospel and in the culture of the people.<sup>24</sup> The Second Vatican Council has challenged the consecrated religious towards an appropriate cultural adaptation and engagement.<sup>25</sup>

Cultural adaptation can be called inculturation.<sup>26</sup> The impact of inculturation has been elaborated by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation to the consecrated religious. He asserts, “A genuine inculturation will help consecrated persons to live the radical nature of the Gospel according to the charism of their institute and the character of the people with whom they come into contact.”<sup>27</sup> Living the radical nature of the Gospel is nothing but proclaiming the Word in word and deed – evangelization. An “authentic evangelization is possible only when the Gospel encounters the total living reality of the people or the total culture of the people, a process known as inculturation.”<sup>28</sup> The effects of cultural alienation are further divulged in the form of isolation.

### **2.3. Social Isolation**

The most dreadful consequence of cultural alienation is isolation. Consecrated religious are accused of a two-fold alienation. It refers to their life-style as a self-sufficient sector in the Church with insufficient communication with the local church and the community at large on the one hand and on the other their seclusion from the poor. The Indian bishops have substantiated the former by pointing to the tendency of the consecrated

religious to run parallel churches in the dioceses.<sup>29</sup> In the words of Cardinal J. L. Barrigan, a “parallel church is senseless, because it does not stem from Christ’s mission; it is not apostolic and does not give witness and it contradicts the unity of the Eucharist.”<sup>30</sup>

Consecrated religious in India have denied the indictment of the bishops. They argue: “We religious are not and do not wish to be a parallel church – this has never been our aim nor our claim. We do not wish to move in a direction all our own, regardless of the hierarchical leadership.”<sup>31</sup> They propose that they enter into the pastoral plan of the dioceses; furthermore, they have expressed their desire to be faithful to their prophetic call in particular within the Church: “But we wish to keep alive our call to be ‘prophetic signs’ to the people of God of what we as church can be and should be, despite the fact that many of us often fail to realize this call in an adequate manner.”<sup>32</sup>

The allegation of the bishops against the consecrated religious and the response of the consecrated religious to the allegation seem to indicate the fruitfulness of the tension between a ‘prophetic independence of CRL’ and a ‘CRL fitting in within the traditional ways of the Church’. What seems to be required of the consecrated religious is that they, while keeping to their charism, co-operate in the tasks of the Church; this is because CRL is an integral component of the life and mission of the Church.<sup>33</sup> This means that consecrated religious are not only called to live harmoniously in the organic communion of the Church, building authentic relationships of communion and collaboration with bishops, other institutes, the secular clergy and the laity, but they must also be an impelling sign of this reality: “In the church as communion – an image of the Trinity – the consecrated life is presented as a visible prophetic reminder of the communion which the whole church must already be living and which, at the same time is her ultimate goal.”<sup>34</sup> A prophetic CRL lived within the Church and in view of the Kingdom holds the church accountable to orient her tasks always in view of the Kingdom. In other words, in order for the CRL not to be a ‘parallel church’, the Church ought to be a reality that proclaims and lives the saying, ‘we are the church, living and working for the common goal of making Christ present to the world.’

Limitations and difficulties do not lack in the endeavour of the consecrated religious to be prophetic witnesses; besides, there is growing awareness and consequent desire for this commitment, which is inherent in the vocation to consecrated life: “Consecrated persons are becoming aware of ... their witness to the universality of the Gospel message, which goes beyond differences of any kind based on race, culture, tribe etc., and through their solidarity and availability to all, especially to the very poor. In such a manner, they create bonds between the church and those marginalized groups which frequently are not reached by ordinary pastoral activity.”<sup>35</sup>

The second level of alienation of the consecrated religious pertains to their isolation from the poor; it is a cause of great concern today since it operates subtly. The subtle ways relate to factors like their large properties often amassed in the name of the poor

while being least beneficial to the poor. Often, their works of charity to the poor are not more than ‘crumbs from the rich man’s table to the poor Lazarus’. In ‘venturing into new missions among the poor’ as they call it, their primary concern in reality is not mission, but rather economic or self-sufficiency. It is rather astonishing that in the Indian context, an approximate 1,00,000 consecrated persons render their services through education, health care, social work, family apostolate and many other charitable and developmental works; yet, they have not succeeded in addressing satisfactorily the concerns of the poor or the issue of poverty.<sup>36</sup> These facts raise a number of basic questions such as: Are the institutions of the consecrated religious and their works at the service of the poor? Do consecrated religious analyse the reality of poverty and the situation of the poor? Do they undertake appropriate actions as response to the reality of the poor? In this regard, St. Paul’s instruction to the Romans on the ritually clean/unclean food seems to communicate to the consecrated religious the significance of the Kingdom over above one’s search for personal security in mission. Paul declares that the “Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval” (14: 17-18). The consecrated religious are called to build the Kingdom of God and not to establish their own petty kingdom.

There is a growing awareness that the isolation of the consecrated religious from the poor has been the main cause for the decadence of CRL today. Chittister claims: “If religious life lasts, it will be because of the poor who will re-evangelize it – break open to religious the Gospel, teach them how little a person really needs to live, show them the beauties of life in the midst of its degradations.”<sup>37</sup> Füllenbach adds: “If religious communities are to survive... they must be on fire with Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of God which means living in solidarity with the poor and marginalized and proclaiming the Kingdom message of righteousness, peace and joy.”<sup>38</sup> Thereby, “the implementation of the option for the poor is the touchstone for whether religious communities will survive or not.”<sup>39</sup> In order to keep CRL alive with its vitality, the consecrated religious ought to be with and at the service of the marginalized.

Isolation from community is isolation from God who is Trinity and therefore, community. Isolation from the poor is separation from God; God takes sides with the poor and “he will listen to the one who is wronged” (Sir 35: 16). Consecrated religious will build communities to the extent they embody God’s love for humankind by living the values of the Gospel. In other words, they need to incarnate themselves into concrete conditions of this world. To that extent, they realize the Kingdom of God here on earth.<sup>40</sup> To sum up, CRL unconcerned about its context or culture is irrelevant at all times. The concerns discussed above, cultural alienation, isolation and even institutionalization seem to emerge from a deep-seated concern: lack of God-experience, which we discuss below.

## 2.4. Shallowness of God-Experience

In their commitment to God and service of the Kingdom, the consecrated religious may lack a deeper experience of God. In this regard, an observation of K. Kunnumparam concerning the church in India seems pertinent: “The vast majority of people in India probably do not look upon the Catholic Church as a community rooted in the experience of God. They admire the efficiency and spirit of service with which we run our educational and charitable institutions. They also appreciate (or hate) our missionary zeal. But few of them will turn to the Church for help in their quest for an experience of God.”<sup>41</sup>

The remark pertains to the consecrated religious as well. They are often seen as managers of efficient educational and charitable institutions rather than persons of God-experience; besides, their dwellings are not perceived as centres of spiritual energy.<sup>42</sup> The *Conference of Religious India* seems to echo this stance. It observes that the great number of God-seekers that come to India do not go to Christian institutions to find answer to their quest. Instead, they flock to Hindu or Buddhist ashrams and mutts. The CRI declares: “Our commitment to God is not such as to become an attraction for those who seek Him directly or indirectly.”<sup>43</sup> These hard-hitting realities do not invalidate the contribution of consecrated religious to the field of spirituality – preaching the Gospel in new areas, catechizing and building up Christian communities, opening of prayer houses where people of all denominations can go and have a God-experience.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, the challenging realities underline the need for an enhanced spiritual life of the consecrated religious that is linked profoundly to their suffering brethren.

An excessive routinization in CRL is noted as the chief reason for a shallow God-experience in the consecrated religious.<sup>45</sup> To excessive routinization could be added factors such as the disappearance of opportunities from the schedule of the consecrated religious for daily spiritual strength on the one hand and on the other their tendency to overload themselves with aggregation of objects. These indecisive orientations and inauthentic priorities (along with the tendency for immoderate institutionalization, cultural estrangement and alienation) not only impede a deep experience of God, but also generate indifference and dissatisfaction in the field of mission.

Describing an *experience of God* is said to be like trying to describe a rainbow to a blind person. Nonetheless, the experience is true, it is tangible. George M. Soares-Prabhu attempts an explication of it by terming it as an ‘experience of God as unconditional love’, which he calls the *Abba* experience.<sup>46</sup> He further demonstrates that the experience of the love of God as Father has its consequence – the experience of human beings as brothers and sisters. St. John has declared this indisputable relationship by asserting that “those who do not love do not know God” (1 Jn 4: 8). The Council has confirmed that the “relation of man and woman to God the Father, and their relation to their fellow human beings are linked.”<sup>47</sup> Jesus was encompassed with this two-fold relationship at his baptism

when in an act of great solidarity he identified himself with the sinful Israel (Mk 1: 9-11). In other words, as a consequence of his experience of God as Abba, he adopted “the life of an itinerant charismatic preacher who announced in word and deed (in miracles and in parables), the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, that is, of God’s long-awaited definitive act of salvation.”<sup>48</sup>

Conceivably, in order to carry out one’s mission effectively, one requires a deep experience of God, which the Second Vatican Council has stated in unambiguous terms: “Therefore in order that their members may first correspond to their vocation to follow Christ and serve Him in His members, their apostolic activity must spring from intimate union with Him.”<sup>49</sup> *Vita Consecrata* reiterates: “To carry out this service appropriately [they] must have a profound experience of God.”<sup>50</sup> A correlation between the interior life and exterior action or in other words, a harmonious blending of contemplation and action that corroborates the very objective of the existence of the consecrated religious as followers of Christ, can offer a solution to the problem of shallow God-experience in CRL.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This presentation has been an attempt to locate and address a few principal challenges the consecrated religious encounter in their mission especially in the Indian context. In this endeavour, as preliminaries, we have asserted that mission comprises two integral aspects, namely, ‘being’ and ‘action’. We have also claimed that a perception of this sort demands a voluntary hurling of oneself into tumultuous situations in order to bring calm or healing therein. It refers in particular, attending to human-made calamities that isolate and oppress a vast majority of humanity called the poor.

In pursuing their mission, consecrated religious find themselves swayed by tendency for a structural set-up that functions on principles of competency and proficiency rather than love and compassion. They also estrange themselves from their cultural context, the community they are called to serve and in particular the poor around them who need them most. While these tendencies are an outcome of a lack of God-experience in the lives of consecrated religious people, they also evidence the presence of anti-Kingdom elements operating subtly in CRL.

The challenges to mission can be addressed through a three-fold measure – a search for God, service to others [the needy in particular], and a life of fraternal communion, which the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* has enunciated in clear terms.<sup>51</sup> As a matter of fact, challenges continue as long as mission continues.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The expression ‘religious life’ when perceived from the view-point of the significance of the term ‘binding’ or ‘bonding,’ explicates clearly both the broader and deeper dimensions of *Consecrated Religious Life*. By means of insistence on personal

relationship with Christ and the task of community building, it claims an embracing not only of those within the frame of CRL (all those who profess the evangelical counsels as vows or promises), but everyone especially the disadvantaged, the marginalized, the poor. In other words, it is an invitation to exercise perfect charity by building communities especially with those who are excluded from community and at their service. This profound significance of the expression 'religious life', along with the significance of the expression 'consecrated life', guides me to employ the expression 'consecrated religious life' to designate the life of the evangelical counsels. This term will be abbreviated hereafter as CRL.

- <sup>2</sup> John Paul II, "Vita Consecrata: Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life (1966)," *Origins* 25, no. 41 (1996): no. 72. This reference will be hereafter cited as *Vita Consecrata*.
- <sup>3</sup> Joan Chittister, "Vows," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 1011.
- <sup>4</sup> For details see, Robert Walter Funk, *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
- <sup>6</sup> Roger Burggraeve, *Each Other's Keepers? Essays on Ethics and the Biblical Wisdom of Love* (Thrissur, Kerala: Mary Matha Publications, 2009), p. 18-99.
- <sup>7</sup> Edward A. Wynne, *Traditional Catholic Religious Orders: Living in Community* (New Brunswick, Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), p. 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Wynne, *Traditional Catholic Religious Orders*, p. 126-127.
- <sup>9</sup> In the Biblical literature 'Mammon' corresponds to greed, avarice and unjust worldly gain (Lk 16: 9-13; Mt 6: 19-21, 24). It is a subtle power operating within human beings for acquisition (Lk 12: 13-21) of security, success, power and prestige. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 16. *Mammon* is also a subversive conspiracy between power and riches that divides society into 'haves' and 'have nots'. Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996) p. 173-174.
- <sup>10</sup> James Coter Monison, *The Life and Times of Saint Bernard, Abbot Clairvaux A.D. 1091-1153* (Oxford: MacMillan & Co, 1868), p. 130.
- <sup>11</sup> Soosai Arokiasamy, "Sinful Structures in the Theology of Sin, Conversion and Reconciliation," in *Liberation in Asia: Theological Perspectives*, ed. Soosai Arokiasamy and Gispert-Sauch (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1987), p. 93.
- <sup>12</sup> Joe Mannath, "The Cost of Discipleship: The Challenges Facing Religious in India Today (Part I)," *Vidyajyoti* 64, no. 7 (2000): p. 502.
- <sup>13</sup> Kurien Kunnumpuram, "Towards a New Church in New Millennium: An Indian Reading of Ecclesia in Asia," *Mission Today* 2 (2000): p. 450.

- <sup>14</sup> Augustine Kanjamala, "New Evangelisation 2000 and the Future of Mission in India," *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest* 19 (1991), p. 59.
- <sup>15</sup> CRI (Conference of Religious India), Synodal Theme: Consecrated Life, Its Role in the Church and in the World. Summary Points for Special Consideration of the Synod (New Delhi: 1996), p. 12.
- <sup>16</sup> CRI, Report on CRI National Women's Sectional Assembly: "Women Religious Journeying in Solidarity: Discovering Our Communion with God's Creation" (Bangalore, 20-24 January) (New Delhi: 1999), p. 41
- <sup>17</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 86.
- <sup>18</sup> Augustine Kanjamala, "New Evangelisation 2000 and the Future of Mission in India," p. 49.
- <sup>19</sup> Seemingly, building communities with the poor may lead to set up institutions together with them and at their service. The Catholic Social Action and the Cardijn movement have been extremely successful in Europe in achieving such goals. However, one is not sure of the benefits of such endeavours in several Third World countries that battle for basic necessities. Even if institutions are set up in alliance with the poor, they may not toil at the service of the poor.
- <sup>20</sup> Joseph Prasad Pinto, "Mission as Inculturation," in *Dimensions of Mission in India*, ed. Joseph Mattam and Sebastian Kim (Bombay: St. Pauls, 1995), p. 149
- <sup>21</sup> Alphonse Inigo, "Seeking a More Authentic and Credible Life in India," *L'Osservatore Romano* 43 (26 October, 1994): p. 13.
- <sup>22</sup> Antony Poruthur, "Religious Life in the Third Millennium," in *Conference of Religious India* (New Delhi: 1997), p. 61.
- <sup>23</sup> CRI, *Synodal Theme*, p. 13-14.
- <sup>24</sup> Inigo, "Seeking a More Authentic and Credible Life in India," p. 13.
- <sup>25</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 3.
- <sup>26</sup> The Bishops assert that inculturation involves the whole of CRL: the charism that characterizes a vocation; the life-style; the manner of formation and forms of apostolate; prayer and liturgy; the principles of the spiritual life; and the organization of community and its administration. It is not merely a question of adapting certain customs, but rather a profound transformation of mentalities and ways of living. However, the norm and measure are not culture or social trends but Christ and his Gospel. See Synod of Bishops, IX Ordinary General Assembly, *The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World: Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City: 1994), nos. 94, 107, 93. This reference will be noted hereafter as *Instrumentum Laboris*. See also, George Basil Hume, "Cardinal Hume's 'Relatio ante Disceptionem'," *L'Osservatore Romano* 41 (12 October, 1994): p. 13

- <sup>27</sup> John Paul II, “*Vita Consecrata*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life (1966),” *Origins* 25, no. 41 (1996): no. 80.
- <sup>28</sup> Pinto, “Mission as Inculturation,” p. 149.
- <sup>29</sup> It seems important to note that the bishops not only put forth expectations to the religious, they also underline their Episcopal responsibility towards the religious. For details see, Hume, “Cardinal Hume’s ‘*Relatio ante Disceptionem*,’” p. 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Javier Lozano Barrigan, “The Bishop must Promote Consecrated Life in His Diocese,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 42 (19 October, 1994): p. 5.
- <sup>31</sup> CRI, Mission and Ministry, Report on the National Assembly (Aluva, 17-21 April) (New Delhi, 1998), p. 82.
- <sup>32</sup> CRI, Mission and Ministry, p. 83.
- <sup>33</sup> Manuel Ruiz Jurado, “Consecrated Life and the Charisms of the Founders,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives (Twenty-five Years After, 1962-1987)*, vol. 3, ed. Rene Latourelle (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 12-13.
- <sup>34</sup> Instrumentum Laboris, no. 57a.
- <sup>35</sup> Instrumentum Laboris, no. 73e.
- <sup>36</sup> CRI, Mission and Ministry, p. 83.
- <sup>37</sup> Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), p. 112.
- <sup>38</sup> Johannes Füllenbach, “Religious Life in the Year 2000,” *Theology Digest* 42, no. 1 (1995): p. 19.
- <sup>39</sup> Füllenbach, “Religious Life in the Year 2000,” p. 20-21.
- <sup>40</sup> Kurien Kunnumpuram, “The Church of My Dreams,” in *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, ed. Augustine Kanjamala (New Delhi: International Publications, 1996), p. 414.
- <sup>41</sup> Kunnumpuram, “Towards a New Church in New Millennium,” p. 444.
- <sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Trinity, “Experiential Knowledge of God and Sanny’asa,” *Indian Journal of Spirituality* 11, no. 2 (1998): p. 282.
- <sup>43</sup> CRI, *Synodal Theme*, p. 13.
- <sup>44</sup> Mannath, “The Cost of Discipleship,” p. 502.
- <sup>45</sup> Barbara Fiand, *Living the Vision: Religious Life in an Age of Change* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1997), p. 76-78.
- <sup>46</sup> George M. Soares-Prabhu, “The Jesus of Faith: A Christological Contribution to an Ecumenical Third World Spirituality,” in *Theology of Liberation, an Indian Biblical Perspective: Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., Vol. 4*, ed. Felix X. D’Sa (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, 2001). p. 281-282.

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<sup>47</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, 5

<sup>48</sup> Soares-Prabhu, "The Jesus of Faith," p. 282.

<sup>49</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, no. 73.

<sup>51</sup> John Paul II, "Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Asia*," *Origins* 29 (1999): p. 357-384.

## TOWARDS A RELEVANT MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY FOR THE “YEAR OF FAITH”

Jose Kumbloickal, MSFS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

On 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2011, Pope Benedict the XVI declared the year 2012 to 2013 as “Year of Faith.” The context in which he announced this was the concluding Eucharistic celebration of the meeting organized by the Council for the New Evangelization. In his address the Pope said that the year would be “a moment of grace and commitment to a more complete conversion to God, to strengthen our faith in Him and to proclaim Him with joy to the people of our time.”<sup>1</sup> This “Year of Faith” also coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the II Vatican Council and in the words of the Pope this year would bring a new evangelization “especially in traditionally Christian countries, which have become increasingly *indifferent* and *hostile* to the mission of the Church.”<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the new evangelization and the “Year of Faith,” it is appropriate for us to delve deep into the significance of the mission of the Church and the spirit that shapes such mission, which we can call the missionary spirituality. In this article we shall first understand what we mean by missionary spirituality, then proceed to the analysis of different models of mission in the New Testament and conclude by visualizing a new model of missionary spirituality from the mission and ministry of St. Francis de Sales.

### 2. MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

It is difficult to define “spirituality” as it deals with a non-empirical dimension of human existence. Moreover today we come across different “spiritualities” according to the taste and preference of everyone. In the broad sense of the term, “spirituality” can mean human beings’ response to a deep and mysterious yearning for self-transcendence felt in the innermost core of one’s self and the spirit of surrender which accompanies it. This relentless quest for transcendence and the union with the ultimate, felt in the deepest recesses of human existence is the fundamental basis for any spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

*Jose Kumbloickal, msfs, holds a Licentiate Degree in Systematic Theology from the Pontifical University, Salamanca, Spain and a Doctorate in Spiritual Theology from the Faculty of Theology, Burgos, Spain. He is a regular visiting professor in universities in India and abroad. At present he is professor and the designated Rector of Tejas Vidya Peetha, Kengeri, Bangalore. He has authored a few books and several articles. He is available at josekumblooly@hotmail.com*

Louis Bouyer, in his work *Introduction to Spirituality*, considers that the concept of different spiritualities is a deviation and mistaken notion of spirituality. According to him there is only one Catholic spirituality, which is worthy of that name, as presented in the Gospels.<sup>4</sup> This spirituality is derived from the life, teaching, preaching and actions of Christ. However we can speak of different “spiritualities” as expressions of the experience of Christ from different human perceptions. When we speak of “missionary spirituality” or “mission spirituality” we understand it as the spirit with which Church engages in missionary activity, trying to be faithful to the Spirit of Jesus. It cannot be reduced to the spirit of missionary activity alone, because action and being are intrinsically connected. Therefore, missionary spirituality also refers to the self-awareness of the disciples of Christ; an awareness that gives them the true identity and sense of mission. The missionary activity then, is an outward flow of this identity that comes from the belongingness to the Master.

Missionary spirituality can have different emphasis according to the self-awareness of the Church at a given time and according to diverse Ecclesiologies. In the history of the Church we come across diverse missionary approaches and attitude of the Church towards other religions and other civilizations. The Second Vatican Council brought about a radical change in the approach and attitude of the Church towards other religions and the understanding of the secular reality of the world itself. This came about as the result of a changed Ecclesiology which evolved during the Council because of the action of the Holy Spirit and by the willingness of the Church to read the signs of the times and respond to them positively. Accordingly the Council decrees in the Document on Missionary Activity: “All Christians by the example of their lives and the witness of the word, wherever they live, have an obligation to manifest the new man which they have put on in baptism... In order to bear witness to Christ, fruitfully, they should establish relationship of respect and love with those men; they should acknowledge themselves as members of the group in which they live, and through the various undertakings and affairs of human life they should share in their social and cultural life. They should be familiar with their national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them.”<sup>5</sup>

Minority communities in general have a tendency of being very self-protective and defensive. One reason for such tendency is the need for self preservation and to inculcate among their members a sense of identity. Church as a minority in the territories of mission often adopted similar attitudes of self defence and even of belittling other religions. Correcting such tendencies and upholding the new vision of respect and understanding for other cultures and religions reflected in the Second Vatican Council. Pope John Paul II in his message on Mission Sunday 1979 stated the following: “Mission is never destruction but instead taking up and fresh-building. Missionaries will have to take up an attitude of attentive and respectful reflection, taking care never to suffocate, but on the contrary to save and develop those goods that have accumulated in the course of centuries-old traditions.”<sup>6</sup>

When we speak of missionary spirituality today, we assume the openness the Second Vatican Council brought about in its documents towards other religions and cultures. The Post-Conciliar declarations on interreligious dialogue bear witness to the emergence of this new missionary spirituality we discuss in this article. The Papal Declaration "*Dominus Iesus*" (On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church) in its article number 3 states the following: "In considering the values which these religions witness to and offer humanity, with an open and positive approach, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions states: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men." Continuing in this line of thought, the Church's proclamation of Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), today also makes use of the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue certainly does not replace, but rather accompanies the *missio ad gentes*, directed toward that "mystery of unity," from which "it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit." Inter-religious dialogue, which is part of the Church's evangelizing mission, requires an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth and with respect for freedom."<sup>7</sup>

### **3. SOME MODELS OF MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY FROM THE GOSPELS**

The roots of missionary spirituality spring from the person, action and words of Jesus. In the New Testament we come across different models of mission of which we shall discuss in this article three models.

#### **3.1. Universal Mission Model<sup>8</sup>**

At the time of his departure from this world, Jesus gave this mandate to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:18-19). Every baptized person is called to share in the mission of announcing the Kingdom of God which Jesus came to establish. The mandate for the same we see in all the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. This universal mission command of Jesus is reiterated by the Second Vatican Council in its Decree on Missionary Activity: "Since the whole church is missionary and the work of evangelization is the fundamental task of the people of God, the Sacred Synod invites all to undertake a profound interior renewal, so that being vitally conscious of their responsibility for the spread of the Gospel, they might play their part in missionary work among the nations."<sup>9</sup>

Obviously this commissioning of Jesus raises a problem, because all the baptised may not be in a position to put into practise this mandate. This is a call for direct evangelization where one is called to preach the Gospel in all circumstances of one's life. This work of

direct evangelization in the Church is carried out by missionaries and missionary congregations that assume pioneering evangelization as their charism. There are also lay missionary movements like the Neocatechumenate communities that also share in this task of direct evangelization.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.2. Particular Mission Model<sup>11</sup>**

The mission mandate of Jesus has different implications. We discussed above in the universal mission model the difficulty for all the baptized to share in the direct evangelization. However, proclaiming the Gospel can also be done, not only by direct preaching but also by one's actions. In this particular model of mission we see Jesus responding to the concrete needs of the people with whom he came across in life: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Lk 7:22).

Christians all over the world are known for their charitable works. It was their concern for each other that attracted others to become disciples of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> By being sensible to the needs of others and reaching out to them in help Christians fulfil the mission mandate of preaching the Gospel. This way of announcing the Gospel and fulfilling the mission mandate of Jesus is carried out in the Church in an institutional manner by way of charitable works by dioceses, parishes and religious communities and it is also fulfilled by Christians in their own individual capacity of reaching out to the poor and needy.

### **3.3. Personal Mission Model<sup>13</sup>**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus elucidates a model of preaching the Gospel which can be practised by everyone. This is the model of witness of life: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14). Even if one does not have the possibility of preaching the Gospel by words or deeds, as we have seen in the other models, by witness of life it is possible in all circumstances of life. In captivity or under persecution no one can prevent a Christian from being "the salt of the earth and light of the world." This model of mission is the birth right of every Christian and this witness is what distinguishes the Christians from others. The Church recognizes that this witness of life can be the only possible form of evangelization in many circles of the world today: "The first form of witness is *the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community*, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary, who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary."<sup>14</sup>

## **4. A RELEVANT MISSION MODEL FROM SALESIAN PERSPECTIVE**

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), who lived in the last part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, is known as the "Apostle of Chablais." His missionary

zeal coupled with systematic mission preaching won for the Church the conversion of the people of the entire territory of Chablais in Savoy. We shall briefly discuss the missionary method of this "gentleman saint" who won the hearts of the hardcore Calvinists and brought them back to the Catholic faith.

The Chablais, a section of Savoy on the south shore of Lake Geneva, had been invaded about sixty years earlier by militant Protestants from Berne, who took over the western part of it as well as the Pays de Vaud and the Pays de Gex, on the north shore of the lake. Catholic worship was outlawed, and churches were burned or razed when not appropriated for Protestant use. Religious orders were suppressed and priests expelled. Thirty years later the duke of Savoy, by giving up his claim to Vaud, had got back the Chablais and Gex, but on condition that the Catholic religion remains forbidden. In 1589 the Protestants of Berne again invaded the Chablais but they were repulsed, and by the Treaty of Nyon it was agreed to allow the reestablishment of Catholic worship in the province and to restrict Protestant teaching to three towns, of which Thonon, the capital, was not included.<sup>15</sup>

Towards the end of 1589, the Duke requested Bishop Granier of Annecy to send 50 priests to re-establish parishes and start catholic worship. The Bishop sent 50 priests with Francis Bochiet as their leader. Within 2 years the Calvinists from Geneva attacked Chablais and occupied Thonon, the principal town of Chablais. They banished the 50 priests and burnt the churches. This uncertainty of claim over Chablais was finally put right when King Henry IV of France abjured Protestantism and offered truce on 31st July 1593. Again the Duke requested Bishop Granier to send priests to restart catholic worship in Chablais.<sup>16</sup>

When the Duke of Savoy requested Bishop Granier to send more missionaries, the bishop knew that his clergy would be reluctant to respond positively to the request of the Duke. The memories of being chased away, presbyteries pillaged and burnt down were vivid in the minds of the priests. When the bishop presented the request of the Duke before the council of priests, the only one who responded positively to take up the challenge was Francis de Sales. While responding to the request of the bishop he quoted Luke 5:5: "At your words I shall cast the nets." Though, his father, Monsieur Boisy, would not give his consent to such a proposal, because he saw in the failure of his son the reputation and honour of the family at stake, Francis was firm and determined. Francis de Sales undertook a four-fold preparation for the challenging mission of Chablais and we shall see the relevance of such mission strategy for a missionary spirituality for our times.

#### **4.1. Spiritual Preparation for the Mission**

Success or failure in mission depends on a series of factors. The mission ultimately belongs to God and the chief agent of missionary activity is the Holy Spirit. Awareness of this fact and preparedness for the intervention of God in our mission is the first step towards the success of any mission. In the four-fold mission preparation of Francis de Sales, the first and foremost was the spiritual preparation. Francis de Sales asked the

Canons, fellow-priests and religious in the Diocese for their prayers and blessings. He spent a few days in intense solitary prayer with fasting, vigils and mortification, waiting for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Before the Apostles began their mission, the Risen Lord had given them the instruction not to depart from Jerusalem till they received the power from above (Acts 1:4). Spiritual preparation for mission is vital. Jesus himself prepared for his mission with a forty days fasting and prayer in the desert (Lk 4:1-2). One of the often quoted maxims of Francis de Sales is: "Human spirit fails, unless the Holy Spirit fills." Human planning and preparation for mission without solid spiritual moorings can result in temporary results and lack of perseverance.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.2. Intellectual Preparation for the Mission**

An intelligent study of the mission situation and the concrete knowledge of what awaits a missionary in the new territory are essential for a successful mission. Francis de Sales was of the opinion that "knowledge is the eighth sacrament for a priest." He knew that the success of protestant reformation was due to, a great extent, the ignorance of the catholic priests. Francis de Sales began to study the differences in doctrine and worship between the Catholics and the Protestants. He was well informed of the false propaganda by the Calvinist leaders against the catholic priests depicting them as sorcerers and evil men. He began to study the apologetic literature of famous defenders of Catholic Doctrine like *The Controversies of Bellarmine*.<sup>19</sup>

To confront the challenges of mission, intellectual and reflective preparations are necessary. Human actions are intertwined with a philosophy of life and cultural moorings. History is the mother of all teachers and those who do not study history repeats history. Francis de Sales studied the interplay between politics and religion in the Protestant Reformation. This knowledge gave him greater advantage in his open dialogue with Calvinist leaders in Thonon. Francis employed the method of winning the leaders by way of convincing arguments and once they were conquered, the followers followed.

#### **4.3. Communitarian Preparation for the Mission**

The success or failure of missionary work greatly depends on the success or failure of team-work. Jesus knew this valuable lesson and so he prepared his disciples to venture into the mission territory two by two (Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1). Francis de Sales knew that the challenging mission of Chablais could not be conquered by individual effort, but by team-work. He accepted the companionship of Louis de Sales, his cousin, who was also a priest in the Diocese of Annecy. He took with him an enthusiastic young man, Roland, to assist him in the difficult task of traversing the inaccessible areas of Chablais. Francis shared with them his missionary plan and took them into confidence.

The missionary spirituality should fall back always on the wisdom of the Master. Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples and wished that the same unity be the sign by

which the world would know that they were his disciples (Jn 17:23). "Communitarian way of committing oneself to mission is a witness to authenticity of living as what one preaches will have to be seen to be practised; it is a means of preventing oneself from being a victim of self-righteousness and arbitrariness; it is a school for living in communion which is one of the powerful core messages of the Good News."<sup>20</sup>

#### **4.4. Psychological and Mental Preparation for the Mission**

Jesus was very realistic with the demands of discipleship. He prepared the disciples for the worst when he told them: "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). Failure is the stepping stone towards success. Mental preparedness for the mission is an essential ingredient for success. Francis de Sales prepared himself psychologically and mentally by making himself familiar with the physical and mental hardship one would face in the Chablais mission. He consulted the surviving members of the previous team to Chablais; he spoke to the elderly priests in the diocese; he took advice of wise people and, above all, he surrendered himself to the providential care of the Lord of the Missions.<sup>21</sup>

Francis de Sales knew that he would be deprived of the comforts of life and that he would be exposed to threats to his own very life. He mentally prepared himself to face rejection and calumny. It is often the fear of the loss of comfort and security that prevents one from opting for the mission. Francis de Sales sets before us the challenging example of the Gospel demand of the mission that only the grain of wheat that dies will produce fruits (Jn 12:24). Missionary spirituality should nurture itself from the example of the Master who willingly died to self to rise again to the new life in the Kingdom of God.

### **5. MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY AND MISSIONARY APPROACH**

A missionary is supposed to be the living Gospel. The oft-quoted axiom: "Action speaks louder than words" is true in the life of a missionary. People who come in contact with the missionary also come to know who Jesus is by his life witness. For this reason it is important that we discuss the relationship between missionary spirituality and missionary approach.

#### **5.1. Gentleness in Personal Contact**

Francis de Sales is known as the "Gentleman Saint." His advice on gentleness is the following: "The holy Chrism, used by the Church according to apostolic tradition, is made of olive oil mingled with balm, which, among other things, are emblematic of two virtues very specially conspicuous in our Dear Lord Himself, and which He has specially commended to us, as though they, above all things, drew us to Him and taught us to imitate Him: *Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* Humility makes our lives acceptable to God; meekness makes us acceptable to men."<sup>22</sup> Francis de Sales always believed that the best way of proclaiming the Gospel was through one's gentle and patient dealings with the other. Francis could remove the

numerous prejudices the Calvinists had against Catholic priests by his gentle and loving dealings with them.

Francis was very tender in his reception of sinners and apostates who had returned to the faith. He would greet them with the warmth of a father, saying, “Come, my dear children, come, let me put my arms around you.”<sup>23</sup> Later, as the bishop of Annecy, he had publically announced that he would be available to hear the confessions of the most wretched and marginalized sinners of his diocese. For this purpose he had a confessional made and placed at the entrance of the cathedral where he spent hours listening to the poor sinners who would not be received by other priests because of their unhygienic conditions and foul smell.<sup>24</sup>

Missionary method and missionary spirituality are inter-connected. Francis de Sales’ most famous saying, a “spoonful of honey can gather more flies than a barrel full of vinegar” bears witness to his personal holiness that radiated gentleness and charity towards neighbour.

## **5.2. Innovation and Creativity in Mission**

Francis de Sales is known as the patron of the journalists and writers. During his Chablais mission, when he faced stiff resistance from the Calvinists and when they refused to listen to him, Francis turned to innovative ways of proclaiming the Catholic doctrine. He wrote down the instructions he wanted to give to the people, copied them and circulated these teachings slipping them under the doors of Calvinist homes. Slowly people began to read these “pamphlets” of homilies, explanation of Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist and other sacraments and they came out to talk to him. He broke the ice and gradually won the confidence of the people.

To be innovative and creative is an essential part of the missionary spirituality for the New Millennium. Many of our missionary endeavours end up in failure when we do not know how to respond to hostile and unknown situations. To be creative and innovative is also to allow the Spirit of God to take control of the situation.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Missionary Spirituality in the context of New Evangelization calls us to be open to the Spirit. Francis de Sales’ missionary method holds good, very specially in the context of the Old Continent where faith is fading and there is a general disenchantment with Church, Catholic doctrine and practices. Francis de Sales places before us a new form of missionary spirituality which gives primary importance for personal transformation and personal witness. As religious congregations, religious communities and consecrated individuals, we are called to participate in the renewal of faith and witness of life in this year of faith and New Evangelization. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has published recently concrete guidelines for all the faithful in different states of life to participate actively in this “Year of Faith.”<sup>25</sup> Pope Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, tells us

that “faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.”<sup>26</sup>

Francis de Sales sets before us the example of joyful discipleship, when he accepted the challenging mission of Chablais, knowing all the complications involved in it. Taking risk for the Lord, joyfully accepting the sacrifices for the mission and proclaiming the Lord boldly with personal witness are some of the salient features of the missionary spirituality from the Salesian perspective. This “Year of Faith” will find it relevant the missionary method of Francis de Sales, who was a pioneer in New Evangelization in the Old Continent in the beginning of the Seventeenth Century.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1104073.htm>, standing, 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2012, 11.01 A.M.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Jose Kumblolickal, “Spirituality”, in *ACPI Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* Vol. 2, ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), pp. 1326-1327.
- <sup>4</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, tr. Mary Perkins Ryan (New York: Desclee Company, 1961), p. ii.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 11. (Reference to Vatican II Documents are from *Vatican Council II – The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Bombay: St. Paul’s Publications, 1995). We see in this article a clear openness from the part of the Church towards other cultures and religions which reflects an attitude of respect and willingness to learn, which was quite rare before the Second Vatican Council.
- <sup>6</sup> John Paul II, Mission Sunday Message, 1979, in *Omnis Terra*, 103 (1979), pp. 378-381.
- <sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Dominus Iesus*, No. 3, Vatican, 2000. ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html), standing 15-04-2012, 10.00 A.M).
- <sup>8</sup> Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:36-49; Jn 20:19-23; Acts 1:6-8
- <sup>9</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 35.
- <sup>10</sup> The Neocatechumenal Way, also known as the Neocatechumenate, NCW or, colloquially, The Way, is a group within the Catholic Church that focuses on the formation of Christian adults. It was formed in Madrid in 1964 by Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández and received approval from the Holy See in 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> Mt 11:2-6; Lk 7:18-23
- <sup>12</sup> Acts 4: 32-37. “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the

goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44-47).

<sup>13</sup> Mt 5:13-16; Mk 9:50; Lk 14:34-35

<sup>14</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed biography of St. Francis de Sales, Cfr: *Work of St. Francis of Sales* in 26 volumes (1892–1932; Eng. tr. by H. B. Mackey and others, 6 Vols., 1883–1908); selected letters tr. by E. Stopp (1960). The most important early Life is by Ch. Aug. de Sales, his nephew, *De Vita et rebus gestis...Francisci Salesii* (1634); see also J. P. Camus, *L'esprit du Bienheureux François de Sales* (6 vols., 1639–41; abridged in 1727, Eng. tr. 1910 and 1952). Modern studies include F. Trochu, *Saint François de Sales* (2 Vols., 1946) and E. J. Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales* (2 Vols., 1966) and English biographies by E. K. Sanders (1928), M. de la Bédoyère (1960), M. Trouncer (1963), and R. Murphy (1964). See also R. Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales and the Protestants* (1962) and M. Henry-Couannier, *Francis de Sales and his Friends* (1964); H. Bordes and J. Hennequin (edd.), *L'Univers Salésien: S. François de Sales hier et aujourd'hui* (1994).

<sup>16</sup> “St. Francis de Sales – A Missionary Leader”, Working Paper II for the General Chapter of the MSFS, Rome, 2007(Availabe at [www.fransalians.com](http://www.fransalians.com)).

<sup>17</sup> Many biographers of St. Francis de Sales opine that it was this spiritual preparation that gave him the inner energy and perseverance in the difficult and risky mission of Chablais. Please refer E.J. Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales: L'Homme, la Pensée, l'Action*, Vol. 1, Paris: Guy Victor, 1966; A. Ravier, *Saint François de Sales*, (Lyon: Éditions de Chalet, 1962).

<sup>18</sup> “St. Francis de Sales - A Missionary Leader”, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Lajeunie, Vol. 1, pp. 241-243.

<sup>20</sup> “St. Francis de Sales - A Missionary Leader”, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> François Corrigan, *La spiritualité de François de Sales. Un chemin de vie*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989), pp. 47-49.

<sup>22</sup> Francis de Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life* (Bangalore : SFS Publications, 1995), pp. 66-67.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Pierre Camu, *L'Esprit du B. François de Sales Évêque de Genève* Vol 1., (Paris : Gervais Alliot, 1939).

<sup>24</sup> Lajeuni, Vol. 1. pp. 484-492.

<sup>25</sup> This communication titled “Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is a pastoral explanation of the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* of Pope Benedict XVI and it was promulgated on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. The objective of this communication is made clear in the following statement: “Thus, the following recommendations for the *Year of Faith* desire to aid both the encounter with Christ through authentic witnesses to faith, and the ever-greater understanding of its contents” (Introduction).

<sup>26</sup> *Porta Fidei*, 7.

## **RADICAL LIVING OF RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSION: SOME MODELS**

**Mathew Perumpil, MI**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

I feel honored to share with you my personal journey in religious life and some models of radical living of religious life in the present context of the world and the mission of the Church. I have been privileged to enter into a special ministry of caring and supporting the HIV infected and affected persons and my experiences of being in this ministry for more than a decade led me to share some reflections that might be of help to think about the radical nature of our call as religious. In my journey through this ministry I have been privileged to meet some courageous, pioneering and prophetic religious, mostly women religious and they have been an inspiration and motivation for me to continue to live my religious life more meaningfully. I hope to share with you in this paper these living models of radical living of religious life with the hope of awakening your spirits as religious who are called to live our life radically in a constantly changing milieu of the world.

### **2. SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF OUR CALL**

Call to religious life is one that leads us to live in communion with others and to a deeper immersion into the world and not a call to live in isolation. Even contemplative form of religious life is special call to be united with the world, bringing the joys and sufferings of the world in prayer and contemplation into the presence of God. Apostolic religious life demands much more an active involvement in the life of people as Jesus and his disciples did making them aware of God's ever present creative activity in the world.

The example of the call of the disciples by Jesus reminds us of some of the fundamental aspects of our call as religious. First of all, it was Jesus who initiated the call. He called us and we responded. Therefore this call is a gift initiated by God. Just like any other gifts, our duty is to slowly unpack the beauty of this precious gift and savor the beauty of this special gift offered to us by our Master.

*Mathew Perumpil is a member of the Order of Camillians. He is a pioneer in the HIV/AIDS ministry of the Church, coordinating and animating Faith based Organizations to provide Care, support and Treatment to HIV infected persons. He is also the Technical Consultant to the Government of Karnataka on HIV Care and Support issues and currently, the Director of the Camillian Pastoral Health Centre and Sneha Care Home, Carmelaram, Bangalore. He is available at mperumpil@yahoo.com*

Secondly, this call is also a call to attach ourselves to the person of Jesus Christ. When He asks us, “follow me” (Mk 1:17), it is an invitation to know Him, love Him, belong to Him and become part of Him. It is an ongoing process of bonding with Jesus so that we can offer ourselves completely through him to the Father. This bonding and attachment is essential so as to present the living Christ to the world today. In other words, a true religious manifests to the world who Jesus is through his or her life.

This call also brings an extra ordinary demand for wholehearted response. Leaving everything behind, the early disciples followed Him. They abandoned their familiar and comfortable world and relationships (attachments) to total surrender to the unknown world the Lord was leading them to.

Finally, the call is about the mission . Jesus came to the world announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He called his disciples to continue this mission today. He called to participate with Him in the ongoing mission of God revealing and announcing the Good News to people especially when they are bowed down by the “bad news” of the present world and reality.

### **3. THE CONTEXT OF LIVING OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY**

Our call to religious life is challenged in many ways by the changing world scenario. Religious life needs to take stock of the world today in order to make an effective and radical following of Christ that will be responding to the needs of the time. Incarnation of God always happen in that particular context and if we become relevant in the plan of God, we need to have a better understanding of what the world is today and only then can we shape our response to this call.

Today we need to understand as religious the impact of globalization and global economy. We see more and more uneven distribution of wealth and new forms of “marginalized “ people emerging all over the world. Modern technologies bring the world and people so close to each other, yet very far from one another. We see more and more society being fragmented by ethnicity, race, caste, gender, culture and religion. All of these lead to conflicts and even violence and disintegration of people and communities. We see the traditional values of families eroded and emergence of dysfunctional families. We see on the one hand beautiful efforts of women empowerment, but the same time more and more women get disempowered in new forms and ways. We see the constant threat to nature and exploitation of natural resources in an alarming manner that would endanger the very existence of humankind. We see the erosion of traditional values that in many ways sustained our societies. And all of these realities challenge the Church and the way we as religious are called to live our call to radical following of Christ.

### **4. BECOMING PIONEERS AND PROPHETS TODAY**

I have been privileged to walk with a special group of marginalized people in my ministry as a Camillian Religious. Although it was not a personal choice I made, I felt God

who called me into religious life put me there as His instrument to bring healing and hope to the HIV infected and affected persons. Once I embraced this mission I felt the hand of God supporting me all the way not only to touch and heal those who came to our centre (Snehadaan, Bangalore), but also to inspire individual religious and congregations to spread across the country to reach out to a most vulnerable and marginalized section of our society. Today, Catholic Church, especially through the religious congregations, are the largest care provider network in our country, witnessing powerfully the “Good News” of our Lord and master, Jesus Christ. In a recent remark by the government officials in Karnataka, they said if it was not by the Christian missionaries, we would not have been able to care for such large numbers of HIV infected persons in our State. I feel that this statement is an affirmation of our living of religious life in a radical way, responding to the needs of the present time.

I have been also privileged to meet many religious who are living their lives prophetically and radically in the world today. As I introduce them my hope is that they may not only inspire us but also provoke us to think out of our boxes to dream a radical living and following of Christ.

#### **4.1. A Prophet in Pattaya**

I met Sr. Michelle Lopez in Bangkok in a meeting of Catholic organizations working in the field of HIV/AIDS. This was a meeting attended by UN and other major organizations and many spoke of their involvement in the prevention, care, support and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Among all the famous and influential speakers in the meeting this frail, unassuming, simple religious nun of the Good Shepherd Congregation stood out for her courageous voice and powerful witnessing of Christ’s love to the broken lives of thousands of women and girls in prostitution. Not only that she challenged the world about the perception of normalizing prostitution with jargons like “sex work,” but also confronted our passivity and conformist attitude towards this issue that haunts the lives of millions of women around the world. Her voice was heard more powerfully because of the work she and her sisters were doing in the sex capital of the world, Pattaya. They have opened a house in the middle of the “brothel of the world” to welcome the women and girls who are in prostitution, offering them a safe place to be themselves and reminding them how God embraces them without condemning and judging. Through her life and example she became the voice of the prostituted women (a term she feels adequately reflects what the women go through) and challenges the governments, media and the Church to stand by these women who are victims of an unjust and unfair world. When asked about where did she get this courage, she just smiles and refers to the One who has called us and strengthens us as religious.

#### **4.2. Angels among Devadasis**

From Bangkok to the HIV capital of India, Mudhol, in Bagalkot district of Karnataka. Bagalkot has the “distinction “ of being the HIV capital of India and home of the Devadasis,

I met a group of sisters who are working among the children of Devadasis, trying to provide them education and alternate skill training to these young girls, who otherwise would be initiated into sex work by their own kith and kin. There are no Christians in the area and they travel 40 kilometers to attend the Eucharistic celebration. Yet the enthusiasm and commitment I saw in them touched me deeply and knew instantly the power of being called to transform the lives of marginalized people. They are working in one of the most unfavorable environments you can imagine, and yet the joy of working for the Lord is evident in their lives.

#### **4.3. Witnessing from Within: Becoming the Yeast**

Today religious congregations are blamed for their enormous structures that in some way becomes counter witnessing especially in countries like India. Very often in the changing socio economic milieu of our country these structures become our liabilities as well. It is in this context that I had the opportunity to collaborate with a group of courageous sisters who were willing to explore new ways of living our vocation to reach out to the most marginalized. Government hospitals are the last option one would choose for health care. Such is the condition of many of our public health facilities. Imagine then an HIV patient getting any sort of care from these institutions. They are usually shunned away as outcasts and untouchables. These sisters were daring to enter into the heart of this system and offer to take care of the HIV patients by admitting and meeting all their health care needs. What was started as a novel initiative is now being watched by the national government as one of the best ways of integrating HIV care in the regular health system. The sisters were not only changing the attitude of the hospital staff and authorities, but also are inspiring policy makers to adopt such models across the country. The sight of religious sister within the District hospital, working and caring for the most vulnerable and outcast is perhaps the most powerful form of evangelization today. Through these novel and daring initiatives, we are telling the world who Christ is and how he brought the “Good News” to the lives of people.

#### **4.4. The Persistent Widow of the Bible**

Sr. Mary reminds me of the widow in the Bible who through her persistence got the attention of the judge and justice. Most of her religious life, Sr. Mary has been with the marginalized and poor, especially in the rehabilitation of the lepers in Bangalore. She fights for them and for the welfare schemes and state support these poor people are eligible for. All of us know that there are many welfare programmes available for the poor and marginalized. Sr. Mary becomes the voice of these people and she doesn't rest until they get their legitimate demands. Every morning you can see her leaving convent to the various government offices and pleading for these people. All these officials relent finally seeing her persistence. She won't leave the office until the request is granted for the poor. One of the officers told me that he had to approve the request because he was afraid she would faint in the office as she was not taking any food while waiting for the

request being processed. Again what touched me is the awe and appreciation these government officers had towards the Sister who was selflessly working for these poor people. What more witnessing do we need to remind them who inspires this Sister other than Jesus Christ who was the champion of the poor and marginalized?

## **5. REFLECTION BASED ON THESE MODELS OF RADICAL RELIGIOUS LIVING**

Radical following of Christ is fundamental to the call and response of religious life. Each religious receives this call to follow Christ radically and the response is expected from each individual religious. Interestingly most of these responses are individually initiated and when it is enjoined with the charism of the Congregation, it truly becomes and contributes to the mission of the Church. This way the charisms in the Church grow and become relevant to the changing times.

As pioneers, radical following requires some level of becoming adventurous in the mission of the Lord. Those who are awakened by the needs of the people, venture into ministries that are difficult and tough, but eventually become powerful tools of evangelizing and witnessing to the liberating love of Christ.

As prophets, religious are called to live their lives radically becoming the voice of God. This voice needs to be heard if God's reign has to happen. All the models we have seen loudly proclaim the voice of God challenging the powerful and mighty and advocating for the poor and the voiceless.

If religious life has to be relevant today, we have to find new ways of evangelizing and announcing the Kingdom of God. Following the invitation of the Lord to become the salt of the earth and light of the world, each religious has to discover the radicality of his or her call. The individual responses then become the collective witnessing of the religious life today.

Radical following of Christ helps us to identify the people at the periphery. Often people on the periphery get unnoticed and neglected. Following Jesus' example, we need to notice those who are marginalized in one way or another. It is the Christian way, and it is clearly the mandate from the Lord, who always stood by the poor, sick and marginalized.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Sharing and listening to these examples of people who live their religious lives radically not only inspires us, but also provokes and challenges our imagination to shape the future of religious life. We need to take a hard look at how we individually respond to our call and how we can rejuvenate our life as religious. It can also guide and help us in making our charisms and thus our Congregations relevant to the context of today. It will also inspire and challenge young people to follow the Lord more closely in religious life.

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Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944

E-mail: [sjbancmf@gmail.com](mailto:sjbancmf@gmail.com) / [sanyasac@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasac@gmail.com)

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