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Religious Wonder

Newness of Pope Francis

Proclamation of the Word

Synodality with Other Religions

Exposition of Romans 12:1-2

New Wine in New Wineskins

(Outgoing-Pilgrim Church with a Difference)

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Editorial

RELIGIOUS WONDER & BEATIFIC VISION

Tasting a Slice of Heaven on Earth

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

This injunction of Jesus is unequivocal. Becoming like children is not an optional criterion; it is a must. It is one of the most important prerequisites to enter into life. Becoming childlike is our project. What do we need to do to become like children? To become like children is to begin to see life with the eyes of wonder. In the first four lines of his paradoxical poem, “Auguries of Innocence,” William Blake writes about the magic of childhood:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower;
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

1. Wonder, a Primary Emotion

According to Plato and Aristotle, philosophy begins in wonder. Descartes speaks about six primary passions: wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness. In *Passions of the Soul*,

Descartes writes, “Wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider with attention the objects that seem to it unusual and extraordinary.” According to St. Thomas Aquinas,

Two things ... contribute to wonder...: the first of which is that the cause of the things which we wonder about is hidden; the second is that in the thing which we wonder about there appears to be something which seems to be the contrary of what it ought to be, on account of which we wonder (*Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia*, q. 6, art. 2).

2. Religious Wonder

We are familiar with the famous saying of Immanuel Kant: “Two things fill my mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” Kant refers to two types of wonder: wondering at the vast external creation and wondering at the internal, depth dimensions of human mind. Besides these two types of wonder, St. Augustine in *The City of God* articulates wonder in relation to miracles. Religious wonder is somewhere in between the twin-wonder mentioned by Immanuel Kant and the supernatural wonder or miracles as described by St. Augustine. According to N. Molloy OP, “The Christian approach to God has its roots in this attitude of religious wonder” (“The Fruit of Greenness,” *In Christo* 8/2 [1970]: 53). “The foundation grace of a deep spiritual existence is the gift of religious wonder. Baptism transformed us from children of wrath into children of wonder” (ibid., 54),

3. Religious Wonder Finds Fulfilment in Beatific Vision

Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa contra Gentiles* writes:

[Hum]an has a natural desire to know the causes of whatever he[/she] sees; and so through wondering at what they saw, and not knowing its cause, [wo/]men first began to philosophize, and then they had discovered the cause they were at rest. Nor do they cease inquiring until they come to the first cause.

Although Goethe considers wonder to be “the highest that [hu]man can attain,” those who believe in God consider beatific vision of God, or finding rest in God for our restless souls as put by Augustine, is the ultimate goal of wonder. We wonder because we are limited. There is so much beyond our scope, our grasp, and our comprehension. We don’t understand, but we aspire. We fly towards, we dash towards that mysterious unknown. This longing, restlessness is sometimes satiated by glimpses of eternity. Those brief moments of beatific vision is wonder finding fulfilment; otherwise wonder remains a quest.

Thomas Aquinas received a revelation while celebrating Mass in 1273 that caused him to stop writing and leave his work, *Summa Theologiae*, unfinished. After a long threadbare analysis of diverse issues concerning philosophy and theology, the angelic doctor commented: “all that I have written and taught seems to me like a piece of straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me.”

4. Sacramental Imagination

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi* (2022) uses the word “wonder” seven times. In fact one of the purposes of writing the letter is to “rekindle our wonder for the beauty of the truth of the Christian celebration” (DD 62). Pope Francis considers wonder to be “an essential part of the liturgical act” (DD 26). He invites us to have childlike humility when we approach the Eucharist. He states, “Since the gift of the mystery celebrated surpasses our capacity to know it, this effort certainly must accompany the permanent formation of everyone, with the humility of little ones, the attitude that opens up into wonder” (DD 38).

It is paramount that we realize that the Eucharist is partaking in the heavenly worship and hence develop a fertile sacramental imagination to get “astonished at the beauty of the Liturgy” (DD 65). Sacramental imagination is at the same time affective-bodily and transcendental-celebrative; it goes beyond cerebral and

involves the whole person. It encourages us to wonder at the closeness of God, to wonder at the ability to hold the Lord of the universe in our hands and receive him in our hearts. This imagination can be further fuelled by encouraging audio-visual representations such as use of dance, music, songs, drama, symbolic depictions, altar decorations, floral arrangements, etc., during the Eucharistic celebrations.

5. The Impact and Effect of a Beatific Vision

Religious wonder, nourished by a lively sacramental imagination, can lead to moments of beatific vision. In those moments, although the laws of nature do not change and material/physical transformation does not take place as in the case of miracles, these moments have deep impact on the one who experiences them. These moments can become life-transforming. We experience these moments in a liminal stage or symbolic stage. We are neither there nor here; it's like being caught in between, in suspended animation, neither in heaven nor on earth. However, we know the direction; the movement is not towards the base and lower, but towards the nobler and loftier. We are miraculously at the peak, the summit of our earthly existence. We are not in heaven, but we feel like being in heaven. It allows us to taste a slice of heaven here and now.

This experience is more passive than active; it is giving oneself, surrendering, prostrating, worshipping, allowing ourselves to be worked upon, and being transformed. St. Ignatius in his *Spiritual Diary* describes it with a Spanish word: *acatamiento*, which is a combination of humility, submission, reverence, obedience, and love. Fear of the Lord, the beginning of wisdom (cf. Prov 9:10), can be compared with the same feeling. After undergoing this experience, we become awestruck, bewildered, intoxicated. It is as if we are taken hold of by a strong power and transported to new heights, heights hitherto unknown and unfathomable to us. The powerful experience generates within us feelings of elation

and strong assurance of God's accompaniment and at the same time that of humility realizing our creaturely unworthiness. It is a pure gift. No other feeling can match its efficacy. We need time to let the feeling sink in; being drawn towards the inner core of life's mystery. The feeling is somewhat described in the words of a hymn: "Lord you have touched my heart and left me speechless; silence is all I need to sing your praise."

These moments make us capable of looking within and looking outside with a new vision. This experience makes us aware of who we really are, what is the purpose of our life, and what is our destiny. This experience is the most foundational experience. Whether we call it a mystical experience or any other experience, it should be an experience of every believer. It must be desired and must be sought after by everyone. This experience turns the mundane world into heaven. It also leads to real repentance and conversion of hearts and minds. This is where the healing and wholeness happens; Shalom is restored; we are transported back to paradise in the company of God and total harmony with the entire creation. We stop surviving and begin thriving. It is a baptismal experience. Like Jesus, we become capable of mindful, soulful, and embodied immersion into the dark reality of the world, in order to transform it with the power of the Spirit.

6. Indescribable Expressed in Symbolic Language

The experience of religious wonder leading to beatific vision first of all cannot be grasped and then it cannot be expressed in discursive language; we need symbols, poetry, and images to express the inexpressible experience. No wonder the first utterance of the human mentioned in the Bible was not a rational philosophical statement, but a love poem springing spontaneously from the exuberant heart of Adam, contemplating his beloved companion (cf. Gen 2:23). Although at one level, as Wittgenstein mentions, "language goes on holiday" (*Philosophical Investigations* [1953], para. 38), on the other side, we discover

the “logic of superabundance” as Paul Ricoeur puts it (*Figuring the Sacred* [1995], 281). The experience is creative; it generates poetic flourish, overflowing devotion, bursts of worship, and generous outpouring of heart.

This experience could be exemplified in the experience of the three apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration. It must have been a magnificent moment for them. Before they could grasp the experience, it was over. They wanted to hold on to it, build the tabernacles, but that was not permitted. Tabernacles have to be made in the heart. The experience had to be pondered and not immediately shared, but it had to be narrated later on to the posterity as Peter did in his letter (2 Pet 1:16-18).

Religious language is symbolic. Other-worldly realities are made accessible to us through symbols. Symbols cannot be understood rationally; we need awe and wonder, a childlike faith to grasp the surplus of meaning, incomprehensible mystery being unveiled through the instrumentality of symbolic representation. This is “under-standing” attitude that looks up to receive divine light and not “grand-standing” attitude of the proud looking down on the reality, as if it has nothing to surprise us.

Conclusion

Becoming childlike is our project in life. Unfortunately as we grow older we lose the grace of wondering and marvelling. According to Mother Melanie Doyle OSU, “Christ had a childlike heart, a humble heart, a deep, perceptive, and alive heart” (“Worship through Wonder,” *Worship* 34/8 [1960]: 442). Let us become Christlike; let us not lose the childhood grace of wonder; let us not be hard-hearted and dead to wonder. Let us instead experience “the power of symbol” (DD 26) and “become once again capable of symbols” (DD 44). Asian consciousness with its religious and mystical bend can become a great asset in this direction.

Dr. Edwin RODRIGUES SJ

THE NEWNESS OF POPE FRANCIS

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Abstract: Pope Francis has brought in freshness in theological thinking through his interreligious engagements, especially through his encyclical *Fraternity and Social Friendship (Fratelli Tutti)* in 2020. The author with his great expertise in Asian theologizing points out how the key elements in this social encyclical are in consonance with the themes developed in Asian theology. The author states that Pope Francis is approving what the Asian theologians had been saying for some time now.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Fraternity, Social Friendship, *Fratelli Tutti*, Asian Theology.

Introduction

In his latest encyclical *Fraternity and Social Friendship (Fratelli Tutti)* Pope Francis outlines his vision of a new world – a cosmic-human community. One could say that he has been preparing for it through some of his earlier documents¹ – excluding his first encyclical *The Light of Faith* which may have been largely prepared by Pope Benedict XVI. In this article I propose to highlight its key elements in the context also of his earlier documents and then show how they are consonant with the themes developed in Asian theology. We Asians are happy with this development and feel encouraged to go ahead in our action and reflection.

¹ These are *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013) – JG; *Praise be to You* (2015) – PY; *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (2019) – HF; *Beloved Amazon* (2020) – BA; *Fraternity and Social Friendship* (2020) – FSF. Hereafter references to these documents will be by the short forms and numbers.

At the very beginning of the encyclical Pope Francis acknowledges the inspiration of St. Francis of Assisi and refers to his visit to Sultan Al Malik in Egypt during the third Crusade in view of bringing peace. Pope Francis also refers to his encounters with Patriarch Bartholomew of Greece and the Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayyeb whom he met in Abu Dhabi in 2019 as well as suggestions from various people and groups from all over the world. It is clear therefore that he sets himself in a dialogical context. As a matter of fact he says in the course of his introduction: “Although I have written it from the Christian convictions that inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will” (6). These are encouraging words for us Asian.

1. Dark Clouds over a Closed World

After the world wars of the 20th century, there is a rising ‘myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive’ economic and political nationalism on the one hand, while there is a sort of cultural globalization thanks to the media. “This culture unifies the world, but divides persons and nations” (12).² There is increasing individualism. In a growing market economy, people are seen simply as consumers. In a post-modern world there are new forms of cultural colonialism, facilitated by artificial intelligence. Individualism and competition make sure that there is no plan that seeks to bring everyone together and build community. “Persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly” (18). During the Corona virus pandemic, for example, old people were left to die in many places (19).

Economic growth does not necessarily mean human development. Wealth may increase, but so does inequality. Human rights, solemnly proclaimed, are not equal for all. A profit-based

² Instead of paraphrasing the text of the Pope, I am frequently using his own words for the sake of accuracy and brevity. Numbers within brackets without any other indication refer to the document under study.

economic model does not hesitate to exploit, discard, and even kill human beings (22). Women do not have the same dignity and rights as men.³ Slavery may have been formally abolished. But the trafficking of humans for cheap labour has taken its place. War, terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution, and many other affronts to human dignity are prevalent. The Pope has often referred to this as a ‘Third World War’ fought piecemeal (25). In such a situation, the tendency is to build walls to protect oneself – walls in the heart, walls on the land – that leaves a legacy of fear and mistrust. There is no longer a sense of belonging to a common human family and there is no shared map which can guide us to build community. What we need at the time is a ‘culture of encounter.’

Modern digital communication is rapid and reaches everywhere. But there is no more privacy. Because it tends to be impersonal, it can become irresponsible. The communication is not human, so it does not lead to a development of relationships. When one gets addicted to digital communication, one may lose touch with physical reality and live in an imaginary virtual world. The communication is so rapid that there is no time for patient listening or thinking. There is a lot of data, but no wisdom.

Pope Francis, then, reflects on the parable of the Good Samaritan and suggests that “the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions” (66).

2. Social Friendship

The Pope then goes on to develop a vision of ‘social friendship,’ which goes beyond individuals loving each other. “A love capable of transcending borders is the basis of what in every city and country can be called ‘social friendship’. Genuine social friendship within a society makes true universal openness possible” (99).⁴

³ Cf. JG 212.

⁴ Pope Francis has a section on ‘Social Dialogue as contribution to peace’ in JG 238-258. This links ‘social friendship’ and ‘dialogue’ in FSF 199-221.

We often speak of fraternity, equality, and liberty. These are intimately related. Without true fraternity, liberty becomes individualism, and equality becomes more an association than a real fellowship. I think that ‘social friendship’ is a new term coined by Pope Francis. It goes beyond individualism, love for the other, etc., and focuses on universal community. “Unless the rights of each individual are harmoniously ordered to the greater good, those rights will end up being considered limitless and consequently will become a source of conflicts and violence” (111).

It is in the context of social friendship that Pope Francis evokes the ideal of solidarity. Solidarity finds its expression in service. It seeks out to help the poor and the vulnerable. It is not ideological, because we do not serve ideas but people. “It means thinking and acting in the name of community” (116). Solidarity is also shown in the way we use and share the goods of creation (117).

3. The Social Role of Property

A second important element of Pope Francis’ teaching is that the universe is God’s gift to all people. Therefore individual or group/national ownership of the world’s goods is not absolute. The Pope says: “The right to private property is always accompanied by the primary and prior principle of the subordination of all private property to the universal destination of the earth’s goods, and thus the right of all to their use” (123). This principle applies also to nations and to regions within them and their resources. A foreigner who migrates either because of persecution or looking for better prospects in life must be welcomed. “For a real and lasting peace will only be possible ‘on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family’” (127). We often speak of individual human rights. Social groups also have similar rights.

4. Migrants

While unnecessary migration has to be avoided, “our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate” (129). Our welcome must be gratuitous (139). Nations should be ready to offer them full citizenship. Migrants come with their own culture and can thus be a cause of an enriching intercultural encounter. The Pope cites the example of the contribution of the Latinos in the USA and the Italians and Jews in Argentina. The Pope also evokes the encounter between the East and the West, which can be mutually enriching. “The West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism. And the East can find in the West many elements that can help free it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline” (136).

5. A Better Kind of Politics

The practice of social friendship needs a better kind of politics at the service of the common good. Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes, or a liberalism that serves the economic interests of the powerful. In both cases, it becomes difficult to envisage an open world that makes room for everyone, including the most vulnerable, and shows respect for different cultures. When individuals exploit politically a people’s culture by appealing to the basest and most selfish instincts for their own personal advantage or continuing grip on power that is ‘populism.’ ‘Liberalism’ ignores human weakness and envisages a world that follows a determined order and can solve ensuing problems by itself. The marketplace does not solve its own problems without human intervention. A healthy politics should not be subject to economics but aim at promoting the common good based on healthy moral principles in the long term without stifling human creativity.

6. Social and Political Charity

When people join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the “field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity, which involves working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity” (180). Social charity makes us love the common good in its social dimensions. “Good politics will seek ways of building communities at every level of social life, in order to recalibrate and reorient globalization and thus avoid its disruptive effects” (182). “Charity is at the heart of every healthy and open society.” When accompanied by a commitment to the truth, it fosters universality, preserving it from being confined to a narrow field devoid of relationships. Without truth, emotion lacks relational and social content. “Charity’s openness to truth protects it from a fideism that deprives it of its human and universal breadth” (184). “It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know the person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering. One can help a person cross a river or build a bridge. A person can be offered something to eat or a job” (186). “Politics too must make room for a tender love of others. . . Amid the daily concerns of political life, the smallest, the weakest, the poorest should touch our hearts: indeed, they have a right to appeal to our heart and soul” (194).

7. Social Friendship and Dialogue

We had seen earlier that Pope Francis speaks of ‘social friendship’ as a means of building and promoting community. When we see the word dialogue in a Papal document we may jump to the conclusion that it refers to interreligious dialogue. As a matter of fact, Pope Francis speaks about, what we can call, social dialogue of which interreligious dialogue is also a part. Such a dialogue is open to all people of good will, even atheists.⁵ He even uses a

⁵ Such a broad view of dialogue can be seen also in *The Joy of the Gospel* (JG), 238-258 and in *Praise be to You* (PY), 164-201.

new phrase to indicate it: ‘the culture of encounter.’ We have seen this phrase earlier too.⁶ Dialogue sets itself between selfish indifference and violent protest. It can be between people, cultures, and also religions and ideologies.

Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to be open to the possibility they have something to contribute to the common good. It involves openness and a readiness to struggle together in the search for truth and its most effective expression. When dialogue is not focused on truth, it can lead to relativism – everything goes. Social dialogue is “primarily the search for the solid foundations sustaining our decisions and our laws. . . . As it peers into human nature, reason discovers universal values derived from that same nature” (202). “Once those fundamental values are acknowledged and adopted through dialogue and consensus, we realize that they rise above consensus; they transcend our concrete situations and remain non-negotiable” (211). I think that the Pope is referring here to what we consider natural law. Such universal moral principles can be embodied in different practical rules, thus giving space for dialogue.⁷

8. A Culture of Encounter

Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter, capable of transcending our differences and divisions.⁸ This means working to create a many-faceted **polyhedron** whose different sides represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching, and reciprocally illuminating one another, even among disagreements and reservations (215).⁹ A culture of encounter

⁶ See BA 36-38.

⁷ Pope Francis has been talking of dialogue in many of his documents. Cf. PY 164-202; JG 238-258.

⁸ See BA, 36.

⁹ Polyhedron seems to be a favourite image of Pope Francis. It is a geometric figure whose many sides can be of different shapes, but harmoniously united together. So it stands for harmony in pluralism. The Pope, for instance, speaks of the ‘Amazonian polyhedron’ (BA 29).

“means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes every one. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life” (216). A culture of encounter also takes into account people who disagree. We also have to consider the different worldviews, cultures, and lifestyles that coexist in society, especially that of the poor (219). Sometimes agreement may demand that we renounce something we hold dear in order to arrive at a consensus. Kindness facilitates the quest for consensus (224). Sometimes, the quest for encounter may follow a moment of conflict. At that time we have to search for truth and justice, tempered by mercy and forgiveness. What we search for is not uniformity, but community in difference. Building social friendship must particularly attend to the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized in society. Such an option for the poor should lead us to friendship with the poor (234).

9. Forgiveness, War, and the Death Penalty

Social encounter is not a given, but has to be achieved. There may be situations of conflict. We should certainly defend ourselves. But at the same time we should not give way to anger, but seek to overcome evil with good, renouncing anger and a spirit of revenge. Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict, but is achieved *in* conflict, resolving it through dialogue and open, honest, and patient negotiation. Forgiveness does not ask for forgetting. The extermination camps under Hitler and the atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the slave trade or the various persecutions should not be forgotten so that they can serve us as reminders of what can go wrong in social relationships. Forgiveness does not mean impunity.

If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples. We need to ensure the uncontested rule of law and tireless recourse to negotiation, mediation, and arbitration (257). Besides, the

development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons have granted war an uncontrollable destructive power over great number of innocent civilians as well as creation. So the theories about a 'just war' may no longer be applicable today. "Never again war!" is the Pope's cry (258).

Finally the Pope strongly affirms: "Today we state clearly that the death penalty is inadmissible" and must be abolished (263). It is no longer a healing process, but vindictive. Even a life sentence is a secret death penalty (268).

10. Religions at the Service of Fraternity in Our World

The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society. Here Pope Francis quotes the Bishops of India: "The goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love" (271).¹⁰

The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is by his very nature the subject of rights that no one may violate. The effort to seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims, helps us, the believers of the different religions, to recognise one another as travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters.

The Church esteems the ways in which God works in other religions and rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions... But while others drink from other sources, for us the well spring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From it, there arises, for Christian thought and for the action of the Church, the primacy given to relationship, to the encounter with the sacred mystery of the other, to

¹⁰ The Pope speaks of dialogue extensively in JG 238-258 and PY 164-201.

universal communion with the entire human family, as a vocation of all (277).

In the document on ‘Human Fraternity’ signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb of Egypt in Abu Dhabi (2019), there is a surprising but clear affirmation, for the first time in a Papal document, that all religions are from God.

Freedom is the right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created humans beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives.¹¹

Consequences, obviously, follows such an affirmation, one of which is dialogue. “Dialogue among believers means coming together in the vast space of spiritual, human and shared social values and, from here, transmitting the highest moral virtues that religions aim for.”¹²

One fundamental human right must not be forgotten in the journey towards fraternity and peace. It is religious freedom for believers of all religions. We saw this affirmed in the document ‘Human Fraternity’ quoted above. That freedom proclaims that we can build harmony and understanding between different cultures and religions (279). A journey of peace is possible for all the humans together. Its point of departure must be God’s way of seeing things. God’s love is the same for everyone, regardless of religion. Even if they are atheist, his love is the same (281). We believers need to find occasions to speak with one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. Violence

¹¹ HF.

¹² HF. It is interesting to note that the sentence above is followed by the comment: “It also means avoiding unproductive discussions.” (!)

has no basis in our fundamental religious convictions (282). Terrorism is deplorable. But it is not due to religion, even though terrorists instrumentalize it. It is due rather to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression, and pride (283).

11. Lessons Learnt

At the conclusion of this presentation, I ask myself: 'What is new in this pastoral discernment of Pope Francis?' I have picked up nine elements. (1) The insistence on 'social friendship' and a 'culture of encounter' that goes against superiority-inferiority complexes at whatever level. (2) The affirmation that the universe is God's gift to all and has to be shared, going against the usual insistence on private property. (3) As a consequence, the migrants have a right to migrate when they really need to move because of persecution or lack of opportunities. (4) The important role of politics. (5) The Asian theologians have been saying for some time that the goal of mission is the Kingdom of God rather than the Church, all the religions being joint pilgrims towards the Kingdom. The call to universal communion is affirming this perspective. (6) This goes with the idea that all religions are gifts of God and can facilitate divine-human encounter. This was first clearly affirmed by Pope Francis in the document on 'Human Fraternity' signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi, (Feb. 4, 2019), though Asian bishops and theologians have been saying this earlier. This favours also the affirmation of religious freedom. (7) A wider sense of dialogue: Interreligious dialogue is one element of 'the culture of encounter' or social dialogue and friendship. (8) A clear stand against war today and the death penalty. (9) A practical affirmation of pluralism symbolized by the image of the 'polyhedron' and the fact that the Pope claims inspiration, not only from different Conferences of Bishops and theologians but also from a Hindu (Gandhi), a Muslim (the Grand Imam of Egypt), and two protestants (Desmond Tutu and Martin

Luther King), besides two Catholics (St. Francis of Assisi and Charles de Foucault) – unusual in Papal documents.

12. The Church and the Kingdom

In this section I would like to elaborate on lesson no. 5 above. The story of Indian/Asian theology goes back to the early years of the 20th century.¹³ Here I would like to concentrate on its theology of mission in a general way. Christianity came to Asia through missionaries, starting with St. Thomas the Apostle, who came to India. There may have been some continuing link with Syria. But missionaries came in greater numbers reaching out to all across Asia with the colonialists in the 16th century. Their goal was to proclaim the good news that Jesus is the saviour and convert people to Christianity and build up the Church.

But in the 20th century, there was a growing realization that there may be good and holy elements also in Asian religions and God may have been reaching out to the Asians through them. This is not the place to offer the story of the development of the theology of religions in Asia. I shall only mark a few milestones. The idea that the Church must engage the other religions in dialogue in view of collaboration in promoting the values of the Gospel began with the Second Vatican Council. In its document on other religions, the Council said:

The Church, therefore, urges her sons [and daughters] to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.¹⁴

¹³ See R.H.S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Chennai: The Christian Literature Society, 1969) for India. For Asia, I am keeping in mind mostly the documents of the FABC which go back to the first general assembly of the FABC in 1974. The FABC papers are available on www.fabc.org/fabc_papers.

¹⁴ See Austin Flannery, O.P. (ed.), *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 668. The document was published in 1965.

In 1974, the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conferences met for their first general assembly in Taipei, Taiwan and their deliberations were on Evangelization. They described it as a dialogue of the Gospel with the poor, the cultures, and religions of Asia. With reference to the religions of Asia they say:

In Asia especially this [evangelization] involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples.

In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations. How then can we not give them reverence and honour? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?¹⁵

Some years later, the Theology Advisory Committee of the FABC developed a set of *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue*. Agreeing with the positive appreciation of the Asian religions by their Bishops in their own words, they continue:

This positive appreciation is further rooted in the conviction of faith that God's plan of salvation for humanity is one and reaches out to all peoples: it is the Kingdom of God through which he seeks to reconcile all things with himself in Jesus Christ. The Church is a sacrament of this mystery – a symbolic realization that is on mission towards its fulfilment (LG 1:5; cf. BIRA IV/2). It is an integral part of this mission to discern the action of God in peoples in order to lead them to fulfilment.

¹⁵ Gaudencio Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia, I* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997), 14.

Dialogue is the only way in which this can be done, respectful both of God's presence and action and of the freedom of conscience of the believers of other religions [cf. LG 10-12; *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (ES) 41-42; RH 11-12].¹⁶

The phrase to note here is 'the kingdom of God' of which the Church is seen as the sacrament. St. John Paul II, picks up this vision in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer*:

The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all [hu]mankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in [hu]mankind's journey toward the eschatological Kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of Gospel values (GS 39). The Church contributes to [hu]mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children.¹⁷

The Bishops from the Philippines, at the Asian Synod, said, "In the social context of the great majority of Asian peoples, even more use should be made of the model of the Church as servant, a co-pilgrim in the journey to the Kingdom of God where fullness of life is given as a gift."¹⁸

Please note that the Church is called a co-pilgrim with other religions towards the Kingdom of God. Let me bring to your attention the shift that has taken place in the process that I have described here. To start with, mission was proclamation of the Gospel in view of converting people to join the Church. Then a distinction was made between the Church and the Kingdom. The other religions are seen as co-pilgrims, with the Church, to the

¹⁶ See John Gnanapiragasam and Felix Wilfred (eds.), *Being Church in Asia*, Vol. I (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1994), 13.

¹⁷ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 20.

¹⁸ Peter C. Phan (ed.), *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 39.

Kingdom. The goal of mission, then, become two-fold: it can be either the Church or the Kingdom.

I would like to suggest, humbly, that what Pope Francis is proposing in his encyclical is precisely what the Asian theologians had been suggesting as being co-pilgrims towards the Kingdom with everyone in the world. What he calls ‘Human Fraternity’ is the Kingdom that the Asian theologians have been speaking about. So we, Asian theologians, are very happy that Pope Francis is approving what we had been saying for some time now. I think that this is an occasion for us to restructure our minds and institutions. I suggest that terms like mission and missionaries must be abandoned, given the kind of connotations they have acquired. We should rather think of building Human Communities – since the term ‘fraternity’ may upset our women friends. If we wish to integrate also the other encyclical of Pope Francis *Praise Be (Laudato Si)*, we could even speak of ‘Cosmic Human Communities’ or ‘Universal Communion.’

Another change in terminology, that is also a change in the mind set, could be the use of the word dialogue. Somehow, as soon as that word is uttered, we think immediately about ‘interreligious dialogue’ and see it as a way to mission. Can we value dialogue for its own sake? Could we hereafter think and talk about ‘social dialogue’? Could our dialogue sessions, if we organize any, focus less on prayer, but more on discussing social problems and on what we can do to build up Human Communities, protest against injustices, and promote sharing and fellowship?

A positive comment is that, in looking for a partner from another religion to speak about ‘Human Fraternity,’ Pope Francis chose a Muslim, not a Hindu or a Buddhist or a whole group. Given history and also the present circumstances, the Muslims may be the most difficult to dialogue with. So I think that that choice must be appreciated. Actually the concluding section of the encyclical is their joint appeal for “peace, justice and fraternity” (285).

Conclusion

We should be very thankful to Pope Francis for giving us this challenging and inspiring encyclical in a world that is still divided with so many conflicts. In our own country we could think of the many people to whom we can all be ‘neighbours.’ Our community is divided by the caste system. There are tensions between different ethnic groups. In urban and industrial centres there may be a lot of economic migrants, especially young people. Women, especially young girls, continue to be exploited in various ways. Religious tensions may be present in some places. The poor are always with us. The Church largely keeps out of politics, unless its own interests are concerned. But if we want to build community, we cannot avoid political involvement, though this is a task for the people, not the clergy. The Good Samaritan should be a model for us. We should look out for collaboration. Pope Francis remarks how the Good Samaritan found an inn keeper to continue caring for the wounded person.

I would like to conclude with the six new beatitudes that Pope Francis has proposed for the modern era:

Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others, and forgive them from their heart;
 Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized, and show them their closeness;
 Blessed are those who see God in every person, and strive to make others also discover him;
 Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home;
 Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others;
 Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.

All those who enact the six items, said the pontiff, “are messengers of God’s mercy and tenderness, and surely they will receive from him their merited reward.”

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD IN THE FRAGILE WORLD OF TODAY!

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Abstract: Proclaiming the Word of God is a must to every Christian believer. Taking into consideration of the fragility of the world of today in various aspects the Proclamation takes a different shape than that of previous centuries. In the Asian context religion plays a vital role in everyone's life. Diverse beliefs nationalism, fundamentalism, and over-drawn secularism affect the freedom of proclamation. In this context, we have to engage in proclaiming the Word of God through new paradigm that is suited to today's society, mainly proclamation by witness, sacrifice and service.

Keywords: Proclamation, Word of God, Fragile World, Asian Context, Nationalism.

Introduction¹

The missionary mandate of Jesus sets the stage of our continuous life of proclaiming the Word of God (cf. Mt 28:16-20). The great commission of proclamation of Jesus was understood originally

¹ The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a Catholic world fellowship of international and local organizations committed to the biblical-pastoral ministry. It was created to carry out the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council concerning the Bible. The Federation relates to the Holy See through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Today, the CBF is represented in 125 countries by 338 members. From 15-21 April 2023 the CBF had its 10th

as a witness to all nations.² The missionary dimension of Jesus' mandate is very well articulated and actively undertaken by St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9:16; Rom 12:18-20), resulting in not establishment of churches (cf. 1 Cor 1:17) but leading people to '*metanoia*' by giving a new meaning to life in Jesus Christ.³ Leaving out the "crusading mind," aggressively converting others to form a separate world, but taking up the "crucified mind," we proclaim the Gospel, as St. John the Baptist, "growing smaller" (cf. Jn 3:30) in taking up the harsh challenge of discipleship. The "crisis or scandal" of the Cross is not only seen in people's misunderstanding of Jesus' mystery of salvation, but also in our missionary endeavours of proclamation of Jesus Christ to others.⁴ It is worthwhile revisiting our prophetic proclamation in today's fragile world.

1. Setting the Context: The Fragile World of Today

Fragility is a state of being delicate or breakable or vulnerable. An object's fragility makes it likely to get broken or damaged but a person's fragility means that she or he is not physically, mentally, and sometimes, spiritually strong. The world as an organisation and an entity stands fragile today.

Today's world is a totally different terrain than that of St. Paul's, who was a remarkable mystic and missionary. The missionary world of Paul was mostly of Greek cultural milieu, under Roman imperial rule. He did not face with any conflicting social set-up. He had the Roman protection and found something more than peace and security of travel under the Roman government. He found toleration and an open field for his preaching. However, the present world in which we have to proclaim the

Plenary Assembly at Mar del Plata, Argentina, having the theme: PROCLAIMING THE WORD: A Gift of Life for the Fragile World. The author was invited to give a talk on this subject from the Asian context.

² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33B; Dallas: Word, 1995), 889.

³ Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction* (Netherlands: Styler Verlag, 1987), 33.

⁴ Cf. L. Legrand, *Mission in the Bible* (Pune: Ishvani Publication, 1992), xi-xii.

Gospel of Christ is, in many respects, a fragile world. Let us understand the different forms of fragility that exist in today's Asian world.

1.1 Political Fragility

1.1.1 Hate and Divisive Nature

Hate seems to be the new currency of politics across the world and especially in Asia. Hateful aggression is being preferred over a courteous discourse between political opponents. In politics, jarring, crude, and unedifying hate speech, incitement to violence, and verbal intimidation have descended to depths that cast serious doubts about our collective ability to be civil and courteous in our public discourse. Hate-mongering as a mode of doing politics flourishes because there is a high degree of popular tolerance for such conduct. The lethal combination of low levels of human development, a widely shared sense of victimhood, and an anaemic education system that does not emphasize democratic values vitiates social relations. Reversing this trend calls for an enlightened statesmanship. It requires transcending petty electoral calculations, fostering human capabilities, and reinstating constitutionally guaranteed human dignity. With 'Bonsaipeople' at the helm, this will not happen soon.⁵

In hate politics, polarisation is created, perpetuated, and strengthened. One party looks at the other as an opponent. Through hate politics one's own self-interest and self-glory is portrayed. At the end of the day, it is the survival of the fittest.

1.1.2 Fundamentalist Nationalism

Nationalism is understood as the national consciousness that exalts one's own nation above all others and places primary emphasis on the promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations. Shashi Tharoor classifies nationalism

⁵ For more details, cf. Badrinath Rao, "Politics by Hate Speech," *Deccan Herald*, March 13, 2020.

into various types: ethnic, colonial, civic, cultural, linguistic, diaspora, religious, and even territorial.⁶ But what is dangerous is the radical or revolutionary nationalism which excludes all opposites. Such was the ideology of Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini. A similar belief is found in the prophet Jonah representing the nationalist idea of the people of Israel who wanted their enemy to be punished by God rather than saved through divine mercy.

Today, political and social nationalism leans ever more towards fundamentalism or neo-nationalism that looks into one's own interest and gain, and is not concerned with global reality. Conservatives and the right-wing populism are gaining ground and getting elected as ruling regimes in many countries, like Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy, recently. These right-wing nationalists are anti-migrants and propagate policies of anti-environmentalism and anti-inclusivism. From the beginning of human history, we find that this ideology and praxis create division, conflicts, and calamities in society where pluralism of languages, culture, region, and race exists. Racism and casteism are kept alive by these neo-nationalists. Irony is that most of them 'live' in the name of Jesus but conveniently forget his way of life.

1.2 Social Fragility

Cardinal Charles Bo expressed on 4 January 2022 that Myanmar is now a war zone.⁷ Yes, the social world, especially of Asia is fragile as it is divided on account of sectarianism, tribalism, casteism, and power. The following issues need to be addressed in proclamation of the word: gender discrimination, poverty, caste-related lynching, migration, youth and farmers' suicides, and substance abuses. The majority of the caste-lynching in India

⁶ Shashi Tharoor, *The Battle of Belonging* (New Delhi: Aleph Book, 2020), 21-35.

⁷ Ellen Teague, "Myanmar 'now a war zone' says Cardinal," *The Tablet*, 04 Jan 2022, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/14870/myanmar-now-a-war-zone-says-cardinal> (accessed on 15.03.2023).

carried out were due to bovine related issues. Most of the attacks are based on rumours. This needs to be stopped to prevent harm caused to the social harmony in society. The media affects today's society very much. It offers attraction and allurements. It promotes negativity, and it is not constructive. Often it makes us lazy and dull.

It is noted that East Asia's recent past is littered with examples of shocking inhumanity against civilian populations. Indeed, for much of the Cold War, People in East Asia were arguably at greater risk of death by genocide and mass atrocities than anyone else in the world.⁸ The recent mass atrocities committed against the Rohingya civilians in Myanmar, a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), illustrate that the creation of shared human rights norms may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the prevention of human rights abuses. However, the horror visited upon the Rohingya indicates violation of human rights.

We live in conflicting situations in the multi-religious context of Asia and the world at large. We live in a world of fierce anti-Christian political and social uprisings, increasing menace created by the anti-ecological environment, displacement of migrants, religious fundamentalism, and over-drawn secularism all over the world. Shashi Tharoor has very elaborately written about the dangers of cruel social 'closeness,' resulting in Donald Trump's "America First," xenophobic populism of Boris Johnson of UK, Narendra Modi of India, Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, Viktor Orban of Hungary, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, or Vladimir Putin of Russia.⁹ This is in consonance with racism and similar divisions in other parts of the world.

⁸ Cf. David A. Frank, "The Reduction of Mass Atrocity Crimes in East Asia: The Evolving Norms of ASEAN's Prevention Mechanisms," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 11/3 (2018): 98, <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol11/iss3/11/> (accessed on 15.03.2023).

⁹ Cf. Tharoor, *The Battle of Belonging*, 9-25.

1.3 Religious Fragility

Asia has been a cradle of major religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, and Sikhism. All religions are peace-loving. However, factors such as extremism and religious fundamentalism create intolerance towards people of other religions. As a consequence, no dialogue becomes possible.

1.4 Fragility of the Christian Families and Ministers of the Word

Today, by and large, we, the ministers of the word lack religious fervour. We don't have the fervour of Jesus. The knowledge about our own faith is weak. Since there is no scope for catechism in schools, children don't grow in faith. Parents are not ready to spend time with children or accompany them in their faith journey.

The practice of conducting effectively or making use of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) is side-lined so that the living of the Word of God in day-to-day life does not find its importance. It is expected that "every Christian, more so the evangelist, must become the 'implied author' of the Gospel narrative for the contemporary society, by living it and proclaiming it relevantly so that he/she will serve as salt, light and leaven to the society (Mt 5:13-15)."¹⁰

The ministers of the Church, by and large, lack the missionary fervour that accompanies sacrifice and mercy, attracting many more to the life-style of the Gospel; it is rarely found or heard that they become "letters of Jesus Christ" for all to read and live. Homily, having "a quasi-sacramental character" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 142) is often not sufficiently scriptural and catechetical. Many a time, the homilist does not seem to help faithful to encounter the Bible and to grasp the beauty of God's Word in their life.

If right understanding regarding our mission, evangelization, and dialogue based on the correct interpretation of the Bible is

¹⁰ Jacob Kavunkal, "A Re-look at the Mission Concept and Missiology," *VJTR* 86/6 (June 2022): 474.

lacking, there is much danger of the fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. Moreover, Pope Francis speaks of another important danger among the so-called ‘ministers’ of the Word of God: “There is spiritual corruption that is comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism, and other subtle forms of self-centredness.”¹¹

1.5 Apprehensions about Missionary Congregations

We cannot deny that the religious presence is slowly subsumed by the social powers of multi-faceted hospitals, educational institutions, and religious fundamentalist outfits promoted by the ruling establishments. What was thought of as a special mission for some congregations within the changed milieu has become extraneous. Also, some religious, who think they are considered only a ‘workforce’ dependent on the hierarchy, are led to a perception of social irrelevance. In the context of powerful social media and the challenges mentioned above, the vocation to consecrated life is shrinking. Religious congregations, both men and women, in India and in some parts of Asia, make use of this situation to ‘export’ vocations to economically affluent countries; however, in the guise of mission, there seems to be a danger of amassing wealth to sustain or build up structures in their homelands. Clericalism, cases of child abuse, racism, and casteism damage the Church’s image, and the credibility of the ministers is called into question.

1.6 Bogey of ‘Forced Conversion’

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, indicating freedom to change one’s religion or belief.” Nobody should support forced conversion to any religion. Nevertheless, the bogey of ‘forced conversion’ is in the centre stage in countries like India; allocations are made, even ‘misquoting’

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, no. 165.

Jesus' words that every Christian is bound to convert.¹² In reality, no forced conversions happened in Christianity down through the centuries, but true or not, this is the image the non-Christians have about us that we have to proclaim the Gospel; it is a duty imposed on us (cf. 1 Cor 9:16).

A.J. Philip rightly questions the claim of 'forced conversion' by some fundamental Hindus, supported by some Indian State governments: "Had it concentrated on spreading the message of Jesus that all are brothers or sisters in Christ, there would have been more adherents of the faith than the 2 percent in India. For Christians, numbers do not matter."¹³

Also, much of the hesitation of the ruling regimes to commit themselves to numbers is because all have their own definition of "force," "allurement," and "fraud." For some, the statement attributed in the Bible to Jesus that "no one goes to the Father other than through me" (Jn 14:6) is both intimidation and fraud. Others hold education and healthcare to the poor as allurement. So is social work among the poor. The matter of "force" or violence or even a threat to violence is a little less opaque. In all, as John Dayal notes, there is zero tolerance to multi-religious nature of the world and zero commitment to freedom of religion.¹⁴

¹² Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court in the case of alleged "forced conversion" of a girl student of a Christian missionary-run school in South India, on January 31, 2022, quoting Mt 28:19-20 as Mission-mandate, saying "every Christian is bound to convert others." Cf. Ilagovan Rajsekaran, "Tamil Nadu Suicide Case: Straight out of Movies," *Frontline*, Feb 07, 2022. On November 14, 2022, the two-judge bench of the Supreme Court consisting of Justice M.R. Shah and Justice Hima Kohli observed that forced conversions may "ultimately affect the security of nation and freedom of religion and conscience of citizen." They alleged: "if forced conversions were not checked, Hindus would soon become a minority in India." There could not be a bigger lie than this. Cf. Cedrick Prakash, "Bogey of 'Forced' Conversion," *Indian Currents* 34/48 (21-27 November 2022): 8.

¹³ A.J. Philip, "Why Legitimize Rumours," *Indian Currents* 34/48 (21-27 November 2022): 13.

¹⁴ Cf. John Dayal, "Hunted by Conversion Ghost," *Indian Currents* 34/48 (21-27 November 2022): 15.

1.7 A New ‘Normal’ Life

The entire humanity went through a painful era of Covid-19. Millions of lives were being torn apart and displaced. It became a crown (*corona* in Latin) of thorns to all across borders, invoking ‘global ceasefire in all corners of the World’¹⁵ with a tough message: ‘No one is safe until everyone is safe.’¹⁶ People are still unsure whether this dreadful pandemic results from natural calamity or bio-war. Victimisation of the vulnerable saddens us day by day.

Although Pope Francis opined: “the corona virus pandemic has given us a chance to develop new ways of living,”¹⁷ despair continues to intensify as we sadly note live injustices in all sectors of the economy, politics, governance, and others. Pope Francis succinctly notes that this worldwide tragedy has made us “prisoners of a virtual reality; we lost the taste and flavour of the truly real.”¹⁸

Another sad factor is that despite the tragic pandemic, police brutality against peaceful protesters, political maundering, and ‘horse-trading,’ and crude expressions of arrogance among rulers and politicians continue to spread the “virus of Evil.” Thomas Menamparampil notes,

Corona virus has caught us unprepared, distracted by concerns and conflicts of diverse nature, and blinded by proposals of half-truths, warped truths and ‘instrumentalised-truths’. We have become like “children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of teaching”.¹⁹

Painful soil of natural calamities and the human-made pandemic has become a new ‘normal’ today. Added to this, the

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Strong in the Face of Tribulation* (CCBI: Bangalore 202), 64.

¹⁶ Cf. Francis Gonsalves & Vinod Victor (eds.), *Corona of Thorns? Or Corona of Life? Changing Church in the COVID Context* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2020), 14.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Angelus Message*, 1 September 2020.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 33.

¹⁹ Thomas Menamparampil, “Has Coronavirus Caught Christian Believers Unprepared?” 04 April 2020; <http://omnisterra.fides.org/articles/view/137> (accessed on 15.05.2023).

society is lost in the virtual world, digitally dazed, immature in their judgements, prodded on by emotions, ready to be led by political wizards and twitter kings. The cyber-armies win. Blind surrender to the 'Strong Man' leads people down the blind-alley.²⁰

2. Proclamation of the Word Today

In this murky situation of the fragile world, we must remember the facts of the proclamation of the Word today.

2.1 Faith: A Gift of God

True, Christian faith is a supernatural gift of God. Paul affirms this: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Our response to salvation is faith, but even that is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. Faith is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources. Faith brings salvation (cf. Rom 10:9) and if salvation would be in part by our own works, then we would have some ground to boast in ourselves. But Paul's emphasis is that even faith does not come from us apart from God's giving it to us. Human effort has nothing to do with it (cf. Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16), and thus no one should boast, as if he/she contributed any part.

In the same way, repentance is granted by God (cf. Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25). Spiritually dead, we were helpless until God intervened, as St. Paul says, "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:5). Faith is an integral part of the gift his grace bestowed on us.

Scripture consistently teaches us that faith is not conjured up by the human will but is a sovereign granted gift of God. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me

²⁰ Cf. Thomas Menampampil, "Action, not Rhetoric, Matters," *Indian Currents* 35/1 (02-08 January 2023), 26. Cf. also, Stephen Alathara, "Missio Ad Gentes: The Perennial Mission of the Church in India," *The Living Word* 127/2 (April-June 2021): 129-131.

draws him” (Jn 6:44). And “No one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father” (Jn 6:65). Acts 3:16 speaks of “the faith which comes through him.” Phil 1:29 says, “To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake . . . to believe in him.” And Peter wrote to fellow believers as “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours” (2 Pet 1:1).

2.2 Faith: A Call to Sacrifice

Our Christian faith, in its intrinsic nature, is a call to sacrifice. Witness to true faith demands a life of sacrifice. Just like the Israelites who had to struggle in the wilderness for forty years to humble themselves before God (Deut 8:3), we too have to go through varying degrees of **red sea experiences**, trials, pandemics, and crisis in our lives, to be tested and tried for eternal life. God tests us in varying ways so that we emerge in purity and humility.

If we look back through our lives on earth, we see that our lives reflect the same kind of ‘**wilderness experience**’ that the Israelites went through, albeit in different degrees and forms. We realize that all the people who persecute and hurt us are instruments in the hand of God to help us get purified. Even when we go through these testing times, we see that God always gives us a helping hand to stay afloat and emerge a winner from these trials. God’s intervention here could be very subtle and hence we often fail to notice it.

2.3 The Gospel Model of Proclamation as Envisaged by Vatican II

2.3.1 *Missio Ad Gentes*

Vatican II states, even in our times the belief is that the Church, a pilgrim on earth, is necessary for salvation.²¹ However, the same Ecumenical Council believes that those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or the Church but lead a good life are not excluded from salvation.²² Here comes

²¹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14.1.

²² *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16.

the emphasis on the intrinsic nature of the Church concerning its commitment to evangelisation and the duty of all the baptised to proclaim the Gospel.²³ Throughout the centuries, this was the concern of the Apostolic Fathers and later on that of the western missionaries to Asia and Africa. This is directed to the ‘*Propagation of Faith*,’ resulting in baptising and establishing Christian communities.²⁴

Pope Francis declared October 2019 as the Extraordinary Missionary Month (*Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on mission in the World*) to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Pope Benedict XV’s Apostolic Letter: *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919). In the present world context, Pope Francis intends mainly to renew the faith and missionary commitment of the entire Church. He mentions the missionary formation/consciousness, which motivates us to preach to all the world (*ad gentes*). He motivates us by saying: “I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission.” At this stage of history, there is a need to have a new paradigm shift in living Jesus’ mission-mandate in ‘mission’ countries like India and to initiate a program of re/new evangelisation of the ‘faithful’ as in the case of the so-called Christian countries. In fact, Paul wrote letters mainly to re-evangelise the already established Christian communities.

However, in the course of time, the term “mission” (spreading the Word) has become ambiguous. We also have to admit that this ‘missionary propagation,’ as Soares-Prabhu notes, has led to some negative consequences like imperialism, colonialism, slave trade, paternalism, intolerance, and lack of credibility.²⁵ Lucien

²³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 14.4.

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on mission in the world*, Pope Francis Message for World Mission Day 2019.

²⁵ Cf. George Soares-Prabhu, “Following Jesus in Mission Reflections on Mission in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today*, *Collected Writings of Fr. Soares-Prabhu*, Vol. 1, ed. Isaac Padinjarakuttu (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999), 35-36.

Legrand has observed: “The word ‘missionary’ is so intimately associated with a savage, arrogant proselytism that its use has become altogether taboo.”²⁶ This is because we have taken the Markan version literally: “Go and preach” (Mk 16:15) and not the Matthean version: “going, make disciples” (28:19) or the Lukan version: “Be my witnesses” (Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8). As noted by Simon Pinto, discipleship is both to follow and to be on a mission.²⁷

This becomes a great challenge in this changed world. Realizing that our faith is not only a gift of God, it is also a sacrifice demanded of every faithful in proclaiming the Word. In this sense, with a mind of sacrifice, ‘soiling the dust of the street,’ we need to take up other ways and means of proclamation, such as *Ad Inter-Gentes* and *Missio Ad Vitam*.

2.3.2 *Ad Inter-Gentes*

No doubt, ‘proclamation to all the people’ (*ad gentes*), the original mandate of Jesus, is the source and strength of our missionary witness in a constantly changing world. Accordingly, the *mission to the nations* is to be carried out in today’s context, especially in the suffocation of “anti-s” in a disturbed society, as a mission *among the nations* (*ad inter-gentes*), remembering that we ‘are always missionary disciples.’²⁸ Pope Francis has vividly proposed:

An evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.... Evangelizers thus take on the “*smell of the sheep*,” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.²⁹

²⁶ Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), xii.

²⁷ Simon Pinto, “Discipleship: An Ecclesial Dimension,” *VJTR* 81/8 (Aug 2017): 176.

²⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24.

Francis of Assisi, Fr. Damien of Molokai, recently Mother Teresa, and many other missionaries proclaimed Jesus Christ through the Good News of love, mercy, and forgiveness to those who did not know Jesus (*ad extra*); they motivated and strengthened the faithful in their faith-commitment to go ahead with a new vigour (*ad intra*).

Taking the exhortation of *Christus Vivit*,³⁰ a broader understanding of the spread of the Word of God faster ‘among the people’ leads us to be among/with any individual or group of non-Christians or even anti-Christians as ‘the light of the world’ and ‘the salt of the earth’ with a heart for dialogue and understanding. “Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns.”³¹ Here there is no boundary of the region, language, or ethnic/caste group; all are God’s children, and all need God’s love and mercy. Not vocal proclamation, but humanitarian service becomes the medium of mission ‘among the nations.’ As Pope Francis insists, any type of service to humanity, be it social, medical, or educational, is the mode of evangelisation. In all our missionary activities, conversion of heart, as Mother Teresa said, and not necessarily membership of the Church, is the goal of the Christian mission.

Respecting other religions, honouring their traditions and cultures, and having an ongoing encounter with their way of life, our mission is enriched, and tension is not only eased but harmony is cherished. Inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism are effective tools of this mission of *ad inter-gentes*. Working for justice, peace, and joy (cf. Rom 14:17), trying to uplift the poor and the oppressed, the migrants, displaced people, and victims of sexual abuse in conflicting and selfish society should be the core concern of every baptised person, a true missionary ‘among the people.’

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, nos. 25, 177.

³¹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 203.

2.3.3 *Missio Ad Vitam*

Life-witness becomes a clear manifestation of our ‘carrying the Word of God’ to all. This can be classified into the following:

i. Proclamation by Attraction

Pope Francis invites every Christian believer to be a missionary in life. He calls it ‘*proclamation by attraction*,’ which can also be termed as a proclamation by the witness. The Kandhamal (Odisha, North India) victims/martyrs in 2008 were the Christians who proclaimed Jesus by attraction/witness. They were effective preachers by life. Doing my daily duties in my community, in the family, workplace, marketplace, or politics without any selfish motive, but bearing in mind that I am a disciple of Christ, is a mission ‘by attraction.’

This is in line with what Paul urged on the Roman Christians, “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Much more than ‘door to door’ preaching or proclamation on public platform or media, a silent life of justice and love in society brings abundant fruit of an effective mission by life (*missio ad vitam*).

ii. Proclamation by Witness

Jesus took upon himself all the challenges/conflicts of life for a mission. When he predicted his suffering and death, Jesus clearly said that he was setting his mind on divine things (Mt 16:23), that is, “to give his life for many” (Mk 10:45). The divine mission which he undertook to fulfil is not to live for himself but to “fall into the earth and die” (Jn 12:24) so that ‘he will draw all people to himself’ (Jn 12:32). This motivation even in the difficult situation of shedding his blood-sweat at Gethsemane urged him to seek the will of God the Father (Lk 22:47).

And this missionary journey for him was not a compulsion or a painful process but a willingly undertaken mission as he himself said: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power

to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (Jn 10:18). The missionary witness envisaged by the Church³² is given in many ways: through respect and love, understanding and acceptance of others as they are, and solidarity in efforts to accomplish all that is noble and good. As noted by Paolo Giglioni, “evangelical efficacy of witness surpasses all speech.”³³ “The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life.”³⁴

Love and mercy always remain the “driving force and sole criterion of the mission.”³⁵ As we find in the lives of so many saints, this missionary witness is the strongest “pull factor” for others to come to know Jesus and become partakers of his grace. This missionary lifestyle requires each of us to be conscious of our special duties, to get actively involved in forming Christian and human communities in the model of the early Church (cf. Acts 2 & 4), to be ready to take up hardships for the sake of establishing *Gospel values* in our surroundings in a climate of freedom and availability, and to show practical tenderness and preferential attention to / option for the poor and the sick.

iii. Evangelical Witness

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount stands at the peak of his evangelical message, which ends in inviting us to follow not just himself, but the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:48). In all the previous 47 verses of chapter five of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus shows who the heavenly Father is: merciful, loving, forgiving, just, and holy. Here he gives witness to the Father through his evangelical preaching. The nature of God the Father’s love and concern for the sinners, the sick, and the despised are very well revealed by Jesus in his

³² *Ad Genets*, nos. 5, 11; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 21, 41; *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42.

³³ Paolo Giglioni, “Evangelization Process: Kerygma to Local Church,” in *Following Christ in Mission*, ed. Sebastian Karotemprel (Bombay: Pauline, 1995), 147.

³⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20; *Verbum Domini*, no. 98.

³⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 60.

parables of the “Lost” (Lk 15). He said emphatically that whatever he says and does is from the Father (Jn 5:19-21) and thus gives a vivid witness to God the Father through his evangelical mission. His address to the Father is much more evident: “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you have given me to do” (Jn 17:4). This evangelical mission and witness brought him severe challenges and conflicts, which he overcame with a spirit of martyrdom!

This Evangelic witness, as we find in the lives of so many saints (in particular, St. Francis of Assisi), is the strongest “pull factor” for others to come to know Jesus and to become partakers of his grace. This invites each of us to a particular lifestyle, being conscious of our missionary vocation, in the model of the early Church (cf. Acts 2 & 4).

iv. Sacrificial Witness

It is indeed a well-known fact that the martyrs’ blood becomes the fruitful seed of spreading the Word of God. Martyrs are heralds and witnesses of the Gospel par excellence. From Jesus’ Nazareth proclamation, we come to understand that he highlighted the adverse reception of the prophetic life: “No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Lk 4:24). The essence of prophetic life is to warn against evil and to encourage good, even to the extent of laying down one’s life: “I lay down my life of my own accord” (Jn 10:18). Albert Nolan observes: “Jesus was not willing to compromise by accepting the Messiahship and resorting to violence nor was he willing to tailor his words to suit the authorities. The only alternative was to die.”³⁶ This was Jesus, consecrated to the Father and committed to his mission to the point of death, even death on the Cross.

The Post-Synodal Exhortation: *Verbum Domini* very succinctly puts it:

The Church must go out to meet each person in the strength of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:5) and continue her prophetic defence

³⁶ Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2007), 170.

of people's right and freedom to hear the word of God, while constantly seeking out the most effective ways of proclaiming that word, even at the risk of persecution.³⁷

We are aware of the great blood-martyrdom of Jesus at Calvary, nailed to the cross. A Roman soldier pierced his side (heart), and at once blood and water came out (cf. Jn 19:34). In the mind of the Romans and Jews this should have been a fatal blow to Jesus; but it was a life-giving act to all his believers. Just as Adam's rib (*pleura*) gave life to the formation of woman, Jesus' broken *pleura* gives to his believers sacramental life of baptism (water) and Eucharist (blood) that cleanses them of their sin and sustains them for a life of discipleship.³⁸ Here Jesus manifests his sacrificial witness by taking upon himself the role of '*the Lamb of God*' who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:19). His 'blood and water' here signify his spirit of compassion like the 'living water' flowing from Jerusalem (cf. Zech 14:8).

Jesus told the rich young man that discipleship costs (Mk 10:21). The cost of discipleship is steep. Indeed, many 'faithful' have chosen to walk away from God because of it. "The call to discipleship is all about the radical choices that one has to make in order to become a perfect disciple according to the heart of the Master."³⁹ Pope Francis observed: "Ours is a Church of martyrs; they suffer, they give their lives, and we receive the blessing of God for their witness."⁴⁰ In this respect, *Verbum Domini* underlines the need to discern the "signs of the times" present in history and not to flee from a commitment to those who suffer and the victims of varied forms of selfishness.⁴¹

³⁷ Pope Benedict, *Verbum Domini*, no. 95.

³⁸ Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to St. John, II* (Garden City, N Y: Doubleday, 1970), 953

³⁹ Dominic Kaniyantharayil, *Discipleship: A Costly Choice* (Bangalore: KJC 2017), 17

⁴⁰ *Angelus Message*, 21, April 2015.

⁴¹ *Verbum Domini*, no. 100.

v. *Prophetic Witness*

Prophecy implies a certain abnormality beyond the ordinary. Jesus, the greatest prophetic witness, uttered forty-one “I am” sayings, as recorded in the Gospels. These evangelical sayings provoke transformation both in individuals and structures. The evangelical radicality gives credibility to the missionary witness. Prophetic missions in today’s society and, specifically in Asia, where tackling poverty, slavery of all sorts, and deprivation of rights are pushed aside by powerful trends of majoritarianism, nationalism, and selfish hoarding of wealth.

However, it is evident, as in the case of Oscar Romero, the prophet of justice, Sr. Rani Maria, the angel of the downtrodden, Fr. Tom Uzhunnani, the suffering servant of the poor, and recently Fr. Stan Swamy, the sacrificial giant of the tribals, that prophetic witness costs as much as one’s own life. Nevertheless, more than blood-witness, life-witness to social justice and love of the oppressed is an effective means of proclaiming the Gospel in today’s context. This is in consonance with Pope Francis’ call for “moving from our comfort zone in order to reach to the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel.”⁴²

A fine proclamation of the Word need not necessarily lead one to give her/his physical life. In our service to the Word of God, we are often left to bear mental tortures, betrayals, false accusations, misunderstandings, prejudices, insults, or severe opposition to the works of justice/mercy, as in the case of St. Mother Teresa. Hardships come in various ways: temptations, illnesses, loss of job, broken relationships, and persecution.

Also, a prophetic witness brings all sorts of mental and physical torture, not only by anti-forces in society, politics, religious movements, and governments, but also by our ‘own’ people who share the same faith and vocation in religious communities. In short, the mission, therefore, is *the Gospel made alive*.⁴³ Word of God,

⁴² *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 20.

⁴³ Lucien Legrand, *The Word is Near You*, Vol. II (Bangalore: St. Peter’s, 2002), 165.

through our witnessing life, will intrude faster even into the 'hard soil' of humans.

Conclusion

We, the believers in God the Almighty, of course, might be depressed in such a continuous torture. We are even inclined to pray with the psalmist: "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?' ... How long, O Lord shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked glory?" (Ps 94:2-4). Some of the Christians would become an easy prey to the torturous situation (cf. Acts 5:4; Rev 2:14) and some others would go in for a life of compromise for a 'peaceful' co-existence (cf. Rev 3:15). But at this stage of faith-challenge we are invited to follow in the footsteps of the heroic martyrs, like Justin the Martyr (+165), Charles Lwanga and his companions in Uganda (+1886), and Rani Maria in India (+1995). "They have conquered him (Evil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Rev 12:11).

We experience a sense of hope and grace, even as we, in our ministry of the Word, recognize the ever-present shadow of fragility, brokenness, and "groaning." This shadow can be lifted by a profound sense of connection to a larger community of believers, the Church, enlivened by the gift of life that comes from God's Word. Within this hopeful context, the "groaning" that arises from our fragility is transformed into a "sighing" of hope, a yearning for the dawn of God's new creation that we long for and towards which we strive (cf. Rom 8:21-27).

In order to march forward, being proud of our faith, it is relevant to remember the prayer of Jesus: "The world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world" (Jn 17:14). Our love is inclusive. We love all even those who persecute us and we live in poverty of insecurity, but enrich all.

SYNODALITY WITH OTHER RELIGIONS Part I

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Abstract: Having emerged from the Christian campus, the idea of 'Synodality' is grounded in the principles and values of Jesus. It is in line with the Second Vatican Council, too. But, how is it compatible with other religions? Given the democratic, participatory, interactive, and collaborative spirit of synodality, 'synodality with other religions' has ample prospects for inter-faith and cross-cultural give and take. This paper explores the conceptual nuances and Christian roots of synodality and proceeds to analyze the problems and prospects of synodality with other religions, from diverse angles, in view of the wellbeing of the human society.

Keywords: Synodality, Religions, Interaction, Harmony, Inter-Faith Relations.

Introduction

The word 'synodality' is highly alien to the world outside the Christian community, precisely to people of other religions. All the same, the idea of synodality could be very well applied to relation with other religions. Besides, the spirit of synodality could be found in other religious groups, too. That would amount to state that there is ample scope for revamping interfaith relations and harmony with persons and communities of other affiliations,

in view of celebrating one humanity. This paper vouches to explore the synodal implications and applications in relation to other religious communities. In the process, it analyzes the conceptual nuances, Christian roots of synodality, synodality with other religions, and some of the problems and prospects of synodality.

1. Conceptual Nuances

The first section of the paper explains the conceptual nuances of the key words, ‘synod, synodal and synodality’ and highlights the shades of meanings inherent in the application of the concept in question.

1.1 Synod

The word ‘synod’ derives from the Greek root, ‘*syn*’ and ‘*hodos*’ or ‘*synodos*,’ meaning ‘together’ and ‘way’ or ‘journey.’¹ To put it straight, ‘synod is a ‘way or journey together.’ As per another school of thought, the word ‘synod’ comes from the Greek term ‘*sinodos*,’² meaning ‘assembly’ or ‘meeting.’ It is equivalent with the Latin word ‘*concilium*,’³ meaning ‘council.’ Therefore, ‘togetherness’ is the spirit of the synod.

A synod is a council of a Christian denomination, usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration, or application. It is an ecclesiastical governing or advisory council, an assembly of the clergy and sometimes also the laity in a diocese or other division of a particular Church. It could be an ‘assembly’ of bishops in the Roman Catholic Church or the governing assembly of an Episcopal province.

A Synod is both an ‘event’ and a ‘process’ where clergy, religious, and the laity gather to discuss important matters of the faith. Synods are events that transform and lead to renewal in the life of the Church. After a Synod occurs, the Church ‘emerges

¹ Tony Meakin, *A Basic Church Dictionary* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2001), 46.

² Ibid., 47.

³ Ibid., 40.

different' and is changed, well, a renewed church.⁴ In sum, 'renewal' is the outcome of the synod.

1.2 Synodality

The word 'synodality'⁵ is used for 'being synodal,' which means 'describing the process of fraternal collaboration and discernment.' Bodies, like the Synod of Bishops, were created to express such fraternal factor. In other words, synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church. 'Collectiveness' is the inner fibre of synodality.

In more simple words, 'synodality' is the '*modus vivendi et operandi*'⁶ of a certain people. '*Modus vivendi*' is the feasible arrangement or practical compromise, especially for bypassing difficulties. It is the 'manner of living or the way of life.' '*Modus operandi*' is the 'particular way or method of doing something.' It is the 'method or style of working or the 'way in which something operates or works.'

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, 'synodality' designates 'the specific' of the Church, the 'People of God.' It reveals and gives substance to her being a 'communion.' It refers to all the members of the Church 'journeying together, gathering in assembly and taking an active part in her evangelizing mission.'

Yet again, 'synodality' refers to the 'involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church.'⁷ In other words, it is the active involvement and participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church. When it pertains to the exercise of the ministry of bishops in the

⁴ Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church: Towards Post-structural Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2017), 13.

⁵ Rafael Luciani, *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2022), 07.

⁶ Mark D. Chapman and Vladimir Latinovic (eds.), *Changing the Church: Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice and Life* (Gwerbestrasse, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 334.

⁷ Ibid., 209.

service of the local Church entrusted to them, the concept of ‘collegiality’ explains its theological significance.

Synods are not new. Pope Francis highlights ‘synodality’ as ‘the specific characteristic of the Church in the 21st century,’⁸ and intended by God. He has put his own transformative stamp on the meaning and conduct of synods. He affirms that a synod involves ‘mutual listening,’⁹ in which everyone has something to learn. That would amount to state that ‘synodality’ is a process of mutual listening and learning.’ It contains the spirit of revolution.

1.3 Synodality: Implications and Applications

First and foremost, synodality is an ‘all-inclusive’ phenomenon.¹⁰ Pope Francis, recently in his video message for the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Latin American Federation of Colleges of the Society of Jesus (FLACSI),¹¹ reflected a broader vision of the school. This applies to synodality.

Having ‘welcoming schools’ with open doors, where the poor can enter and where one can go out to meet the poor, learning to live together with everyone, teaching the pupils to discern, to read the signs of the times, having a conscience and fostering conscious awareness, and the like, are a few of the salient features of a synod. The ‘inclusive sense’ that is reflected here is an application of synodality.

Secondly, synodality signifies a ‘characteristic of the Third Millennium church,’ by way of making it relevant and vibrant, responding to modern challenges. With focus on the ‘People of God,’ a transition from synod of the bishops to ‘synod of the Church’ is underway. It calls for drastic structural changes, like an ‘inverted pyramid,’ in which all share in the power.

⁸ Barbara E. Wall and Massimo Faggioli (eds.), *Pope Francis: A Voice for Mercy, Justice, Love and Care for the Earth* (New York: Orbis Books, 2019), 33.

⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰ Luciani, *Synodality*, 103.

¹¹ Exaudi Staff, <https://www.exaudi.org/popes-message-to-jesuit-schools-group/> (accessed on 03.07.2023).

Further, synodality focuses on the ‘socio-cultural and economic realities’¹² as the real context of the Church. It also stresses on the reformation of the ‘legal system of the Church’ by ‘separating the legislature, executive, and judiciary,’ so that better justice may be measured out. Pope Francis visualizes such a transformation in the way Church conducts itself, so that the credibility of the Church will significantly improve in the third millennium.

Thirdly, there are various levels on which synodality works. ‘Collegiality’ is the exercise of the ministry of bishops in the service of the local church entrusted to the care of each of them. ‘Communion’ is between the local churches at the heart of the one universal Church of Christ, brought about by means of the hierarchical communion of the College of Bishops with the Bishop of Rome. ‘Synodality’ is the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church.¹³

2. Christian Grounding of Synodality

The second section of the paper highlights the roots of synodality in the Bible and in the Christian tradition, along with the special focus in the Second Vatican Council, the pronouncements of the recent Popes, and the recent initiatives by the current Pope.

2.1 Human Beings the Image, Likeness, and Temple of God

The first book of the Bible, in its first chapter, declares that ‘human beings, male and female, are created in the image and likeness of God’ (Gen 1:27-28). This is a categorical way of stating that there is an essential relation between God and human beings. It is a matter of great prestige and dignity for the humans to be reflecting the divine in them.

The New Testament advances this reality to a higher level and states that ‘human beings are temples of the Spirit’ (1 Cor

¹² Luciani, *Synodality*, 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

3:16), in other words, 'dwelling places of the divine.' To be the 'abode of God' is an additional credit for the human beings. It adds to the dignity of the human being, too. 'To be fully human is to be fully divine,' this saying becomes meaningful in this sense as well.

Now, 'human beings to be the image, likeness, and temple of God' is not limited to a particular community or a group. Instead, it applies to all small and big communities, nationalities as well as civilizations and cultures, the world over. Such a foundational perspective of Christianity is a substantial basis for the entire Christian community and the human society to be synodal and united on the same platform.

2.2 The Filial Vision and Fraternal Mission of Jesus

Jesus is a vibrant symbol of the New Testament, in all aspects. He rose from the Old Testament understanding of servant to a filial pedestal, along with a humanly and divinely level that is highly elevated. His filial experience was grounded in the Fatherly figure of God. The Father in Heaven is a loving Father who does not discriminate the humans on any ground, but 'sends sunshine and rains to both the righteous and the unrighteous' (Mt 5:43-44). The filial vision of Jesus found the heavenly Father as the symbol of perfection (Mt 5:48). He accorded all human beings the same filial status, without even a pinch of discrimination.

The filial experience of Jesus found expression in a fraternal mindset, which includes all human beings. The spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood is the core of the mission of Jesus. Eliminating all sorts of discrimination from among the human groupings is the objective of his mission. The destination of celebrating the spirit of equality with one and all calls for doing away with the sense of high and low, rich and poor, powerful and weak, and the like. The target of the mission of Jesus is the establishment of a human-divine family, where God is the Father and all human beings, along

with the creation, are brothers and sisters to each other as well as children of the same God.¹⁴

The filial vision and fraternal mission of Jesus has ample scope for being synodal with everybody. It cannot be denied that the human society has several boundaries separating the humans in terms of individuals, families, institutions, communities, regions, religions, nations, and the like. All the same, being related to everyone in the fraternal spirit is basic to the human identity, with the headship of God as the supreme Father of the family. The central spirit of the vision and mission of Jesus is parallel to the synodal attitude in the day-to-day life of the humans.

2.3 The Universal Prayers and Values of Jesus

The prayer of Jesus “Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us” (Jn 17:21) is characteristic. This was a prayer for unity, par excellence, and this unity has no borders. Again, “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). Yet again, “look, I am with you always, yes, to the end of the world” (Mt 28:20). These prayers and assurances of Jesus reflect the supreme value of his abiding presence, which energize the life and the evangelizing mission of the Church, across the borders.

Besides, the golden rule of Jesus ‘do to the other what you would have him or her do to you’ (Mt 7:12) speaks volumes as to the mutuality of the fraternal behaviour a Christian should extend, one to another. This teaching necessitates being inclusive and interactive with all people who are ‘others,’ may they be different in faith, class, clan, ideology, culture, nationality, or any other type of belonging.

Almost all the values of Jesus are universal values and they go in perfect tune with the spirit of synodality. The unity between God and human beings is the model for unity and solidarity among human beings. The presence of God is assured in the gathering

¹⁴ Chapman and Latinovic (eds.), *Changing the Church*, 209.

of the humans as one people. The state of being reconciled and united among the humans is a necessary condition for the union with God. Synodality emerges from the essence and spirit of the values and prayers of Jesus, necessarily so.¹⁵

2.4 The Trinitarian Model

God in the Christian tradition is the Trinity, which is composed of three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.¹⁶ They are three-in-one and one-in-three, at the same time. They are equal in status and dignity, too. Jesus spoke about the Father all throughout his life. He prayed to the Father as well. The voice of the Father certified more than once that Jesus was his beloved son in whom he is well-pleased. Jesus spoke about the Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son jointly, thus sustaining the relationship between them. The Trinity is the perfect example of unity in diversity.¹⁷

Trinity is a singular model for synodality as well. The relation and unity among the persons of the Trinity is a case in point for the way the People of God can travel together. The entire humanity as well as the whole Catholic and Christian community has to exist and progress together after the fashion of the Trinity. All the levels of councils and synods, small and large, have to be characterized by the divine and human qualities of the Trinity. Synodality is an inbuilt feature of the Catholic, Christian, and human existence.¹⁸

2.5 Three-Sided Dynamics of Life and Faith

Life is three-sided. So too is faith. It could be said that faith is the sum and substance of life. It could also be stated that life is the sum and substance of faith. At any rate, life has three directions,

¹⁵ Chapman and Latinovic (eds.), *Changing the Church*, 209.

¹⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁸ Luciani, *Synodality*, 87.

life in relation to oneself, life in relation to others, and life in relation to God, who is the source of life.¹⁹ Faith too has three dimensions, faith in oneself, faith in others, and faith in God.²⁰ They could be further understood as individual, social, and divine aspects of life and faith. These three aspects of life and faith are mutually related and can never be separated from each other.

In a similar fashion, synodality vouches to declare the interconnectedness of the three dimensions of life and faith. The diverse small and big communities of the human society share the common reality of life and faith among themselves. When one shares one's faith as well as life with the other, life and faith get their true meaning. Similarly, when one shares in the life and faith of the other, life and faith touch upon a larger horizon. Sharing the life and faith, across the boundaries, is the core spirit of synodality.²¹

2.6 The Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council has been a milestone in the history of the entire Christian community as well as the Catholic community. It took the Church 'back to its roots.'²² It caused an ideological, cultural, ethical, and spiritual renewal in the Church. It had far-reaching implications for the entire world, as well. It was literally 'restart' and 'refresh' in the life and missionary journey of the Church. It was an epoch-making council.

In a similar fashion, the idea of 'synodality' currently in the process, in line with the Second Vatican Council, is revolutionary and comprehensive in its spirit, approach, and extent. The inclusion of priests, nuns, brothers, lay brethren, Christians of other denominations, people of other religions, and the entire humanity

¹⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004), 156.

²⁰ Ibid., 203.

²¹ Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 178.

²² Andrew Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach* (London: Sage Publishing Ltd., 2014), 44.

on earth in a synodal experience is nothing less than a revolution. Considering all Christians, believers, and human beings 'People of God' is the core spirit of synodality.²³ I believe, only such a mindset is worthy of Christian faith. Only such an attitude is acceptable to God as well.

2.7 The Ground-Breaking Document 'Nostra Aetate'

'Nostra Aetate,' meaning 'in our time,' is the ground-breaking document of the Second Vatican Council. It affirms, 'if we Christians discriminate human beings in the name of gender, age, ethnicity, language, caste, class, creed, denomination, ideology, culture, food habits, dress patterns, social traditions, nationality, and the like, we have no right to call God our Father.'²⁴ This realization is deeply rooted in the perfection of the Heavenly Father, who does not discriminate even between the good and the bad or the righteous and the unrighteous. The larger outlook that emerged from the above document initiated an all-inclusive approach to the human society as well as the Christian community.

Similarly, synodality is an all-inclusive approach to the entire People of God. It is a democratic process that could bring about participation, collaboration, and unity among the diverse segments of the Christian and human society. Recognizing the Fatherly culture of God is mandatory for faith in God, as a Catholic, Christian, religious, or human being. Synodal way of being Christian or human would call for a fraternal style of conducting oneself with one and all.²⁵

2.8 Towards a Culture of 'Inter'

Initiating a culture of 'inter' is the genius of the landmark document of 'Nostra Aetate.' 'Inter' would mean exploring what is 'between' or 'among' the individuals, groups, families, communities, nationalities, regions, and other social units.²⁶ It would

²³ Luciani, *Synodality*, 23.

²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵ Ibid., 57.

²⁶ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 103.

necessitate understanding faith in an interactive and growing way. It would also call for transcending from ‘faith to interfaith.’ Further, the culture of ‘inter’ makes faith and mission evolve among the humans, both as individuals, and groups.

Likewise, synodality refers to the collective dimension of religious and human life. Ecclesial community has to be understood as diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal, or universal. Walking together involves mutual sharing of the individual, social, cultural, and economic contexts of one and all. Synodality also emphasizes rootedness in the divine and human realities. The culture of exploring the common realities between or among the People of God takes place in the setting of the light of the word of God, listening to the spirit and discerning collectively. Such a synodal life refers to an assembly that celebrates love, sharing, communion, collegiality, participation, and collaboration, across the boundaries, well, a ‘culture of inter.’²⁷

2.9 Papal Pronouncements on Harmony with Other Faiths

The subsequent pronouncements of the Popes on harmony among faiths categorically articulate its all-embracing implications. Convening the Second Vatican Council in 1962, Pope John XXIII declared, “we have to look at what unites people rather than what divides them.”²⁸ “We...have to meet as pilgrims and start...searching for God...in the hearts of humankind,”²⁹ added Pope Paul VI, at the Meeting of religions at Bombay, India, in 1964. He continued, “[hu]man must meet [hu]man, nation meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God.”³⁰

Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Manila in 1981, exhorted, “Christians will...join hands with all men and women of good will

²⁷ Ibid., 123.

²⁸ Thomas Cahill, *Pope John XXIII: A Life* (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2002), 79.

²⁹ Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 157.

³⁰ Ibid., 158.

and work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society, in which the poor will be the first to be served.”³¹ During his first visit to India, he stated at Madras in 1986, “by dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God.”³² “Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony or we drift and ruin ourselves and others,”³³ he affirmed at World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi, in 1986.

Further, during his second visit to India at New Delhi in 1999, Pope John Paul II emphasized: “dialogue is an act of love, which has its roots in God himself.”³⁴ “Different religious traditions of India are a hope for a better future for the human family,”³⁵ he further stated then. He caught the imagination of people of all religions as he pronounced categorically then that “religion should be what God intended it to be, a source of goodness, harmony and peace.”³⁶ All these Papal pronouncements are grounded in the statement of *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 26, that “the dialogue, which the Church proposes, is grounded in the logic of the incarnation.”³⁷ All these pronouncements articulate concisely the spirit of synodality as well.

2.10 The 2019 Abu Dhabi Declaration on ‘Human Fraternity for World Peace’

There was a historical meeting in Abu Dhabi between Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church and a world leader, and Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyib, Grand Imam of al-Azhar and an Egyptian

³¹ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 619.

³² *Ibid.*, 619.

³³ *Ibid.*, 623.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 629.

³⁵ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 639.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 637.

³⁷ Pope John Paul II, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html (accessed on 03.07.2023).

Islamic scholar, on 04 February 2019. The meeting was oriented to ‘world peace and living together.’³⁸ They came up with a declaration on ‘Human Fraternity for World Peace.’ The declaration has caught the attention of the world.

Acknowledging the declaration, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, stated, “I thank both religious leaders for using their voice to promote interfaith dialogue, mutual respect and understanding across the faith spectrum. In these trying times, we need this spirit more than ever.”³⁹ The UN Member States applauded the resolution readily. As a result, the 04th day of February is dedicated as ‘International Day of Human Fraternity’ by the United Nations. ‘Fraternity’⁴⁰ means brotherhood, which implies ‘the sense of being brotherly and sisterly, one to another. It is the quality of being a social group with persons having shared interests and experiences. The spirit of synodality is very much inherent in the idea of fraternity and is a boost for applying the same to people of all affiliations.’⁴¹ The above declaration is in line with the spirit of synodality; it elicits a new dimension, too.

2.11 Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Leading to World Interfaith Harmony Week

‘A Common Word’ (2007) can be considered as one of the most powerful documents in the history of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.⁴²

³⁸ John Raymaker and Gerald Grudzen, *Pope Francis, Conscience of the World: Building Needed Bridges in a Troubled World* (London: Hamilton Books, 2019), 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁰ Joseph Esmond Riddle, *A Complete English-Latin and Latin-English Dictionary, for the Use of Colleges and Schools: Chiefly from the German* (California: Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2015), 377.

⁴¹ Jordan Nyenyembe, *Fraternity in Christ: Building the Church as Family* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), 10.

⁴² D. Linnan and W. El-Ansary (eds.), *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of “A Common Word”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

‘A Common Word between Us and You’ was processed by hundreds of scholars, leaders, and intellectuals from the Muslim and Christian communities across the nations. Two fundamental ‘religious commandments,’ namely ‘Love of God’ and ‘Love of Neighbour’ are at the heart of this Christian-Muslim dialogue.⁴³ These two commandments are common to the three monotheistic religions of the world.

The two love commandments provide a solid ground for dialogue among all the religious traditions of the world. This was the way of broadening the boundaries of dialogue towards people of all backgrounds, convictions, ideologies, and cultures. In other words, dialogue includes ‘people of goodwill’ across the campuses of all faiths, social traditions, and nationalities.⁴⁴ This declaration was in response to the proposal of King Abdullah of Jordan in the UN General Assembly on 23 September 2010. Accordingly, the United Nations declared 1-7 February as ‘World Interfaith Harmony Week,’ on 20 October 2010. This Christian-Muslim dialogue, leading to a major declaration at the UN level, is a substantial case in point for synodality in its practical form.⁴⁵

2.12 The Encyclical ‘*Fratelli Tutti*,’ Fraternity and Social Friendship

The brilliant encyclical ‘*Fratelli Tutti*,’⁴⁶ by Pope Francis, is a milestone in the history of the world as well as the Catholic Church. The ‘Abu Dhabi Declaration’ on ‘Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,’ signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayyib, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 04 February 2019, gave the momentum for the encyclical ‘*Fratelli Tutti*.’⁴⁷ In other words, the declaration

⁴³ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁴ Raymaker and Grudzen, *Pope Francis, Conscience of the World*, 59.

⁴⁵ Luciani, *Synodality*, 27.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (New York: Paulist Press, 2020), 01.

⁴⁷ *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 5.

was the backdrop of the encyclical or the encyclical evolved from the declaration.

‘*Fratelli Tutti*’ is one of the most modern, practical, and realistic versions of interreligious dialogue and relations among people of all communities, well applied to all the communities and nationalities of the world. It establishes ‘fraternity and social friendship’ as the mission of harmony par excellence, that leads to the eternal dynamics of divine-human and human-human combine. The term ‘*fratelli tutti*’ comes from the ‘admonition’ of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) to his Franciscan brothers and sisters to ‘follow a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel.’⁴⁸ The fraternal mindset and the social friendship have very much to do with the spirit of synodality in all its implications, even as an admonition, for the timely worldwide call for imbibing the demands of synodality.⁴⁹

(to be continued)

⁴⁸ Luciani, *Synodality*, 104.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF ROMANS 12:1-2

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Abstract: The distinction between one who believes in Christ and the 'world' characterizes Jesus' earthly ministry. The identity of Jesus and his disciples is what makes this distinction glaring. This is simply what Paul establishes in Romans 12:1-2. Paul begins the letter to the Church in Rome with clear explanation on how humans have been cut up in the realm of God's saving grace. He further explains Christians as people who is righteous not by tribal affinity, but by faith in Christ. In the examined biblical text, Paul addresses an important question of why a Christian must live a transformed life. He further explains how to live that transformed life. The life of a Christian must reflect what the will of God is: good, pleasing, and perfect, because the life of a Christian is offered to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable.

Keywords: Paul, Sacrifice, Rom 12:1-2, Renewal, Transformation.

Introduction

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul draws the boundaries of the people of God, Jew and Gentiles. He explains that the covenant promised to Abraham's seed is not determined by physical descent or works of the law in flesh; rather, it is determined by gracious call which knows no social bounds. Paul presents a gospel open

to all who believe (1:16-17). A sketch of a way of living with particular reference to critical issues which confronted the Roman congregations is the task of Paul's letter.¹

In Rom 12:1-2, Paul writes:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

These two verses serve as an introduction to the rest of the main division (12:1–15:13), the theme of which they set forth. As the key to the right understanding of the sections which follow, they require a careful study. This article analyses Rom 12:1-2 and its relevance for Christians.

1. Background and Structure of the Text

The preaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ set the platform for Early Church. Jesus' disciples were scattered abroad due to persecution, but they did not stop proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus in whom they believed. The gospel was not limited to the Jewish environs; it reached the threshold of the gentiles. It was as good as Jesus' ministry was without break, because the disciples effectively carried on the work. This included the person of Apostle Paul, whose ministry to the Gentiles was far-reaching. This he reiterated to the Church in Rome (1:16-17). The universal nature of the Gospel was vivid in Paul's mission; this was not in mere words, but also in action. He travelled as far as Macedonia and Asia. He also demonstrated the earnest desire to visit the Church in Rome in this letter (1:9-15; 15:23-32). Rom 12:1-2 forms an important part of the epistle to the Church in Rome. Paul demonstrated the practical application of

¹ J.D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 705.

righteousness through faith in Christ. He employed a powerful progression of message which intensively summarizes all his intended words (12:1–15:13) in the first two verses. The presented structure (A-B-C-B'-A') forms the framework of the analysis of the text.

A I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God
B to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God
C which is your spiritual worship.
B' Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind
A' that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect

As seen in the text, the process of transformation begins with God. However, human role and participation is of great importance, even though he/she is helped by God. Paul made it clear that God will not do for a person what a person should do for him/herself. Paul addresses two important issues in this text: (i) why should a believer be transformed? (ii) How can a believer be transformed? There is an expected mode for Christians so as to attain the result Paul stated: “that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The practical living of Roman Christians was the ultimate concern of Paul. This letter serves as an eye opener to make Christians sure of themselves in Christ. It describes Christians in this world as ‘Living Sacrifices.’

2. Analysis of the Text

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God this is true worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will (NIV).

Paul began his words to the Church in Rome with ‘**therefore**,’ suggesting the need to step back into the previous section to get the big picture of the entire book. The background of the text in the previous section provides details that summarize why Paul made use of *oun* – ‘therefore’ to usher in his words here. Romans 1:17 encapsulates the theme of the entire book, which is ‘righteousness from God.’ The first person pronoun, “**I**,” commenced the statement of Paul, referring to him speaking to the people. He is presented as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, a proclaimer of the good news. Paul refers to the recipients of his message as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters,’ connoting members of the same family – the body of Christ. On this note, Romans 12:1 opens up this strand of practical session of commitment and righteousness reproduced in the believer’s life.²

“**I urge you**” has been given several connotations which have to do with either an authoritative command or a personal plea. And “**in view of God’s mercies**” is viewed as the explicit ground on which Paul speaks, rather than his apostolic authority.³ Although the latter is reflective of several of Paul’s writings, the fact that the statement here has great bearing on God rather than Paul’s personality, cannot be discarded. Also, ‘God’s mercies’ can be seen as summary of all that Paul has said about the justification, sanctification, and salvation of people. It is not attributed to human merit or efforts, but to God’s mercies. Paul’s appeal is based on the mercies of God, the platform on which he and his recipients have become members of the same family. With the verb *parakaleo* (which can be translated as ‘beseech,’ ‘instruct,’ ‘appeal,’ ‘beg,’ or even ‘exhort’), Paul comes to the readers with a serious sense of urgency – something that should not be taken

² R.K. Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 211.

³ B.N. Newman & E.A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 132.

for granted. Paul brings the whole discussion to bear as a motive for devotion to God.

The word “**present**” (which also means offer) is a key term to the text. It is somewhat technical. It is also used by Paul in 6:13, 16, 19. “And do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as at those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (6:13). Here, Paul posits that Christians should present their bodies to the right person who is going to use them skillfully to accomplish his purposes.⁴ As used in Rom 12:1, ‘present’ has an idea of giving something over to another, to relinquish one’s grip on it. It also connotes that someone cannot give it and then later takes it back. This is an element of decisiveness expected from every Christian. *Parastesai* as a derivative of *paristatano* when used as a metaphor, which means to “bring into one’s fellowship or intimacy.”⁵ This perspective gives rich meaning to what Paul communicates here, coupled with the cardinality of the concept of “**living**” echoed in the same verse. *Parastesai* further sets the platform for the concept of “**sacrifice**” Paul later introduces in the next part of the text. This same word is used in Lk 2:22, where Jesus was presented to God in the temple by his parents. This gives great insight in the life of Jesus; his parents were giving him to God, with no thought of taking him back.⁶ This understanding is congruent.

What should Christians present? It is their bodies. And this should be done as living sacrifice. Paul’s language immediately reminded Paul’s first readers of the common practice of offering

⁴ J. Cottrell, *Romans: College Press NIV Commentary, Vol. II* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publication, 1998).

⁵ J. Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Electronic; Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), 3936.

⁶ Howard G. Hendricks and Williams D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Illinois: Oasis International Limited, 1991), 273.

up animals as burnt offering to God in an act of worship.⁷ Ritual offerings were made in certain pagan religions, just as it's a central part of the Mosaic Law.⁸ Unlike pagans, Jewish religion demands that animals to be used for sacrifice must be without blemish; if not, the sacrifice remains unacceptable. This stance is what differentiated the Jewish concept of sacrifice from other religions in the Ancient Near East. The disqualification will be done at first by the priest, after the external examination, and then it's up to God to finalize the internal acceptance. *Somata* – the “**bodies**” is most appropriate; meaning literal ‘bodies’ just as Paul mentioned. Paul's emphasis on *somata* unveils the importance of the body in itself (as an authentic part of the human nature) and how significant it is to use the body to glorify God. Contemporary Christians need to watch against every iota of corruption that has crept into the Church. This emphasis has a great bearing on the way Christians use their bodies. What the Christians think with their reasoning faculty, what they do with their hands, what they watch with their eyes, what kind of gatherings they attend, and what kind of music they listen to, has to be discerned.

It is plausible to say the body stands for the totality of a person, the total being with special emphasis on person's interaction with the world. Thus, Paul is setting the line straight with the connotation that there is now a shift in ownership. Meaning that the bodies are no longer owned by the people who actually possess them in the physical sense; rather, it is now owned by God. The concept of sacrifice in the African context is with the emblem that it can never be taken back in whatever way or means. In fact, when a sacrifice is offered in African setting, the priest instructs the owner of the sacrifice not to look back. This indicates that the sacrificed object is now a sacred entity which should not be claimed again by the

⁷ J. Day, *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 23.

⁸ H. Kraus, *Worship in Israel: A Cultic History of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 34.

one who sacrifices it. Paul's explanation is explicitly distinct from the Africans because it does not involve animals or idols. Therefore, one could perceive Paul saying to the Church present your bodies to God without the thought of taking it back again, not because of anything but because of his mercies and love.

The body is the object of sacrifice. The depiction here suggests that this is the only instrument of sacrifice human have – the only thing someone can give to God. **“Living sacrifice”** is a contradiction in terms (because sacrifice should be dead in the actual sense), except in the spiritual realm. Thus, ‘living’ is a deliberate contrast with the Old Testament sacrifices in which the animals were killed in a one-time act. Here, Paul is talking about a very alive body. Therefore, Christians are no longer obliged to offer animal sacrifices, instead offer themselves with all the vital energies in continuing day-after-day worship. This is suggestive of the fact that in view of God's mercies, Christians become dead to sin, though still living in this world. Besides the fact that the bodies are ‘living,’ they are also **“holy”** and **“pleasing”** to God. Holy in the sense that the bodies are set apart in consecration to God; pleasing in the sense that such a sacrifice is a delight to God's heart. This is more like the Old Testament sacrifices which provides aroma pleasing to God (Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9, 13, 2:2). Christ's sacrifice was likewise a fragrant offering (Eph 5:2), just as Christian's act of service to God. Public worship is special and must not be neglected, but the true worship God desires is not a single act, rather it entails the whole of Christian life from day-to-day.

The features of ‘holy’ and ‘pleasing to God’ attached to living sacrifice heightens the significance of what Paul explains. This sets up the platform on which the succeeding verse rests. The first verse talks about **who a Christian should be** and the second verse sheds more light by beginning with **what he should not be**. **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world...”** The word **“conform”** has the idea of pouring something into a mould. This

line can be paraphrased ‘do not take the shape of the world.’ Do not allow the world to do the opposite of what God wants to do. An alternative to conforming to the world’s pattern is to ‘be transformed,’ which can be interpreted to mean a metamorphosis or complete makeover.

The “**world**” in question refers to the age marked by satanic character. The world system that Paul talks about is in total opposition to God and his upright values. This relativistic and sin-justifying value system will continually exert pressure on Christians. The words *euschematizesthai* and *metamorphousthai* used in Rom 12:2 are argued to be synonymous.⁹ The contrast in this verse is not the two kinds of change (which *schema* and *morphe* provides), but the two totally different models according to which one may shape his/her life. The two competing models are: “**the pattern of this world**” and “**the will of God.**” The instruction therein is that Christians should not shape their lives according to the anti-Christian cultures of this world.¹⁰

Transformation is from within. To “**be transformed**” is actually the passive form of a verb, whereas the word for “**renewing**” is active. This is suggestive of the fact that God does the transformation, not human. However, the overhauling of human thinking is what allows God to effect the transformation, hence we can translate it as “...Continue to let yourselves be transformed.” Unfortunately, many Christians are conformed to this world; they do not sit and think through several opinions and make informed decisions.¹¹ Instead, they act according to what the society and culture dictates. Since the Christian mind undergoes constant renewal, it therefore cannot be neutral. The Christian life is characterized with a once and for all complete change of mind. This can also be viewed as a pointer to the salvific work of Christ.

⁹ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 709.

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, *Pleasing God: Overcome the Obstacles that Keep You from Honoring God* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 49.

¹¹ Sproul, *Pleasing God*, 55.

Christianity is **not about a changed life, but an exchanged life**. The mind is the seat of intellectual and moral judgment.

The word of God is the object for renewing the mind of Christians. Just like everyone else, Christians are confronted with a myriad of conflicting choices with regards to how to act and live. Thus, **renewing of the mind** is the renewing of the ability to think correctly, especially about spiritual and moral matters. The secular concept of meditation entails shoving the mind off anything and everything; this is incongruent with the biblical art of meditation. What God expects is that the mind is constantly filled and saturated with his word. This is suggestive of the fact that a transformed and renewed life is absolutely controlled by the word of God.

The result of the transformed life is what leads to the last statement of Paul in verse 2: “...**then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.**” Test and approve connotes **discernment**. Some scholars argue that the will of the God is the purpose of the transformed life. Whether this statement expresses purpose or result, it simply reveals that transformation that renews the mind is a necessary yardstick for being able to discern God’s will. In other words, unsaved person cannot trust his/her instinct. The ‘good’ will of God is as good as God is. The ‘acceptability’ is not only in prospect, but also in retrospect. Therefore, someone cannot add anything to the will of God and in any way improve it. God’s will is totally, absolutely pleasing. His will is also perfect as he is, as perfect as his character and holiness. To know the will of God is to know what God wants or desires.

3. Relevance of the Text

Although Romans 12:1-2 was Paul’s message to the Church in Rome, it is also relevant to the contemporary Church. Christian life begins with God because he is always ahead of humans. He never asks humans to do anything for him until they are fully aware

of what God has done for them. Many ‘Christians’ do not find it worthy to present themselves as living sacrifice because they have not come to the full understanding of what God’s mercies means. They have not really grasped the gravity of what God has done for humanity through the person of Jesus Christ. A little child can recite Jn 3:16 – a very popular portion of the scripture. However, ‘understanding’ here doesn’t have to do with recitation, but the careful alignment with what God has done as affirmed in the recited portion of the Bible. Human response to the saving grace through Jesus Christ is the true understanding emphasized here. God’s love is great and mighty.¹² This is what Paul wishes to convey when he uses the expression ‘God’s mercies.’ Thus, the rationale behind everything Christians do and say must be God’s mercies.

The act of ‘presenting’ one’s self as a living sacrifice is human responsibility. It is a decision to make. Just like the “non-conforming” act in Rom 12:2. To present one’s self is what every Christian must do by him/herself and for him/herself. This step is absolutely intentional: give yourself away! After giving one’s self away, nothing is left to give again. By implication, this act totally discredits partial presentation. When Christians give themselves to God, they have nothing else left to be given. Therefore, a partial act of giving one’s self away is as good as giving nothing at all. Unfortunately this is what many contemporary Christians do. They only “present some.” The biblical text does not read; “present your leg, head, hand, neck, mind, head, or even eyes; rather, the body.” This is why Paul chooses the word ‘body,’ so that the message here can be adequately captured to mean – ‘the whole,’ or even ‘without anything or any part left out.’ Until this is done, Christians have not presented anything yet. God is much interested in ‘everything’ from everyone who has faith in Jesus, casting aside

¹² O.P. Kolawole, *The Reality of God’s Love for Mankind: A Sharp Lens on the Book of Genesis* (Mauritius: Blessed Hope Publishing Company, 2019), 65.

no detail of his/her life and destiny. Although the body formerly belonged to human, now it is God's.

The word living attached to sacrifice connotes one's existence not only in this world (in general understanding), but everywhere a Christian finds him/herself: at work, market, school, government position, Church leadership, and many more. Christians therefore remain God's ambassadors who are not in hold of their own lives but totally controlled by God.¹³ Among many contemporary Christians, pretense is the order of the day. Many portray themselves as angels in the Church but manifest as demons in several other places. Such Christians have failed and cannot be referred to as living sacrifice, because they are not being transformed. Also, many people think they can be transformed by themselves. Therefore, they exert their strengths and efforts in ensuring their transformation, but to no avail. Paul makes it clear in his statement that transformation is not human-made; it is God-made. It comes from inside-out. It is a fruit of human act of presenting him/herself and God renewing his/her mind.

The motive of the world is to mould God's children into its nature. This ravages the earth, including where Christians live, work, and study.¹⁴ To be conformed to the world is to be involved in the evil structures of the world. Sometimes, it could mean doing the popular thing. There is a conflict here; this is absolutely what sets up Paul's usage of "but" as contrast. What is popular with human is not always popular with God. This is what made Joseph say: "How can I do this and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). God was Joseph's priority. Christian non-conformity must be a discerned non-conformity because it is easy for contemporary Christians to trivialize the act of non-conforming and trivialize it

¹³ Oladotun Paul Kolawole, "A Theological Exploration of Mark 4:35-5:43," *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 26 (2023): 5-24.

¹⁴ Abdulazeez O. Otunaya & O.P. Kolawole, "The Relevance of John 1:1-18 for Contemporary Christians" *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 85/3 (Mar 2021): 200.

to the length of simplistic externals as the Pharisee did. Ideologically, many Christians have dropped out of this world – they are non-conforming without transformation. Meanwhile, the theatre of God’s redemption is this world. Christians should not flee this world ideologically, rather intervene in its functioning everywhere and every time. They should become agents of transformation because God wants the world (people) to be redeemed.¹⁵ If Christians will be effective witnesses in this world, the study of the world must be done and they should have the passion and delight to please God. Often, the conflict is between what pleases human and what pleases God. This is why Paul made God’s role clear in the transformative process.

A person is a product of what he/she thinks. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The mind is the Central Processing Unit of the body. Contemporary Christians must guide their minds so jealously against the activities that corrupt their minds, ranging from music to the kind of movies or even novels one takes interest in. Many Christians attend Church services and even several special Church programs, moving from one revival service to the other, from one prayer meeting to the other. Yet in their lives little significance is given to the word of God but much attention and time is accorded to all kinds of frivolous activities. Amidst all these vices, Paul provides contemporary Christians with thermometer with which words and acts can be measured. Most contemporary Christians misconceive the ‘will of God’ as an obscure mystical reality and confusing. Most people spend much time in life trying to find what the will of God is, but they have not presented themselves as living sacrifices. We are faced with choices and decisions on daily basis, in terms of career, marriage, choice of study, relationship, institution of learning, etc. Paul strongly posits that the will of God is to be discovered and

¹⁵ O.P. Kolawole, “The Great Commission Mandate of the Church in Matthew 28:18-20,” *Holiness and Discipleship: Word and World* 40/4 (2020): 202.

done with such relish that it will be proved to be good, acceptable, and perfect. He states that those who genuinely do what is required (present themselves) will definitely find in their own experience the reality of the sweet will of God.

Conclusion

Paul's letter to the Church in Rome is of great significance and its relevance to contemporary Christians cannot be discarded. Dedication and transformation should characterize the lives of all who believe in the lordship and the saving grace of God through the person of Jesus Christ. This bears witness to the fact that sanctification is taking place in the lives of Christians. The exposition of Christian truth requires a response in the enlightened heart; with this in mind, Paul asks his readers to do a realistic evaluation of their life. Christians should realize that God is the sole purpose of their existence in this world. Christians no longer live for themselves, rather they live for God, as 'Living Sacrifices.'

OUTGOING-PILGRIM CHURCH WITH A DIFFERENCE

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Abstract: The ‘Outgoing Church’ is to be viewed beyond institutions, structures and physical spaces. It is rooted in perceiving Church as a mystery, which lives out its discipleship by following the precepts of Jesus. The article explores sociological and theological meanings of the Church and establishes ‘Mystical Communion’ as the basis for ‘Body of Christ’ and ‘People of God.’ By understanding this as its vocation and mission, Church becomes a Listening Church, Synodal-Servant Church, Outgoing-Pilgrim Church, and Prophetic-Witnessing Church.

Keywords: Outgoing Church, Synodal Church, Pilgrim Church, Mystical Communion, Body of Christ, People of God.

Introduction

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church, more often than not, is identified with pyramidal-institutional model. On the basis of the institutional model, until Vatican II, the Church was conceived as a single, unified “perfect society.”¹ The concept of ‘perfect society’ has made the church to view itself as second to none and complete

¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 1978), 13-14.

in itself. Consequentially, it began to lose its charisma. A Church which “forgets that it is something temporary, provisional, and interim, makes too many demands upon itself; it grows tired and weak and will fail because it has no future.”² In spite of Vatican II dedicating a full-fledged document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and illustrating various dynamic images of the Church,³ our Church remains self-promoting rather than becoming an instrument of the Reign of God. In this context, Pope Francis reiterates the need for change and proposes a model of an “Outgoing Church,”⁴ which is people-centred and views itself as a field hospital to care for the wounded, neglected, and the excluded.

The ‘Outgoing Church’ is to be viewed beyond institutions, structures, and physical spaces. It invites us to perceive the Church as a mystery, which lives out its discipleship by following the precepts of Jesus: charity, humility, and self-denial (LG 5). In discovering and personalizing the ways of this Outgoing Church, let us, first, explore the sociological and theological meaning of the term ‘Church.’ Secondly, we shall highlight the ‘Mystical Communion’ as the foundation of this ‘Outgoing Church,’ which is founded on the images of ‘Body of Christ and People of God,’ and thirdly, we shall explore the concrete ways of being the ‘Outgoing church’ through ‘Synodal-Pilgrim Model’ of living within and outside the Church.

1. Sociological and Theological Understanding

Sociologically the term “church” would mean any group of people who consider themselves to be followers of Christ and belong to an outward institution. In this understanding faith is taken for granted and at times even ignored. But “theologically the term “church” refers to the mystery of Christ as realized in the community

² Hans Küng, *The Church*, (New York: Image Books, 1976), 137.

³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (Nov. 1964), no. 6. Church is a sheepfold, Gateway, Cultivated field, Building of God, Vineyard, etc.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Ad Theologiam promovendam* (Nov 2023), no. 3

of those who believe in him and are assembled in his name.”⁵ The Church as the ‘mystery of Christ’ emphasizes that the Church is not merely a society made of human beings, but a community called out by God in Christ to dwell in communion with God and with one another. The Greek words *ekklesia* and *kurieke*, and the Hebrew word *Qahal Yahweh* illustrate the act of being called out by God.⁶ Hence, the members of the Church believe that the Church is a mystery, work of God, and he is present and operative in the Church through the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ continues his presence and the saving mystery.⁷ “Mystery of God is not a question of something grasped mentally but a relationship that touches all of life.” Knowledge of the mystery of God is mystery of love (*Desiderio Desideravi*, no. 39). Hence it is not blind or esoteric, but dynamic and flows outward.

The Church realizing itself as the **mystery of Christ is the key to view itself as a provisional place** where people find one another and God in Christ. This mystical dimension of the Church is the foundation stone missing today. The mystical identity of the Church ensures that it does not become an END in itself, but on a journey accompanying the People of God in the realization of the Reign of God. In a truly prophetic sense, Jesus was highly critical of the status-quo based institutional religion of his day. Jesus grounded his authority on God and spoke from the Spirit of God. Unfortunately, our Christianity has failed to provide room for prophetic protest against clericalism or abuse of authority. We hardly listen to the promptings of the Spirit and much less to the *Sensus Fidei* of the People of God.

We need to recover the original spirit of the Church as the People of God and mystical body of Christ, which is ready to

⁵ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 129.

⁶ Etymologically *ekklesia* comes from two Greek words *ek* (out) + *kaleo* (called), i.e., people who were called out by the Lord. Hebrew word *Qahal Yahweh* means ‘community of God’ and the Greek word *kurieke* means a community of the Lord.

⁷ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 129.

take risks, cares for the poor and the vulnerable, stands against injustice, and where there is no clergy-laity divide. For this we need to view our Church as a mystical communion, which will obliterate all our self-referential attitude and make the Church open to the promptings of the Spirit that could come from all corners.

2. Mystical Communion: Body of Christ and People of God

Avery Dulles writes that the Church is a mystery.⁸ As a mystery it is not a society, but a community of people with greater intimacy with one another and with God. Emil Brunner, therefore, calls the **Church as a brotherhood (or fellowship) and a pure communion of persons.**⁹ In this Mystical communion model, institutionalism, juridicism, and hierarchy do not have any value. Dietrich Bonhoeffer defines such a church as an interpersonal community, in which, “[t]he community is constituted by the complete self-forgetfulness of love. The relationship between I and thou is no longer essentially a demanding but a giving one.”¹⁰ Such a self-forgetfulness of love and the attitude of giving originates from the communion that exists in the interpersonal community. Thus, **the essence of the Church is *koinonia*, a living mystical communion.** The Greek term *koinonia* as a noun means a full intimate unity, far deeper than any ordinary friendly relationship, and it implies sharing in common and being companions. Thus, church as mystical communion becomes fundamental to perceive the Church as the ‘Body of Christ’ and ‘People of God.’

2.1 Mystical Body of Christ

St. Augustine writing on the image of the Mystical Body of Christ stresses on the mystical and invisible communion that binds together all those who are enlivened by the grace of Christ. The grace of

⁸ Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 13-14.

⁹ Cf. Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 107.

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 123.

Christ is the seed that brings all into union with God. In this body, Christ is the head, all are in ecclesial communion without prioritizing hierarchy as higher and others as lower. The mystical body is “the Unity of those who live with the life of Christ.”¹¹ The invisible grace and life of Christ in the ‘Body of Christ’ enables the members to relate with one another as brothers and sisters, with an openness to listen, love, and care for each other.

The mystical body has an in-built vital divine life-principle called the Holy Spirit, due to which the Church can grow, repair itself, and adapt itself to changing needs.¹² *Lumen Gentium* further establishes that the structures of the body function as instruments, serving Christ’s Spirit who vivifies the mystical body. *Lumen Gentium* also clarifies that the mystical body is not coterminous with the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, the mystical body cannot be only limited to the Church structures and institutional formulas. **The mystical body communion, while remaining a solid foundation for the Church, goes beyond the walls of the Church and opens itself to new realities.** It updates itself constantly and is willing to change and does not discriminate between clergy and laity. The mystical body is intrinsically linked to the People of God.

2.2 People of God

Lumen Gentium gives a primary place to the image: “People of God.” People of God is a Biblical notion that portrays Israel to be the nation of God’s predilection. God willed to make people holy and save them, not as individuals but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness.¹³ In the New Testament, Christ called a group of people from all races, who would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and they would be the new People of God of the

¹¹ Emile Mersch, *The Whole Christ* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938), 76.

¹² Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 54.

¹³ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter II, no. 9

New Covenant (LG 9). They enjoy the dignity and freedom of the children of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in their hearts and they obey the new commandment to love as Christ loved us (cf. Jn 13:34). The destiny of the People of God is the Reign of God and they are called to live in communion of life, love, and truth (LG 9).

The People of God is basically a priestly community. They are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood by their baptism. The Greek term for People of God is *laos*. It indicates no difference within the community as between priests (clerics) and people (Laity).¹⁴ Hence “the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood . . . are ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.”¹⁵ Though the ministerial priest, in the person of Christ, effects the Eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all people, the faithful by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. It manifests the fellowship and close unity of the People of God. The mystical body of Christ model and the People of God image highlight the notion of the Church as a communion or community.¹⁶ The mystical communion of the Church leads the Church to be ever ‘journeying together’ according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such a synodal Church is the need of the hour.

3. Synodal-Pilgrim-Outgoing Church

Synodal Church is not merely a talk. Synodality is a different way of being a church. Synodal Church is a way of living. It is not another structure or a document. Synodal Church is a consciousness and an attitude that comes from the awareness that all are members of ‘mystical body of Christ and People of God.’ The term Synod (*syn* = with, *hodos* = path)¹⁷ refers to the People

¹⁴ Cf. Küng, *The Church*, 170.

¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10

¹⁶ Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 59.

¹⁷ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2nd March, 2018), no. 6. Hereafter ITC.

of God being together along the way. In this journey together, Jesus is the way (cf. Jn 14:6) and so the early Christians were called “followers of the way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:23; 22:4). **Ignatius of Antioch** in his letter to the community in Ephesus says, “all its members are σύνοδοι, ‘companions on the journey’ on the basis of their baptismal dignity and their communion with Christ.”¹⁸ John Chrysostom reaffirms that the term Church and Synod are synonymous.¹⁹ In other words, he reiterates, that the Church exists by practicing synodal living.

The synodal living is going beyond the walls and barriers to embrace all in an inclusive-communion spirit and comprehending itself as an Outgoing-Pilgrim Church.²⁰ The goal of the pilgrim Church is not to be found in itself, but to go out in realizing the Reign of God and being a herald of hope.²¹ “The goal of this journeying together is not to create a new vision or pastoral plan with objectives. **Rather the goal of our journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and His Church.**”²² In journeying together, we listen together without prejudices, pray together, discern together, support one another, and bear witness by our lives. “After we listen to each other, we are called to dialogue together on ways we can accompany each other as we seek to grow in holiness,”²³ humility and boldness.

Conclusion

The Outgoing Church views itself as a ‘Mystery’ and therefore not perfect, but evolving day by day by listening to the Spirit and

¹⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Ephesios* IX, 2; F.X. Funk (ed.), *Patres apostolici* I, Tübingen, 1901, p. 220.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Explicatio* in Psalms. 149. PG 55, 493.

²⁰ ITC 58

²¹ Küng, *The Church*, 137.

²² “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission,” *Participants Guide*, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington (2021), no. 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 4

one another. Hence, it functions as a synodal Church: A Church that “goes forth,” as a missionary Church “whose doors are open” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 46). Pope Francis articulates this strongly, when he says,

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures (EG 49).

Today we need such a church, which exists as a prophetic sign of God, witnessing to fraternity, participation, and mission to stand for the upliftment of the poor and ready to lend them her own voice. For this, the Outgoing Church has to be a humble Church in its attitude, ever ready to learn by listening and is willing to enter into a continual conversion process with courage and freedom of heart.²⁴ In this Church there is no discrimination between clergy and laity, male and female, high caste and low caste, senior and youth, and black and white. The Outgoing Church functions no more as a custom officer, but as a shepherd, who seeks after the least and the lost. It goes out into the context of the people to suffer with them, to heal the wounded, and to save the broken in a borderless journey. Ultimately, it has to be a Listening Church, Synodal-Servant Church, Outgoing-Pilgrim Church, and Prophetic-Witnessing Church.

²⁴ “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission,” *Participants Guide*, no. 9; cf. EG 26.

Book Review

Book Review Editor: Anil D'Almeida SJ

Broadening the Horizons of our Minds: Reflections on Faith and Science. By Fr Fiorello Mascarenhas SJ. Bengaluru: ATC publishers, 2021. ISBN 978-93-91399-07-8. Pp. 93. Price: Rs. 150.

One of the popular phrases today in religious circles is “faith and science.” The book’s overarching theme is how science and faith are compatible to one another. Numerous astounding scientific breakthroughs are produced in the modern world. These findings in actuality, complement rather than contradict our Christian beliefs. The author emphasizes how religious people can become more enlightened and broad-minded by combining their beliefs with science. A religious, with a wide scope of thought will be able to communicate the Gospel to the faithful in a relevant way.

The Roman Catholic Church previously condemned Galileo’s scientific discoveries. In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II officially apologized for the wrongdoing committed against Galileo. In order to stop history repeating itself, one must learn the art of interpreting the bible using various tools such as historical critical method etc. This helps one to read the bible intelligently and with deep devotion.

The Bible texts should not be taken out of context, in doing so, one makes a pretext of it which is wrong. The author quotes scripture and Dei Verbum exhaustively and encourages the readers to use it for the right interpretation of the Bible. He briefly introduces ‘Principles of interpretation of the Bible’ (p. 15) He also uses church documents written by various Popes and Doctors of the Church.

Faith and reason should go hand-in-hand. One cannot ridiculously reject the scientific discoveries. Human intelligence and faith lead us to a deeper knowledge and love of God. The traditional Christian understanding of creation story, original sin and salvation are discussed extensively in the light of modern scientific and historical discoveries. The author maps the Big Bang Theory and the Genesis story to explain the creation story. Original sin is explained as original selfishness (p. 27); fundamentally humans are drawn to be selfish than being selfless. Salvation is understood in relation to the dynamic and active presence of God from the time of creation of the universe till today. It is important to connect scattered dots in the history to understand and develop new perspectives.

Existence of suffering in the world is inevitable. Instead of considering suffering in the world as God's means of putting people to the test, one should consider how humans contribute to it. Environmental crisis is the best example to understand how human beings can create suffering. God forgives us; people may be able to forgive one another; but Nature does not; it reacts!

The book culminates with the second coming of Christ (p. 71). The author expresses the dangers that are involved in fundamentalistic interpretation of Parousia. He emphasizes the uncertainties involved in explaining the 'second coming of Christ' quoting scripture and Vatican II council. He considers Teilhard de Chardin's perspective

that 'our cosmos is moving on to its omega point' (p. 73).

This is a 'must read' book for anyone who believes that science can offer absolute solutions to every issue that our society faces today. This book will be helpful to those who question whether faith and science can coexist. It is also a great resource for learning more about what the church has to say about faith and science. The readers of this book can learn the fundamentals of biblical interpretation and the need for it in the 21st century. The reader does not have to be an expert in science to enjoy the book. I would advise everyone who is interested in fusing faith and science to read this book.

Joseph JERALD SJ

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