

September 2019

# JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA



**Inter-faith  
Dialogue  
Special**

## The Changing Face of Inter-faith Dialogue

## FOOTPRINTS

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# Take me and lead me, O Lord, beyond...

Beyond my little vision  
That only sees the misfortunes,  
Atrocities and injustices  
Meted out everywhere to 'my people'.  
But sees not the same when done to 'my neighbour'!

Take me and lead me, O Lord, beyond...

Beyond my little heart  
That cries out in pain and anger  
Upon hearing reports of 'our holy places',  
'Our sacred relics' being set aflame  
But is numb when 'my neighbour's holy places' go up in flames.

Take me and lead me, O Lord, beyond...

Beyond my little attitude  
That makes me rudely reject my neighbours' cultures,  
Their beliefs, their religions and traditions  
As inferior and wanting, compared to  
My 'great, complete, and superior religion and truth.'

Take me and lead me, O Lord, beyond...

Beyond my deep-seated bias and prejudice  
That makes me value and devalue people  
Going only by their caste, creed, colour and gender  
And not recognizing their innate human dignity,  
Nor accepting the unique power and status of the other gender.

Take me and lead me, O Lord, beyond...

**Jeyaraj Veluswamy, SJ**  
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(The author is currently serving JRS mission for Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh.)



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As a service of information for the South Asian Jesuit Assistency, Jivan is sent to Jesuits and their colleagues, Collaborators and friends. Articles appearing in Jivan express the views of the authors and not of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia. All material sent for publication may be edited for reasons of space, clarity or policy. Readers are requested to donate generously towards Jesuit ministries.



## A story to remember

Thank you for the short story titled "A walk to remember" by Sch. Titus Gonmei. The story brought back memories of my early years in the Society. I remembered many Jesuits who made a deep impression on me. It justifies why the Society of Jesus is called the Society of Love. Such stories help us to share our identity and mission. Congratulations on the good work.

| Arul Rayan, SJ | Gandhinagar

## A response not Jesuit enough

Reading through the cover feature by Anthony Dias, SJ, and the appendix by Joseph M. Dias, SJ, in the July edition of Jivan, I was both amused and irked. Amused because both authors predictably chose to remain safely within the realms of the secular when formulating their propositions for the theme "Jesuit responses to a stunning verdict"; irked because despite the fact that both men are priests, there was no reference to Jesus, the one man who has an answer for every challenge we will ever face. These responses were not peculiarly Jesuit, however, nor were they necessarily unusual, but are, in fact, representative of a

wider problem many Catholics in India seem to have in responding to the crisis that is staring us in the face.

This paralysis results partly from our uncritical acceptance of the rhetoric of modernism, especially that of liberal secularism. Recognizing the violence inherent to liberal secularism we will realize that the violence of Hindu nationalism was already coded into Indian nationalism. There is need for Catholics to rethink their relationship with modern nationalism, and the cult of the nation state. These go against the universal spirit of Catholicism.

A good place to begin articulating a Catholic response to this crisis would be to upturn modernist and liberal assumptions about politics and open up the field of the political from the immanent to include the transcendental. We need to particularly assert the possibility, and indeed the need for the sacred to embrace the profane and sacralise it. Simultaneously there is need to talk about the values peculiar to distinct sacred orders. Not all sacred orders cherish the dignity of the individual.

A response to Election 2019 must rely on a rejection of modernism and an insistence on the universalism preached by Christ and His Church.

| Jason Keith Fernandes | Lisbon

## JESWITS

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"Old Provincials don't die - they join the JRS."



"Why I've been wearing a cassock all my life, Father, and never even realised it!"



"In the old days, Jonathan, we used to meet at weddings and birthday parties, remember? Nowdays it seems we only meet at funerals".



"Sister, sister, Father Joe's confessions are so good, that next week we'll give him even better sins!"



## POSA Speaks

GEORGE PATTERY, SJ

# Universal Apostolic Preferences for 'Ministry of Utmost Happiness'

Last month, I was commuting between 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' (Arundhati Roy) and the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP). I thought I was starting from and arriving at the same station - the ministry of utmost happiness (MUH)!

MUH is dedicated to the unconsolated. And rightly so. It speaks of and to the unconsolated. It describes the universal struggle of the minorities to be free. Their borders are not fixed by gender identity, religious beliefs or caste behaviour. They are fluid and borderless.

UAPs invite us to the world of the excluded, those without dignity - the refugees, the migrants, the poor, the mountains and rivers - all deprived of their dignity due to the relentless march of corporate religious nationalism, flexing its muscles, to create more and more inconsolable souls.

MUH gives you a world with complexity, energy and diversity with darkness and vitality intertwined. It takes you to the graveyard where the mourned and the mourning exchange places. Its people live in places on the streets as well as under-cover and underground (Renee Shea).

UAPs invite us to the 'secularized world' - sign of the times. They raise questions, they reset borders, and they travel between the secular and the sacred. How do we raise questions on and about God? What do we thirst after? What is the pathway to utmost happiness?

"If you want to know the world behind our corporate-sponsored dreamscapes, you read writers like Arundhati Roy. She shows you what's really going on (Junot Diaz). MUH is clear. 'The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' are one and the same.

UAPs are supposed to serve as horizons for us to move towards. The Infinite is beckoning us; the excluded are traversing borders; the young are searching and the earth is crying. What is going on around and inside us? Nothing short of transformation, a conversion to the unexpected, is asked of us by entering into "spiritual" conversation.

MUH contains a world of anguish and joy, love and war, death and life; the human is beyond the borders of skin and country. Everything is alive in ministry, from emotions to people to the country itself (Anita Felicelli). The underdog characters weave a world of hope.

UAPs take us to the world of a labouring God, loved into existence. It is glorious, heterogeneous, rich and complex, ever struggling to be a 'world'. "It is necessary to step out of oneself and lovingly care for everything that is good for others. A model of human life reconciled with creation is not possible if we are not able to break out of individualism and inaction."

UAP-MHU could be a collaborative venture. Let us carry forward this dialogue between humanity that lives in dizziness, and the horizon that beckons us to reconciliation and justice.



## Editor's Desk

VINAYAK JADAV, SJ

# Why Inter-faith dialogue today more than ever?

History has perhaps witnessed more bloodshed due to religion than politics. Much of the civil unrest and warfare around the globe today are either between religious groups or religiously aligned subcontinents. The words 'kafir' (infidels) for non-Muslims and pagan for non-Christians are just suggestions of inter-religious attitudes.

South Asia is worse. The perennial tension between India and Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim rivalry within India, Sunni and Shiite hostility within Pakistan, conflicts between Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka, the mayhem by the extreme-radical Muslim groups in Afghanistan, cold war between Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh and the rising Hindu hegemony in Nepal are clear examples of religious identity increasingly becoming the source of division and destruction. Of the eight south Asian countries, only two are secular (India and Nepal), the rest have a State religion of their own.

It is under this threatening contemporary religious context that we need to revisit the meaning of interfaith dialogue in the region. Much water has passed since the traditional mission of inter-religious dialogue began. The core of interfaith dialogue has moved from theology to culture; from seminaries to streets; from convictions of differences to celebration of commonalities. All inter-faith dialogues are inter-cultural dialogues. Pope Francis in the interfaith meeting in Sri Lanka (2015) reminded us: *as experience has shown, for such dialogue and encounter to be effective, it must be grounded in a full and forthright presentation of our respective convictions. Certainly, such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common. New avenues will be opened for mutual esteem, cooperation and indeed friendship.*

In the face of rising mono-culturalism, neo-nationalism and fascism in the guise of majoritarianism, we need to protect secularism and democracy in India. Against a political agenda of 'divide and rule', interfaith dialogue is one weapon, if not the only weapon. Religious pluralism needs to be acclaimed in the name of inter-faith dialogue. Inter-faith dialogue must be not a stray activity but a way of life!

Against the onslaught of consumerism and materialism, interfaith dialogue can provide a shelter of meaning to all faiths. Faith is a common answer to the material hunger and thirst of humankind. Against the threatening global secularization, interfaith dialogue helps discover a common ground that fills the spiritual vacuum. It needs to tell the world that terrorism has no religion! Interfaith dialogue is a spirituality that transcends every religiosity. Let what is wounded between the faiths be healed by the balm of interfaith dialogue.



# Everyone is a victim - therein lies our hope

Fundamentalism and Inter-faith dialogue in South Asia



A Hindu priest gives a shawl to the Pope during an interfaith meeting in Sri Lanka

Image Source : Catholic Herald

The persecution of the Christian community is the single most noxious common factor among the eight states of South Asia – in Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan, and even in tiny Maldives.

But Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs can point to countries where they are lynched, imprisoned without charges, or otherwise told they are not wanted, unless they agree to live as second class citizens, or as leashed lapdogs to be displayed at international photo opportunities.

## There is persecution everywhere

The gloom may be darker in one state than in the other, but the darkness prevails everywhere. Communities prey on each other, trying to negotiate space for their footprints on the demographic landscape. Each community carries its baggage of terrorism and political violence.

It is in this cauldron of a hundred fires, confrontations and blood-letting that communities seek peace, co-existence and reconciliation. They grope at every straw of hope that floats their way, they seek an anchor wherever they can, every photo opportunity, every supportive hero such as a Mother Teresa.

The solution lies in accepting and understanding the universality of persecution. It needs to be negotiated by those who emerge as community leaders. Survival on the platform of a lasting peace will depend on the skill, with which they build peace overtures, and the deftness with which they insulate and guard it from political persons and parties whose ascent to public office is almost always on the ladder of hate, greed and bloodshed, even in peaceful democracies

This article is about religious minorities. Ethnic or linguistic populations can say their crisis is existential and if they cease to exist in their place of origin, they vanish from the face of the earth. Gender and sexual orientations are different discourses altogether, important though they are with women numbering half of humankind.

## In Sri Lanka

The Easter bombing of the churches in Sri Lanka brings out the complexity of the situation. Several Muslims have been arrested for suicide bomb attacks on Catholic and Protestant churches in Colombo and elsewhere. The dead were not just Christians or even Sinhala. They included people from several nationalities - Sri Lankan, Indian and European.

The bombings have had repercussions on community relations that are still fragile almost forty years after the start of a civil war which saw 100,000 or more civilians killed, a disproportionate number among them Tamils, and over 50,000 militants and soldiers from the two sides. This is the highest

toll in the sub-continent after the Partition of India in 1947.

## In Pakistan

Pakistan is seen by most as the official bad boy in South Asia. The case of Aisha Bibi is a reminder of this. The judge who found her 'not guilty' of the charges of blasphemy was targeted. (The law is the same as in India, a relic of British colonial policy to harass the weak). The minister who came out in her support was shot dead. Aisha was eventually secretly whisked away to Canada.

India under Mr. Modi has promised a law welcoming Hindu, Sikh and Christian refugees from Pakistan, but not Muslim, even if they are Shias and Ahmadiyyas who are targeted more than the other minorities.

Pakistan too has problems of its own - 64,000 people have died in terrorist violence from 2000-2018.

## In Bangladesh and Bhutan

Bangladesh has long been freed of military rule but the plight of the minorities, especially Hindus, remains as terrible as in Pakistan. Nepal and Bhutan is a different cup of tea. Nepal pretends to be a secular state, no longer the world's only Hindu kingdom. The Hindu majority, despite ethnic divides, is united in its religious identity. In

the interior areas, informal restrictions on the tiny Islam and Christian communities continue.

Bhutan needs to be cited for its treatment of its ethnic minority, the Nepalese, and its religious minorities Christians and Muslims. Its boast of being home to the happiest people in the world rings true.

## In India

India is comparatively a peaceful country as civic discord goes. It does not have the gunfire one hears in the US, or the tribal genocides in parts of Africa or even in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

But let us not forget that 10 lakh people were killed at Partition by the same peaceful people – 5 lakh were Muslims, 5 lakh Hindus and Sikhs. In 1984, perhaps as many as 5,000 Sikhs were killed or burnt alive in Delhi, apart from those by the police in parts of Punjab. No one has been punished. The violence against Muslims happens too often, and is soon forgotten.

The first thing that comes to the mind of Indian Christians is of some Hindutva gang attacking a pastor or home worship group, or the police arresting someone. This persecution is a reality, though State governments and even a section of the Christian religious and political leadership remains in denial. The ruling party has as its creed a ban on conversions, a total ban on foreign remittances and the taking away of affirmative



Image Source : Google

action rights from Tribal Christians. At least two Christians have been lynched by self-styled cow protectors.

Life for Christians is going to get tough in the future whether the BJP remains in power or not. Most of the attacks on Christians have come to our notice in recent years through the United Christian Forum Helpline. Often the attackers bring a journalist or videographer with them, with the police posse keeping them company from a distance.

Alas, the persecution of Muslims is on an entirely different level. The physical attacks, the lynching, the insults, the coercive use of the Jai Shri Ram chant to humiliate Muslims is a part of grinding their dignity into dust. Even the so-called laws now being enumerated ostensibly to help liberate Muslim women from religious and patriarchal tyranny (such as the Triple Talaq Act) end up being instruments to circumscribe the community. The final straw is the constant testing of the Muslim's loyalty and patriotism.

Generally, the media is not sympathetic to the Christian or Muslim or even Dalit victim. The National Human Rights Commission, the National Minorities Commission forums exist for community harmony and peace. But they remain useless, toothless forums. International support is equally impotent. India is a large market for oil, military equipment and technology. No western government, therefore, wants to anger the Indian government. The Indian government has, whichever party is at the helm of affairs, mocked strictures of the UN, the US and the EU.

## Is there place for dialogue?

Dialogue is part of government policy. The Ministry of Home Affairs has various programmes to foster communal harmony and dialogue. But the agencies created for this are defunct, comatose or else serve the agenda of the political ideology in power.

The PMO may monitor extremism and terrorism, but dialogue is not part of its agenda. In its entire five year first term, the NDA government did not call a single meeting of the National Integration Council of which the PM is the Chair. The NIC was set up by Jawaharlal Nehru to be an extra-Parliamentary forum where various interests could meet freely, without party whips and ideological borders, to discuss such issues as communal harmony, unity and fraternity.

With fraternity at a discount in the environment of distrust after 1947, reinforced with every war or threat of war with Pakistan,



Image Source : crunow.com

Dialogue is part of government policy. The Ministry of Home Affairs has various programmes to foster communal harmony and dialogue. But the agencies created for this are defunct, comatose or else serve the agenda of the political ideology in power.

the people and the communities can be said to have forgotten the fine art of genuine, creative, fruitful dialogue in search of harmony as promised by the Constitution.

For the religious communities, the heads of various religions, denominations, congregations, mutts and gurdwaras dialogue remains little more than a tokenism, a photo opportunity. In effect, whether it is the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi or a dialogue called at a national forum, the drill remains no more than reading from holy books on peace, and ending with a group photograph.

Be it the Catholic Bishops Conference, or the various Gurudwara Prabandhak Committees or heads of the Sanatan Dharma, Arya Samaj, RK Mission, the Jain groups and the Buddhists, whether representatives of the Dalai Lama, or of the Ambedkarite group very little genuine progress has been made on dialogue in 70 years of independence.

## The tasks ahead

And yet, it is recognized deeply that there is no other way to construct a peaceful republic and live harmoniously in the motherland and in South Asia other than in a democratic landscape built on trust. This trust in turn is derived from a fuller understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each other, but also of the fears, the anxieties and the hopes which dwell in each one's heart.

which dwell in each one's heart.

Much lies with the leadership of the communities. Religious hierarchies must introspect on their role. This is not to question the need to modernize dogma and doctrine, activities which may take centuries. But the grammar and lexicon of religion can easily permit cleansing, and even purging in some cases, where majoritarian and supremacist rhetoric verges on the inflammatory ('hate speech').

The solution perhaps lies in the dialogue of life, where people normalize peaceful co-existence, diversity, equal opportunity. Governments can be facilitators, provide platforms, and even funds when required, rewrite textbooks, and/or encourage cinema conveying harmony.

This is an everyday task - for individuals, people's groups, communities, nations.

The author is an eminent journalist and activist based in New Delhi, a member of the National Integration Council (NIC) and a former national president of All India Catholic Union (AICU).

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# The changing face of Inter-religious dialogue



Image Source: missio-hilft.de

I have been interested, if not actually engaged, in interreligious dialogue for the last 65 years. Looking back, I am amazed at the manner in which it has changed over the years. Sharing that story with you will be both interesting and illustrative. It will also give us some idea of where we should be going in that field.

In 1954 I went to a small parish in South India as a Jesuit novice. I met my guru, Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam. He was interested in Indian culture and religion, and in the project of inculturation and interreligious dialogue. This was not appreciated by the authorities in the seminary where he had begun teaching. He was transferred to a small parish, the farthest in the Province. In my two weeks with him he evoked in me an interest in Indian music, culture, philosophy and religion. It gave direction to my life and work. In the Juniorate, I taught myself

Indian music, introduced to it by Fr. Michael Raj. In the Philosophate I delved into Indian philosophy through my private reading. In Regency I was given two years to do a course in Carnatic music. In theology (1965-68) I wrote a paper comparing Indian and Ignatian spirituality.

Together with Frs. T. K John (Delhi) and the late Sebastian Nallail (Kolkata) I spent a month visiting Hindu holy places and ashrams in the north encountering and talking to and dialoguing with

sannyasis. By then my guru had started an ashram in Chennai and I was in touch with Swami Abhishikatananda, OSB, Raimon Panikkar, Pierre Fallon, SJ, Robert Antoine, SJ, Mathew Lederle, SJ. They were all living some sort of ashram life. They had started an intellectual dialogue group that met periodically. These could be considered pioneers in interreligious dialogue in India. The dialogue was both intra-personal and interpersonal. I participated in one of their meetings in Mumbai while still a student of theology.

This was the first stage (or way) of interreligious dialogue in India. Their goal was to develop an Indian Christian spirituality for themselves and for others. So they were dialoguing with Hindu experts from whom they could learn. They hoped to proclaim Christ better to the Hindus, with the hidden hope of conversions, if I may say so. Dialogue was a way to mission. This was also the official position of the Church at the time. But the missionary focus was neither too strong, nor obvious. Their dialogue partners were intellectuals. Fr. Hirudayam used to organize sessions for reflection, meditation and even a retreat for interreligious groups. He was better at commenting on some of the Hindu texts than his interlocutors. So, he was admirably listened to.

There were other Jesuit gurus and ashrams in Belgaum, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Srs. Sara Grant and Vandana, later joined by Ishapriya, lived together with an Anglican community in Christa Prema Sevashram in Pune. A Hindu guru and a lady used to live there for some years. Dialogue with the Hindus became less formal. It was more a dialogue of life. The hope of converting any one was slowly disappearing. The focus was more on Indianization (Hinduization?). The ashramites felt at home in Hindu ashrams like Sivananda ashram in Rishikesh which were more open. An organization called Ashram Aikiya consisted of more or less 60 member ashrams, some with only one or two members. These ashramites were engaged in interreligious dialogue which was focused less on mission but more on their own way of life.

A second way of interreligious dialogue is more intellectual than spiritual. There are Indian theologians who are actively dialoguing with Hinduism than with Hindus. Their purpose is developing an Indian theology. They explore the Bhakti tradition in Hinduism, for example, or try to integrate the advaitic or non-dual perspectives in Indian theology. Their dialogue is more textual and intellectual than personal.

A third manner of interreligious dialogue is celebratory. Fr. Hirudayam in Chennai used to have a festival of lights in early December. In it he sought to bring together the different religious groups around the theme of light. The Hindu festival of lights (Diwali) or the

festival of lights in Thiruvannamalai in the South (Karthigaideepam) usually occurs sometime in November. The Muslim festival of Ramzan may be celebrated around the same time. The Christians see Christmas as a festival of light. So, one could have readings on the theme of light from different religions, songs, dances, sharing of sweets, etc. It brought an interreligious community together. In the last few years we have had an interreligious Iftar party in Chennai. We have started bringing



Image Source: swarajyamag

A fourth manner of interreligious dialogue that is emerging in recent years is practical. We pick up themes like violence, religious fundamentalism, the relation between religions and politics, the promotion of equality and justice, etc. and request scholars of different religions to address the issue and see what a community with people of different religions can do to confront and solve the problem in a practical and collaborative way. ”

together Muslims and others, speak a little on the meaning of Ramzan, let the Muslims have their evening prayer, while the others are quietly attentive and then have a common meal. In the last two years Muslims have started organizing Iftar parties and invite us to participate.

A fourth manner of interreligious dialogue that is emerging in recent years

is practical. We pick up themes like violence, religious fundamentalism, the relation between religions and politics, the promotion of equality and justice, etc. and request scholars of different religions to address the issue and see what a community with people of different religions can do to confront and solve the problem in a practical and collaborative way. Such dialogue underlines that religions are not primarily ways of belief, but manners of acting, giving meaning to and transforming life in community and in the world. Most countries are becoming multi-religious today, thanks to world-wide migrations. Believers are convinced that atheistic secularism is a threat to humanism, justice and peace. So they want to promote, a multi-religious secularism, as in India. This can be done only through interreligious dialogue. Here the religions are not presenting themselves as structures of beliefs and rituals, but as inspirations for animating personal and community lives and structures. This might involve socio-religious research.

The third and fourth kind of dialogue seems to be more attractive to people. They are more involved in the celebrations and more concerned about the impact that religion can have on society. Here I come back to my personal story. For various reasons, I could not join my guru in his ashram project. But after his passing to the Lord and my ‘retirement’ I was asked to direct the ashram. I suppressed the ashram and made it into a research centre focusing on social and religious questions from a multi-religious perspective oriented to action.

I think that we are entering into a fifth kind of interreligious dialogue. I see around me a growing number of interreligious marriages. This is more a dialogue of life than reflection or action. We have to help the interreligious couple to be loyal to their individual faith and at the same time reach out to each other at the religious level. There may be a danger that they may give up the practice of their faith. The next question is “what about their children?” An answer to such issues will need another article.

The author is a retired eminent Jesuit, who continues writing on theological issues.  
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# An Inter-faith pioneer from rural Bihar: Peter Doherty, SJ

Peter Doherty was ordained in 1968. From his earliest years in India he was taken up by the question, 'what is the Good News for the people among whom I have come to live?' He saw that the majority of them were from a range of Hindu castes. He appreciated the local Jharkhand church, yet he saw that Jharkhand's northern areas around Hazaribag were culturally very different from the Adivasi culture of Ranchi, and that the local church had little to say to these Hindu village communities – after all, the Adivasi communities had been long exploited by these same Hindu castes. When he focused on the scheduled caste communities, he moved well into a non-Christian world, into a culture marked by landlessness, exploitation and illiteracy. But he also discovered a wealth of popular religiosity.

Peter was clearly motivated by his own Jesuit commitment and by Vatican II theology. He saw that the local church was heavy with the symbols of western culture and this was an obstacle to local people being open to hear the Gospel. He saw the need to move away from a tradition bound Church. He went in the mid-1970s to Allahabad and got a Masters in Hindi. On his return, he went to St. Xavier's, Hazaribag. There began his search about how to convey the Gospel to simple people. Later he moved to Tarwa village and started a centre that became the centre for a network of villages. Then he laid the ground work for another network of villages now centred at Dumer.

His approach echoed a new emphasis from Vatican II that spoke of the 'seeds of the Word' being in all cultures. He saw that Hinduism was both a religion and a culture, that a disciple of Christ could remain in his/her Hindu culture. He formed a Kirten Mandali, a group of singers. Realizing that our Catholic Hindi hymns were very different from the seasonal songs of this Hazaribag locality, the group wrote gospel stories to the local tunes, formed a singing mandali, and toured the villages in that area where they got a positive response. These soirees attracted many and became a regular feature in many villages.

Doherty took the cultural form of a 'satsang' which centred on a guru, and advocated a satsang community comprising disciples of the Sadguru, Jesus Christ. This also was the beginning of a fuller 'kirten liturgy', of Mass celebrated in the form of a kirten puja. He insisted that being baptized into discipleship did not mean leaving caste and culture. He advocated the celebration of Hindu festivals, himself becoming a sort of pundit blessing houses, performing mundan (child's first tonsure), and other



Image Courtesy: Myron Pereira, SJ

rituals common to the local culture. He realized that the common spoken language of Hazaribag area was different from Ranchi's sadri dialect. He identified it as Maghi, and with the help of his team wrote a book of the Maghi grammar, translated into Maghi the Gospel according to St Mathew, the Canon of the Mass, and a made a collection of bhajans - 'Bhajanawali'. For a few years he organised a Maghi language course in the summer. In his contact villages, predominantly but not always of the scheduled castes, he followed up with educational work: a wide network of non-formal schools, and a variety of development programmes. A strong element of his 'faith sharing' was addressing the caste exploitation of the Dalits.

His work in the 1980s and 1990s was perhaps more pastoral inculturation and less of inter-faith exploration. Later he moved to the ministry of media-communication. He passed away in 2012. He was very creative and would come up with a new idea every week. He was a towering and forceful personality. His approach to his inter-faith search did not come as a mere academic exercise but was a desire to speak the Gospel through symbols and rituals that common people would understand.

The era of inculturation seems to have passed but the 'kirten liturgy' continues, its symbols being an idiom to which the local non-Christian people can relate.

The author is an Australian Jesuit working in the Hazaribag region and has been involved in rural mission for several decades.

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# Promotion or Denial of Education?

## a critical look at the DNEP - 2019

The Government of India released the Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) – 2019 on 31st May for public response. India has a population of 1.3 billion and the Constitution recognises 22 official languages. The DNEP was published in only two languages, English and Hindi. Because of persistent demand, a summary was released later in a few more languages.



### What should have been done?

After India's independence, there have been a lot of Education Commissions. We expect a new policy on education to fine tune the previous policies, plug the loopholes, rectify the drawbacks and thus propose an integrated policy. The previous policies and the gains made so far in education have not been taken into account at all in this new policy proposal. More importantly, the draft report is a departure from the earlier policies in terms of commitment to build a National System of Education based on Common School System.

The draft has some good ideas about what education should be in the 21st century. It uses arguments for changes such as:

need for an education that will be for the 21st century, freedom in formulating the curriculum, doing away with the affiliating system, allowing colleges to have their curriculum and testing methods, degree awarding facility and so on. At the same time, the reforms suggested go against the federalism of the Indian Constitution. Reservation in educational institutions is done away with and merit will be the only consideration for admissions in higher education. The language of the draft is almost the same as that of GATT and WTO.

### Centralization of education

The areas that are contentious and dangerous are that the whole education system will come under one authority, the Central

Government. There will be uniform curriculum, centralized testing agency, eligibility test to enter into higher education and several other reforms. The attempt is to centralize education under one centralized authority, irrespective of the fact that India is not “one nation, one culture and one language”. The proposed National Education Commission (NEC) under the chairmanship of the PM will control everything from pre-KG to Ph.D. State governments are reduced to be only implementing agencies of all the policies and plans of the NEC.

This policy will destroy the Federal structure of India, and make education inaccessible to the poor and the marginalized. More seriously, the draft has a clear slant towards a particular ideology and glorifies the past, though it pays lip service to modern education.

## Against the Constitutional provisions

DNEP is against the vision and the provision of the Constitution of India. It is silent about the reality of caste, which is a discriminatory social order. It fails to recognise the social and educational backwardness of a large section of Indian society. The social oppression faced by the depressed communities and the difficult living condition of the tribal communities are not addressed. The proposal of merit-based scholarship and fellowship is against Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution. It is totally silent on the reservation policy and proposes admissions based only on merit. This is not only denial of social justice but also a denial of the constitutional rights.

## School complex

Schools with less than 30 students will be closed and will be merged with well-functioning nearby schools thus creating school complex. This in effect would mean that all government schools will be closed in rural areas as most of them work with one teacher and the number of children is less. The closest school for a child could be as far away as five kilometres in rural and tribal areas. The poor children will drop out of schools where they are not available in the vicinity. Those most affected will be girls as the parents would be wary of sending their girls to schools that are far away. This goes against the universal accessibility to education, ensured in our Constitution.

## The structure of school education:

The structure of the school education so far followed in India is 10+2. The draft policy suggests a new structure of 5+3+3+5.

Each child is expected to enter into the formal school structure at three. Netherlands which is considered to have the best education in the whole world does not allow the children to join the formal education system before seven. The best place for the formation of the child is the home at this early stage.

There will be public exams by NTA (National Testing Authority) for 3rd, 5th, and 8th classes, and 8 semester exams from 9th to 12th classes. Education cannot be reduced to mere passing of exams; it will only further cripple the natural growth of the students. National level public exam at 3rd class itself will result in heavy dropouts. Totally there will be eleven public exams before completing the school education.

Vocational education will be introduced at the pre-KG level and will be mandatory at the upper primary level. This is an indirect way of encouraging the students to take up the traditional occupations of their parents thus perpetuating caste based occupations.

The marks obtained by a student at school will not be counted for higher education. The student has to take an eligibility test which will be conducted by the National Testing Agency. Only if the student passes the test will s/he be eligible to enter higher education. This will pave the way for private coaching centres to flourish and only those who manage to study in these centres by paying exorbitant fees will be able to pursue higher studies.

The draft policy pays lip service to universal education. The former minister of MHRD said before the release of the draft policy that education in India stands on five pillars: accessibility, affordability, equity, quality and accountability. Even a casual look at the draft policy can ascertain that it goes against the first three of these pillars.

The Constitutional Bench upheld the rights of minorities to establish and administer institutions of their own. The DNEP does not even recognise the existence of minorities except when it comes to scholarships. It is more in the nature of propagating a particular ideology and is not an inclusive document taking into account the multicultural reality of India. We need to collectively urge the Government to withdraw this policy totally as it goes against the rights of State Governments, the Constitution of India, the reservation promised to the SCs/STs, and minority rights, and is not keep in mind the cultural diversity of India. Since it denies education to a vast majority of our people, we summarily reject DNEP.



Image Source : Deccan Herald

The proposed National Education Commission (NEC) under the chairmanship of the PM will control everything from pre-KG to Ph.D. State governments are reduced to be only implementing agencies of all the policies and plans of the NEC. ”

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# Hinduism and Inter-faith dialogue in contemporary times



Image Source: discoverursoul.com

Violence in the name of religion is stalking the streets. The divide between religious communities is widening by the day. In the last few decades we have seen an increase in violence and the changing patterns of violence in South Asia. In Pakistan the victims of communal violence are primarily Christians and Hindus, lately the Ahmadiyas are also being persecuted there. In Bangladesh there have been incidents of violence against Hindus and Buddhists. In India the major victims are Muslims and Christians. Since the 1980s the trend of picking up identity issues like Ram temple, conversions (ghar wapasi), love jihad, and beef eating among others have dominated the social scene. The country has seen major acts of violence in the form of post Babri demolition in Mumbai (1992-93), Kandhamal violence (2008), Muzzafarnager violence (2013), and also the ghastly murder of Pastor Graham Staines (1999).

This violence is the outcome of hate which is constructed, manufactured by propagating falsehoods, and misconceptions about the 'other' - the minorities. The political formations

which take recourse to identity politics are the beneficiaries of the violence and consequent polarization which takes place in society. As such the whole process is political. It takes up identity issues, constructs emotions around these and that becomes the fertile ground for hate and consequent violence.

Currently the phenomenon which is very disturbing is that religious and social practices of people of 'other faiths' are questioned and objected to. Ours is a pluralistic country with followers of all religions living here peacefully for centuries. Four major religions of the world took birth here and other religions found honourable place here as soon as their prophets gave the message of love, peace and amity. Vedic religion, also addressed as Sanatan Dharma is very ancient. There are many traditions within the umbrella of Hinduism. Lord Mahavir and Gautama Buddha preached their values here and harped on non violence. Christianity also came here in and around the first century. Islam came to the Malabar Coast and then to many parts of India from the seventh century.

Indian society is the intermingling of all these religious traditions that have contributed to peace and progress of the region. The conflict as such is not between religions, but is the outcome of sectarian politics and narrow nationalism that came as a reaction to rising Indian nationalism. The participation of all religious communities in the freedom movement is the highest point of interaction cutting across religions. This brought the communities closer in the bond of Indian Nationalism.

It was Gandhi, a devout Hindu and a Sanatani, who put forward the practical definition of Hinduism when he articulated that his Hinduism teaches him to respect all religions. At the same time there were other Hindus, who resorted to the politics of 'Hindu identity', saw the history of India in a communal way and spread hate first against Muslims and of late against Christians as well. Hinduism has many streams within it.

Gandhi points out "India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation, they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation; India has ever been such a country. In reality there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if only for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India." (<http://www.mkgandhi.org/swarajya/coverpage.htm>). Further,

"In India, for whose fashioning I have worked all my life, every man enjoys equality of status, whatever his religion is. The state is bound to be wholly secular", and, "religion is not the test of nationality but is a personal matter between man and God", and, "religion is a personal affair of each individual, it must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs" (Harijan, August 31, 1947). It is with this foundation in Hinduism that Gandhi could bring people of all religions together in a single fraternity. Similarly, Hinduism was used to create the 'other' by those using 'Hindu identity' for their political goals.

Where do we stand today as far as inter-faith amity is concerned? The diversity of the country is being undermined.

The misunderstandings about the other community are ruling the roost. If we see the culture and living pattern of all the communities we can see the influence of one on the other. Indian art, architecture, music, food habits, and religious traditions have the interactive influence of all the religions.

We can see examples where Muslims and others are following the Bhakti Saints, all visit Sufi Shrines and many visit various churches like Mother Mary of Velankanni.

The Gandhian tradition of Hinduism propagates the whole world as being one family. It maintains that truth is one and there are many paths to achieve it. The Bhakti tradition of Hinduism has been a big binding factor for the country. Gandhi was highest embodiment of the plural traditions of Hindu religion. He stands tall as the greatest Hindu of our times. In his life and work we can see the beauty of plural traditions of Hinduism, which are inclusive and promote interaction of people of diverse communities.

So where do we go from here? The diversity of faiths and lifestyles has to be used as strength. For this, understanding the morality of other religions is the starting point. The misconceptions that have been spread need to be countered with full rationality and commitment. The core values of all religions are to promote love among different people, to seek justice for the weak. The myths that have been created against others are based on false

propaganda, which is thriving because it has not been properly countered.

We need to actively engage in promoting interactive culture, respecting diversity and giving primacy to the Indian Constitution in matters of our citizenship rights and duties. The urgent need is to communicate that those spreading hatred against religious minorities have nothing to do with the plural traditions of Hinduism, the values of Hinduism which accept and celebrate the diversity in matters of following one's religion, lifestyle, food habits and what have you.

People from different religions need to come together in sharing the joys of their festivals. The nearness at social level breaks the barriers of 'otherness'. People need to meet around common social programmes to build an Indian nation with dignity for all people, the nation of the dreams of those who laid the foundation of India through the freedom struggle.



Image Source : awaaznation.com

The participation of all religious communities in the freedom movement is the highest point of interaction cutting across religions. This brought the communities closer in the bond of Indian Nationalism.

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# A journey into the heart of the 'religious other'

My Superiors missioned me to 'Apostolate among Muslims'. This mission placed on me a twofold responsibility: explore, find and establish contacts with Muslims in order to help them understand the Church and her love for Muslims, and help Christians who prepare for ministries in the Church to recognise the importance of dialogue with Muslims. With Pope Francis leading the universal Church in his efforts to broaden and deepen contacts with Muslims as a model par excellence, it is certainly a kairos moment for us to launch out into the deep in dialogue initiatives with Muslims. In this short article, I share the two most important challenges in teaching Islam and Christian-Muslim relations in the centres of theology in India.



Image Source : Google

## Ignorance is far more widespread than understanding

The first challenge is to confront the 'layers upon layers' of prejudice against Islam and Muslims in India. These prejudices have grown from certain interpretations of historical memories of certain groups or have been largely drawn uncritically from the distorted images of Islam and Muslims in the mainstream media. These prejudices are

underpinned by ignorance that is often expressed through cynical comments on Muslims, their morality and way of life.

Often students make comparison of the ideals of Christianity with the realities of Islamic world, and judge Muslims negatively. In his book 'Christians and Muslims: From double standards to mutual Understanding' Hugh Goddard relates an incident of gross ignorance of a Jesuit. A British-based Muslim who was born and educated in South Asia told him the story of his Jesuit teacher

who surprised him one day by asking him why Muslims worshipped pigs! Further conversation between teacher and pupil revealed that the former had observed that in South Asia members of the Hindu community did not eat beef cows were considered to be sacred animals. He had also observed that members of the Muslim community did not eat pork. So he assumed that pigs were considered sacred, and were worshipped by Muslims. The question, therefore, though logical was based on ignorance. Goddard comments that even



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a basic understanding of Islam should be enough to make it clear that Muslims certainly do not worship pigs, since Islam is an insistent monotheistic faith. Helpfully, he adds a footnote that today's Jesuits are considerably better informed and educated concerning other religious traditions!

I have learnt that overcoming ignorance is no easy task. Christian scholars in interfaith relations such as David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas give some helpful classification of ignorance in reference to the 'religious other'. In my teaching experience, I have found that some students display ignorance that could be termed as innocent ignorance. They are simply ignorant of the faith and praxis of the 'religious other'. They do not display any intentional prejudice. They acknowledge their ignorance and correct their perception on receiving right information.

The second type displays blind ignorance born of intellectual stubbornness that effectively prevents 'coming to know the other'. Though not necessarily malicious, this blindness draws from close-minded conservatism. Sustained educational efforts, especially personal experience of the 'positive other', brings about desirable changes. The third type of ignorance, culpable ignorance, is sustained by refusal to know, avoidance of the challenge of cognitive change, and the reinforcement of a prejudicial perspective by deliberately shunning any evidence to the contrary. This is an ideologically driven ignorance.

In my experience most students come under the first two categories. They need good information gleaned from the scholarly works of Christians and Muslims as well as personal experience of meeting Muslims. I place before them such works and humbly reflect on the intellectual labour of others with the students. Besides such class room presentation and interaction, following the model of my teacher and Guru Paul Jackson, I make efforts to provide opportunities for meeting with diverse Muslims.

I have realized meeting Muslims and having conversation with them is the real game changer. I am convinced that there is no alternative to personal experience.

If the heart is touched and moved, one learns to recognise the preciousness of the 'religious other'. I have also noticed to my great joy some students display gently the capacity to reflect theologically on the Christian faith in the light of the insights that come from the Islam. On such occasions I join them in touching the avenues of comparative theology. I invite them to read deeply the contributions of Paul Jackson who sailed into deep waters of comparative theology in his lifelong commitment to Maneri Studies. I also propose to them to read the works of the leading exponent of this field, Francis Clooney. I have met Christians who display culpable ignorance with respect to Muslims. They often express it in insensitive comments laced with heavy doses of prejudice and even hatred for Muslims. I am yet to develop a method to confront and help such people.

## Avoid reductive essentializing and pluralizing

The second intellectual difficulty is a tendency to 'essentialize' Islam that is reducing Islam to one or other dimension. I found this more of a theoretical challenge. 'What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic' by Shahab Ahmed helped me to deal with this question. I find myself fortunate to meet and have long discussions on this work with some of the leading lights in the field such as the Jesuit Dan Madigan and the Franciscan Michael Calabria. Shahab Ahmed presents a view that Islam is a human-historical phenomenon and it cannot be labelled simply as such as 'religion', 'culture', 'civilization', or 'symbol-system' nor can it be identified with some 'essence' or 'core'. He argues that Islam has to be conceptualized in such a way that it accounts for, as Shahab Ahmed puts it, 'Balkan-Bengal-Complex' where from 1350 CE to 1850 CE Islam has settled across the geographical and cultural situations holding diversities and even contradictions. Such broader conceptualization will avoid reductive essentializing like 'Islam is the legal core of the religion' or pluralizing Islam by giving up the search for coherence and thus not taking Muslims seriously when they define themselves. Further, the author in responding to the question, 'what is Islam?' notes that 'Islam is a hermeneutical engagement with its

search for meaning in the Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text'.

The Pre-Text is Truth that lies beyond and behind the Text of revelation given to Muhammad. This Pre-Text is ontologically prior to the Text. The Sufis and philosophers engage with the Pre-Text through mysticism and philosophy. The Sufis, for example the Chistisufis, embraced the concept of Wahdat al-wujud. This concept emphasizes that there is only one existence, one wujud that is God. True existence belongs to God alone. Though in the phenomenal world we perceive diversity, in reality everyone reflects the existence of the One. In other words, everyone is one in the One. The philosophers emphasize that through reason one has access to Truth, the mind of God. Here the premise is that the Universal Reality of God-in-the-Unseen whose truth is knowable. The simple believers engage with 'Text' which is revealed from the Unseen-God-beyond-this-world to a human messenger-in-this-world, i.e., Muhammad. At this level the premise is that God-in-the-Unseen whose truth is seen in the Text. The Con-Text is the way Muslims historically lived through cultural, linguistic, expressions often expressed through art, poetry, and architecture.

The problem with the contemporary conceptualization of Islam is, in Ahmed's view, that it defines Islam solely by the Text of Revelation. Revelation has, in effect, been downsized to Text alone, whereas historically Islam has been "nothing other than the hermeneutical engagement with Revelation in all its dimensions and loci" (p. 355-6).

This theoretical position clarifies that those Christian students who are preparing for ministries must learn to conceptualize Islam through a wide-angle lens: 'hermeneutical engagement with Revelation'. It is my hope that at least some students will grasp this challenge and equip themselves with intellectual curiosity towards Muslims, their histories, cultures, spiritualities and their expression through poetry and arts and open up new avenues for theological and cultural dialogue with them.

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# Sameeksha

## a Jesuit Āśram of inter-religious harmony

Sameeksha, Centre for Indian Spirituality at Kalady in Kerala, India, is a Jesuit āśram, an open space for a spiritual encounter between followers of different religions. It is situated on the banks of the Poorna River (Periyar), in the village where Śaṅkarācharya was born. Sameeksha is a Kerala Jesuit Province project to promote a culture of interreligious harmony.



Inter-religious Meditation Hall with the four Holy Books and the lamp at the centre

Sameeksha was started in 1986. The Jesuit Province entrusted to Fr. Sebastian Painadath and Br. Varkey Mampilly the mission of establishing it. We opted for an āśram style structure of the living quarters, in the lay-out of the garden, and in the lifestyle. The meals are strictly vegetarian; there is certain simplicity in the infrastructure. The four acre land is filled with nutmeg trees which, being medicinal, give out positive vibrations on the campus. The gates are open day and night. One experiences here some of the sublime values of the Indian āśram tradition, like simplicity of life, a contemplative atmosphere, closeness to people, openness to religions, harmony with nature, and warm hospitality.

At the centre of Sameeksha there is an inter-religious meditation room named Śāntinilayam. Built according to the specifications of the traditional sacred room, it has four doors in the four directions welcoming seekers from all religions, cultures, castes and denominations. The meeting point is the oil lamp burning at the centre of the room: the symbol of the divine presence in which all meet at depth. Around it one finds four Holy Scriptures: the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapadam, the Bible and the Koran. They are pointers to the divine centre of light and hence they guide spiritual seekers on the path of life. These Scriptures are kept on a round carpet that carries the symbols of eight diverse religions on the eight spokes of a

wheel. In this room meditation courses and prayer meetings are conducted. They are open to followers of all religions. Over the years Śāntinilayam Meditation Room is accepted by people as a symbol of inter-religious harmony. Muslims, when they come, make their prayers here, Hindus sit singing their bhajans and Christians have their Eucharist for bigger groups here. When the Hindu sage Nitya Chaitanya Yati visited Śāntinilayam, he spontaneously said, “This is the future of humanity.”

Sameeksha is more a presence than a project. The term sameeksha taken from Yajur Veda means integral world-view - seeing the same in all, looking at all with respect. Over the years Sameeksha has been accepted by Hindus, Christians, Muslims and secular-minded people as a place where they feel spiritually at home. “Respect the rich diversity of religions and recognise the deep unity in spirituality” – this is the theological principle on which Sameeksha functions. There are four areas in which Sameeksha serves the people:

(i) **Programmes of inter-religious harmony.** In this āśram setting followers of different religions meet and develop genuine mutual friendships. Dialogue of Life is actually the base and goal of a culture of harmony. On every second Saturday of the month there is a dialogue seminar (Dharmasameeksha) from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm. Resource persons and sages from different religions and secular fields present their reflections on different issues related to life and culture. The programme for the year with focus on a particular issue is announced in advance. Once we had a series in which a sage of one religion presented the Scripture of another religion respectfully. This was taken as a genuine form of inter-religious dialogue. Meditation sessions based on texts of the Hindu, Christian and Sufi heritage are occasionally offered. Secular groups book Sameeksha for their programmes related to justice, ecology, literature, and spirituality beyond religions. Sebastian Painadath takes care of this dialogue sector.

(ii) **Theological formation of the laity.** A two year course in theology (Jnānasameeksha) is offered to help the laity develop open faith perspectives in the light of the Vat. II. This is an off-campus Certificate Course of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. The Church in Kerala has tremendous potential in the form of educated and competent laymen/women. This theology programme addresses mainly those retired from professional life to give them a mature faith formation. Every month, an Ignatian retreat is offered (Dhyānasameeksha) for the spiritual formation of the laity. Xavier Tharamel is in charge of these programmes.

(iii) **Ministry among the teenagers.** Boys and girls in their

teens are a vulnerable group heavily under the pressure of the modern media. A Jesuit with his competent team offers life orientation programmes in schools and colleges, reaches out to teenagers, their parents and teachers through personal counselling (Atmamitra). People come from all religions and secular fields. Sessions are also offered with psychological tools like NLP and TA. Toby Joseph Kozhuppakalam competently handles this ministry.

(iv) **Service to migrant labourers.** Kerala has more than 3 million labourers from North and Central India. The economy of Kerala is upheld by them. But there are several human issues related to their work. Sometimes injustice is done to them, their medical needs are not attended to or they are not given living quarters. A Jesuit, Shin Kallunkal, is fully dedicated to this ministry (Jeevika). He networks with other agencies.



Inter-religious Meditation Hall from outside

Image Courtesy: Sebastian Painadath, SJ

Sameeksha thus contributes its mite to a culture of inter-religious harmony which is very much needed for the future of the country. Throughout the year individual seekers and small groups come here for a few days of retreat or study. The Centre has a good library with books in spirituality, theology and inter-religious dialogue. On the basis of this library Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, has recognised Sameeksha as a Research Centre. The Jesuit Staff here is very much involved in writing and publication. Over 70 books have been published besides

hundreds of articles in journals.

The Jesuit presence at Sameeksha is integrated with the multi-religious local milieu. The people of the village have taken this Centre as part of their life. Children can move around freely, youngsters come for study and counselling, the elderly come for relaxation on the river-bank. There is also a good rapport with the local ecclesiastical set up. Jesuits are involved in the parishes whenever help is requested. The Regional AICUF unit and the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network in Kerala are coordinated from here.

A six-member Jesuit community resides here. They are always available for counselling and spiritual guidance. Each one feels that his area of involvement is the community’s ministry. GC 34 declared inter-religious dialogue as a fundamental option of Jesuit ministry. The Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) of the Society give us four areas of Jesuit involvement that help us to discern our priorities at Sameeksha.

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# THOUSAND WORDS

In commemoration of 5th September  
feast day of St. Teresa of Calcutta.



“

Prayer is the only  
activity of the day,  
the rest of the  
activities are then  
the prayer of the day.”

| Editor



Photo: Raghu Rai



# Dialogue with Sikhs



Image Source : dailyrepublic.com

**G**uru Nanak Dev, born in 1469, moved by compassion for his suffering people started Sikhism, to liberate his people from socio-religio-cultural oppressive systems and divisions based on caste, social hierarchy, and economic inequality in society. Community meal (langar), qurbani (sacrifice) and liberation from rituals are just a few of the many reforms he brought in. If Jesus made everything new by giving a 'new commandment', it could be said that Guru Nanak Dev renewed the teachings of Jesus and made them relevant to the existential situation of united Punjab. For Guru Nanak, 'qurbani' (sacrifice) was joyfully accepting the difficulties and hardships arising from a life of service, helping the weak and the poor - a truly Christian ideal. Sikhism is a non-violent 'enlightening and liberative' spiritual movement similar to what Jesus started. My contact with Sikhism began in 1960, a peaceful and spiritual era when one could see elderly people walking along the roads of Punjab in groups early in the morning, reciting devotional verses of Gurbani.

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh started Khalsa, meaning, a total surrender of oneself to God - again a genuine Christian concept. Misinterpretation of 'Khalsa' made Sikhism militant and ritualistic. Though, Sikhs are normally very strong in their faith, they are not reluctant to enter into dialogue with Christians. In fact they look forward to it. Dialogue with Sikhs essentially needs to be at the level of culture and living circumstances; dialogue of action is more important than dialogue on the intellectual or theological level. The basic principles of Sikhism are almost identical with those of Christianity. Like Christians, Sikhs believe in one God. The Guru Granth Sahib has lots of similarities with the New Testament. Two important principles identical both in Sikhism as well as Christianity are service (seva) and sacrifice (qurbani).

In 1969, Sardar Harbans Singh, a landlord from Hoshiarpur made a request to start some kind of health care programme

for the more than 200 people working in his land. The CMC Sisters of Jalandhar started a dispensary for the public. Sardar Harbans Singh made all the arrangements, providing land and money to start the dispensary. The day the Sisters started living there temporarily to supervise the construction he brought a big picture of Sacred Heart of Jesus from his own prayer room and kept it in the room where the Sisters were going to live, saying, "It is appropriate that this be in your room. When you move out to your building, I shall take it back to my prayer room." He later asked the Sisters to take as much land as they wanted for their work, free of cost. This was the beginning of the 'Catholic presence' in Hoshiarpur, initiated by a Sikh. Sikhs are also open to accept whatever 'good' there is in Christianity. There are many Sikhs who, while being rooted in their faith, accept Jesus as their personal 'Guru' and pray to Jesus as Sardar Harbans Singh was doing.

Though very strong in their religious belief and traditions, Sikhs are among the most open minded ready to collaborate with likeminded people for any work beneficial to humanity. Because of religious similarities, dialogue with Sikhs is one of the most fruitful apostolic works provided we enter into it with 'mutual openness' to enrich each other.

Once peaceful, Punjab began burning due to religious fundamentalism in the late nineties. Fr. Aloysius Fonseca of Mumbai Province challenged himself: 'How/what can I contribute to bring 'peace' in Punjab.' He started the Punjab Jesuit Mission based in Ropar. Well balanced educated Sikh youth helped him to promote grass-root level dialogue in the villages of Ropar through programmes like skits and dances about dialogue, peace, harmony, etc. He started these in many villages with a view to bringing about peace and harmony.

I joined Fr. Aloysius in 1996 and continued his work till 2005. From 2000 onwards, on the occasion of Christmas Sikh youth of Kotla Nihang village used to stage plays about the birth of Jesus in Ropar Parish and other villages. They were happy doing it and their parents encouraged them.

At a dialogue meeting organised in 1998 in Ropar, Fr. T.K. John of Delhi Province presented the principles of Christianity and Prof. Manjeet Singh, the Jatedar of Kesgarh Sahib of Anandpur Sahib presented the principles of Sikhism on the theme of 'Seva' (service). Sikhism is one of the youngest and perhaps most vibrant religions. We have a lot to learn through dialogue with them.

In 1999, when the Sikhs were celebrating 300 years of Khalsa in Anandpur Sahib, the then Regional Superior of Delhi, Fr. Thomas Kunnunkal, reflected with the Jesuit community of

Ropar 'what could be our contribution' in such a mega event. They finally decided to have a centre for Peace, Dialogue, and Socio-Cultural intervention at the grass-root level. But later it was stalled for various reasons. In 2000 Fr. Henry Barla, Rector of Vidya Jyoti, presented the principles of Christianity and Jatedar Simran Jeet Singh Mann, presented the principles of Sikhism on the theme of 'Qurbani' (sacrifice) during the Sikh-Christian dialogue session held in Ropar. Sardar Simran Jeet Singh was the MP who took up the cause of Christians in Parliament when there was persecution of Christians in Gujarat and elsewhere.

In 2011, Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran, then President of Pontifical Commission, along with the Nuncio and a few other Bishops were well received into the Golden Temple in Amritsar for an Inter-Religious Dialogue meeting with the Akal Takht Jatedar and his team. In 2012, Fr. Thomas Kunnunkal along with Fr. Victor Edwin conducted a session on Sikh-Christian collaboration in Chandigarh. In 2015, a Sikh-Christian Colloquium on the topic of 'Seva' (service) was held. Fr. Paulus Mangai of Vidya Jyoti presented a paper on Service according to Christianity and Mrs. (Dr.) Surinder Kaur on Service according to Sikhism. These programmes were well appreciated and welcomed by all, especially the Sikhs of Chandigarh.

In 2012, on the Feast day of Guru Nanak Dev, Fr. Thomas Anchanikkal, and in 2013 and 2014, on the occasion of Guru Nanak Jayanti, Bishop Ignatius Mascarenhas gave a 'homily' to the Sikh community from the Sanctum Sanctorum of different Gurdwaras where normally outsiders are not allowed to enter. It was a very clear sign of their openness towards Christians. Dialogue with Sikhs should touch various aspects of the daily life of people at the grass root level since Sikhism has more to do with the ordinary lives of people.

In many ways Sikhism promotes a way of life similar to what Christ preached. Theologically there should not be any difficulty to accept at least some of the Sikh Gurus as 'Prophets'. Serious reflection and comparative study of Sikhism will perhaps produce 'a Christo-centric Sikhism' that will pave the way to a new opening and will be beneficial both to Sikhs and Christians in strengthening their faith. Today, I feel that deep down I am a Sikh, accepting Guru Nanak Dev as a 'Guru' (prophet) while growing in my intimate attachment to Jesus Christ and being deeply rooted in Christianity.



Image Source: Google

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# The Zen faith



Image Courtesy: Mathew Cyril, SJ

Yamada KounRoshi, one of the renowned Japanese Zen masters of our times once said, if a Christian practices Zen, he/she will become a better Christian; deep in Christianity as well as in Zen. Zen is like tea; there is no Christian tea, Buddhist tea or Hindu tea; tea is tea; so is Zen. Zen can be taken in all religions and all spiritualities. Yamada KounRoshi is the master of Fr. Ama Samy, SJ.

In practicing Zen we are not concerned about Zen as an institution or as Zen-Buddhism. We practice Zen as spirituality. Zen is a marvellous spiritual way; awakening and compassion are its heartbeat. Zen goes beyond institutional religion and doctrine though it is rooted in Buddhism.

Bodhi Zendo is a Zen meditation centre founded by Fr. Ama Samy, SJ, at Kodaikanal in 1996. This is the only Zen centre in India for Zen training and practice of awakening/realization. Japanese Zen is wedded to harsh discipline; whereas at Bodhi Zendo discipline and freedom are wedded together through meditation, koan training, selfless service, silence, study, sutra chanting and bowing.

The centre is open to all spiritual seekers, Indians as well as non-Indians. Every year hundreds of Hindus come here; some Christians and a few Muslims too. Today it is known as an international Zen meditation centre. Besides daily meditation sittings, every month we have two Sesshins (intensive meditation retreats) - a three-day mini-Sesshin and a six-day Sesshin. We can accommodate only 35 to 40 people.

## I

In Zen tradition, Ox-Herding pictures are widely known. It is a series of 10 pictures, drawn by a Chinese Zen Master called Kakuan in the 12th century, depicting the story of a village farmer who lost his ox, went in search of it and finally found it. These pictures symbolize the stages of the Zen journey towards Enlightenment. I will focus only on the last three pictures – the 8th, 9th and 10th.

The 8th picture shows the great death. There is only an empty circle (a big zero). It points to the stage of 'Awakening to Emptiness'. This stage has two phases. The first phase is, dying to yourself; to your ego. It means letting go of all our attachments, ideologies, prejudices, also attachments to religions, etc. It is like what Meister Eckhart said, "I pray to God that I may give up God". It is in a sense, falling into the abyss of Emptiness. The second phase is awakening to the 'Mystery of Emptiness' as boundless openness and that is your very self. As Jesus said, "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Lk 17:33).





The 9th picture is returning to the source and origin. This is the resurrected stage. In this picture, no human being is shown; only trees in bloom, birds singing, river running and fish swimming. Here one comes to realize the world is the self, the self is the world. In Zen tradition, this is the realization of Suchness or Tathata. Further, one comes to realize everything is grace; everything is blessing. As Julian of Norwich says, "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well." Zen Master Unmon said, "Every day is a good day." Another Master exclaims, "All are blessed, ten thousand times blessed."



hidden agenda or reservation. For example: conversion or persuasion that ours is the absolute truth, etc. If there is some suspicion of such a hidden agenda or reservation, then there will be no true dialogue.

When you pass over into the other religion/tradition, you have to die into the other fully. Then you can come back to your own home ground. This is the actualization of 'Emptiness as your very self'. This is expressed in the Zen koan: Abide where there is no-abiding.

This Zen way of dialogue is practical not only for Jesuits but also for our laity. We need to help them to be able to pass over and come back in the Zen way of dialogue and become channels of peace and harmony. As far as our students are concerned, it will be better to help them to practice mindfulness and silence.

In our practice of interfaith dialogue, it is important to pray or meditate together in silence. Silence should be an essential factor in our dialogue. Zen practice is grounded in silence. There is a well-known Zen koan about the silence of the Buddha:



The 10th picture is entering the market place. Here you can see an elderly man engaged in conversation with a young man who is carrying fish and liquor to sell in the market. Zen spirituality is finally coming back to the world, to the market place. The market place is your temple. It is great acceptance of one's humanness as well as the world. It is also inter-personal and dialogical. In awakening you

realize, everybody/everything is the face of your true self. Hakuin Zenji sings, "This very place is the Lotus Land! This very body, the Buddha!"

## II

This Zen realization is the heart of religion, the heart of spirituality. This realization helps one to be open to the other and to the world; not to be fixated with one's own ideologies and judgments. Awakening to Emptiness means awakening to this boundless openness; which is your very self. In this openness every religion/spirituality/tradition can be embraced and affirmed. This openness enables one to be free and at home with oneself and others; to be creative and courageous, trustful and peaceful. In this openness you meet the other in freedom and love.

In Zen spiritual practice, our relationship with other religions should be in terms of "Passing over and Coming back". It is the heart of dialogue. It is not merely understanding of some doctrines or theories or rituals. 'Passing over' means you bracket your own religion and enter into the heart of the other religion/tradition. In this Zen way of dialogue, you let the other be the other and at the same time you stand in the place of the other and put on the heart and mind of the other.

Having passed-over in this way, you can come back to your own religion. And when you come back, you are not the same anymore. You are transformed. You stand in the 'in-between'. You are in your own home religion as well as at home in the other religion/tradition. You are in the creative-middle. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

In this 'passing over and coming back' there should not be any



Image Courtesy: Mathew Cyril, SJ

A non-Buddhist once asked the World-Honoured One, "I do not ask for words, nor do I ask for no-words." The World-Honoured One remained seated. The non-Buddhist praised him saying, "The great compassion of the World-Honoured One has dispelled the clouds of my ignorance and enabled me to be enlightened." Making a bow of gratitude, he departed. Ananda then asked Buddha, "What realization did the non-Buddhist have that made him praise you like that?" The World-Honoured One replied, "He is like a high-mettled horse which starts at even the shadow of the whip." (Gateless Gate, Case: 32)

Contemplative silence is the nourishment for the soul of dialogue. This koan will ask further, "Who is that who is nourished by the silence?" Do you know who that one is?

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# Christians and Yoga



Image Source : kbo.org

This year International Yoga Day was celebrated on 21st June in many countries led by India. But there was a hiccup among Christians caused by a controversy with regard to the legitimacy of celebrating this day in Christian churches. Some fundamentalist Christians said: “We have already taken too many pagan practices into Christianity in the name of Vat. II. It is high time we put a full-stop.”

In holding on to this view the so-called ‘orthodox’ Christians were remaining faithful to a document signed by Cardinal J. Ratzinger and issued in 1989. He was at that time Head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. UCAN paraphrased the above document: “Eastern prayer and meditation methods (including yoga) are not free from dangers and errors harmful to Catholic spirituality... We find ourselves faced with a pointed renewal of an attempt, which is not free from dangers and errors, to fuse Christian meditation with that which is non-Christian” (UCAN INDIA, July 8, 2019).

In fact, the encyclical *Dominus Jesu* signed by the Pope, was very much against the world religions. This was strongly opposed by some fifteen or so national and international theologians. The surprising thing is that there was no serious opposition from Rome to these articles many of which almost conclusively proved that the position of Rome was outdated and opposed to Vat. II.

In the 21st June controversies on Yoga, two points are very obvious: a) the opponents had only vague ideas of Yoga, and b) they seemed to ignore the current teachings of the Church with regard to her relationship with non-Christian religions. We shall consider these two points briefly.

## A peep into the yoga system

Often people think that yoga consists of some funny and exotic postures like standing on the head or taking the posture of

a peacock. But a close look at the various steps and parts of the Yoga system can give us a glimpse of the vast, deep and elaborate aspects of this philosophy.

Yoga is one of the eight systems of Indian philosophy. Within the yoga system there are many schools of yoga – Hatha, Raja, Japa, etc. The Sankhya system goes with Yoga. These two are called samantantra (complementary). Sankhya stands for the theoretical and Yoga for the practical aspects of this samantantra.

Yoga is called astanga marga to express its eight steps to reach its final purpose, namely, Samadhi. It means union with God, often expressed with the concept 'God-realization'. These steps are (1) yama (control or 'don'ts'), (2) niyama (non-control or 'dos'), (3) asana (posture), (4) pranayama (breath control), (5) pratyahara (control of the mind), (6) dharana (meditation with interruptions), (7) dhyana (meditation without interruptions), and (8) samadhi (union with the Absolute Being).

The first step consists of five 'commandments' namely, ahimsa (non-violence), satya (non-lying), asteya (non-stealing), aparigraha (non-attachment) and brahmacharya (celibacy/virginity). And so with the other steps. There is nothing anti-Christian them.

## The Church and world religions

The pre-Vatican II Church had a rather negative view of world religions. The Council of Florence had stated that "no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life" (Neuner-Dupuis). Vatican II declared: "The Church has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them" (NA. 2, LG. 16). So, the Church has to "preserve and promote" the spiritual and moral good found in yoga as well.

## Dialogue for mutual enrichment

In adult discourse one of the most odious things is the assumption that "I am better than you" and "I know more than you". This attitude was opposed even by liberal Hindus leaders like Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji. Referring to the 'condescending attitude' towards world religions, some non-Christian leaders cynically said: "It took Christianity almost

2000 years to admit that often non-Christian religions reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (Vat. II, NA. 2).

Some decades ago I had the privilege of attending a Vipassana retreat given by the famous Buddhist Guru Goenkaji. There

were two sisters who had come for the same retreat. Unfortunately they had an intense dislike for each other. Their superiors sent them hoping that they would be healed. But it was too much for one of them so she gave up and went back. The other sister remained. One of the exercises during the retreat was sending love-vibrations to people you had problems with. She began to send love-vibrations to the sister who had gone away.

After the retreat the two met. Seeing her at a distance, the unforgiving sister rushed towards her companion with a big smile and embraced her warmly saying, "How foolish I have been! I am so happy to welcome you." The sister who sent the love-vibrations was overjoyed. What happened? Vipassana did not preach about love; it transmitted love.

## Yoga's contribution to value education

There is a lot of talk about value education in our country. Since a number of years, moral science books have been prepared and taught in our schools. But these do not seem to have the desired effect. One of the reasons for this failure is that these courses end up with teaching a number of theories and ideals about good moral behaviour without showing any practical ways.

Yoga is a system in which theory and practice go hand in hand. Some educationists have suggested that some of the yoga steps can be introduced in moral education. But many Muslims and Christians consider it a trick by the advocates of Hindutva to push Hinduism through the backdoor. In response to this opposition we could repeat what was already suggested to the Christians in the context of co-operating with the government on the International Yoga Day. In fact, the first two steps of Yoga, yama and niyama, obviously consist of moral ideals and theories found in almost all religions. But these moral theories could be accompanied by practical training in the remaining four or five steps of the Yoga system. If this is followed in value education, our students will be profit very much and soon we will find them living these ideals and values.

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Yoga is a system in which theory and practice go hand in hand. Some educationists have suggested that some of the yoga steps can be introduced in moral education. ”

Image Source : ucanews.com



# Inter-religious couples

## A new Inter-faith dialogue

This article is restricted to marriages between a Catholic person and a partner belonging to another faith. These are known as 'Inter-religious' or 'Disparity of cult' marriages. The focus of the article is on couples who are already married and the Jesuit response.

### Introduction

In the context of Parish ministry, I am more and more inspired by the courage, resilience, faith and perseverance of married people. Since a few years, I start a marriage celebration with these words, 'All married people are saints'. The reason is that in my opinion married life is the most challenging of all ways of life. To be sure each way of life – bachelor, spinster, priest, religious – has its own challenges, but the challenges of married life are more numerous and intense than any other.

In an already challenging marriage situation, inter-religious couples face even more challenges and so need even more attention and help.

GC 34 stated unambiguously that 'to be religious today is to be interreligious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism' (GC34, d5 #3). This must be the starting point for our ministry to inter-religious couples.

### Specific challenges faced by inter-religious couples

**Ostracism from family and community** – In some cases the couple is ostracised by the family because the parents find it difficult to accept that their child has married outside the faith. While this is the case with the partners of both faiths, it is often the Catholic family which is unaccepting.

In cases where the Catholic girl joins the joint family of her husband, both pleasant and not so pleasant experiences can be the result. The Catholic partner who lives in the joint family may have more women for support and help (sisters of the husband, sisters-in-law, aunts, and even grandaunt). However, if some or all these are negative towards the girl because of her



Image Source : Google

faith tremendous challenges arise.

In cases where it is known that the marriage has not been celebrated in a Church, ostracism can also come from the Catholic community. The Catholic party is frowned upon.

**Living out one's faith** – Openness to another's faith is not easy. When one believes that one's faith contains all the truth that there is to be contained, there is a tendency to look down on the other's faith and beliefs. It is sometimes the case where a partner has respect and love for the spouse, but not for the

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spouse's faith. In other cases, it is extremely difficult because of a variety of pressures to live out one's faith. In many such cases the person moves away from 'institutional faith' and practices his/her faith in the confines of heart and home.

**Children** – Sometimes the partner from the other faith is open to the children being baptised into the Catholic faith. At other times, both partners agree that the children will choose their faith after they have reached the age of maturity. In still other cases one or other partner insists that the child be brought up in his/her faith. This last way leads to strife and discord.

**Guilt** – The Catholic partner is often caught in a dilemma when it is a matter of external worship and rituals. Many Catholics regard the worship of Hindu idols as blasphemous. At religious celebrations, the dilemma is whether they are committing a sin if they bow before, offer flowers to the idol or if they partake of the 'prasad' (a devotional offering made to a god, typically consisting of food that is later shared among devotees).

**Fundamentalism** – There are cases where both partners can be fundamentalists. This is often triggered by an exceptionally happy event (securing a lucrative job offer when in dire straits, 'miraculous' healing of a family member) or the occurrence of misfortune (death of a loved one, failure in examinations). One or other 'god' is credited or blamed and this leads to disparaging remarks regarding the other's 'god' and faith.

## Response to inter-religious couples and marriage

Given the fact that inter-religious marriages occur regularly and with increasing frequency, as Jesuits we cannot but respond to this challenge. I suggest a response on two levels: a) before marriage; b) after marriage.

### Before marriage

**Training of priests** – Priests have to be trained solidly in the Church's theology of marriage and family. They must also be taught to develop an open and receptive mind. All too often priests might become defensive about the Catholic faith and partisan in their response when a young man/woman approaches them with a partner from another faith. They must be made to realise that being harsh and closed is a sure way to create bitterness and rancour in the couple. In many cases the couple goes away never to return.

**Pre-marriage instruction** – It is obligatory in many places in the Catholic Church for the couple to do a pre-marriage preparation course. In some places special courses are organised for couples entering into an inter-religious marriage. This course is a wonderful opportunity for a solid catechesis on the meaning of marriage, its implications, its joys and challenges. These couples could be encouraged to attend a week-end residential course (as opposed to a one day non-residential course) so that they can spend more time with each other. Inter-religious couples could be invited to share their experiences and challenges and how they have lived beautiful married lives. In this context, a pre-nuptial enquiry can be tailored to fit the faith of the other so as to make it more relevant.

**Planning the liturgy** – The couple must be instructed in the fact that marriage can be celebrated outside the Eucharist. Often the Catholic party insists on the Eucharist which takes away the opportunity to have an extremely relevant inter-religious prayer service where the scriptures of both traditions can be exposed and meditated upon. This also helps to avoid two ceremonies and complications that arise when these are held. This celebration need not be in a church or other place of worship, but in a secular/neutral place so that both parties can feel equal.

### After marriage

**Ongoing and persevering ministry** – Ongoing and persevering are not merely synonyms in this context. The reason for using both words is that all too often pastoral care of inter-religious couples has begun well but has died a premature death. If it is not possible for parishes to take this up at the individual level, the Diocese must take it up and plan a five or even ten year outreach ministry. This must be planned and executed so as to offer guidance, support, help and any other requirement of the couples.

**Inter-faith marriages as a basis for inter-religious dialogue** – These couples who are living out 'the dialogue of life, action and religious experience' suggested by the Church and reiterated by GC 34 can be led through these to 'the dialogue of theological exchange where they are taught to "deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values."

**On-going formation of Catholic laity** – Even after Vatican II and its document on other faiths 'Nostra Aetate' ('In our time') of 1965, the larger majority of laity as well as priests and religious still have a largely negative view of other faiths. In many cases, the Catholic faith is considered as superior to all others. Those from other faiths are looked down upon and regarded as practising an inferior and even untrue faith. Many Catholics think (even today) that those who have not been baptised in the Catholic faith are certainly going to hell. Education of laity, priests and religious in an on-going, sustained and unrelenting manner is the need of the hour. We need a change of mindset which enables us to look at other faiths as other ways of reaching God and to practice the key observation of Nostra Aetate which states "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions."

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that Indian and Asian societies are pluralistic and changing rapidly. In the light of this, marriage and family life is also changing. It is also true that marriage and family (beginning with the Genesis account of creation) are still intimately connected. In the context of inter-religious marriages (which are approximately between 30% and 32% in Mumbai) it is all the more necessary that as Jesuits we reach out as best we can to families of such marriages.

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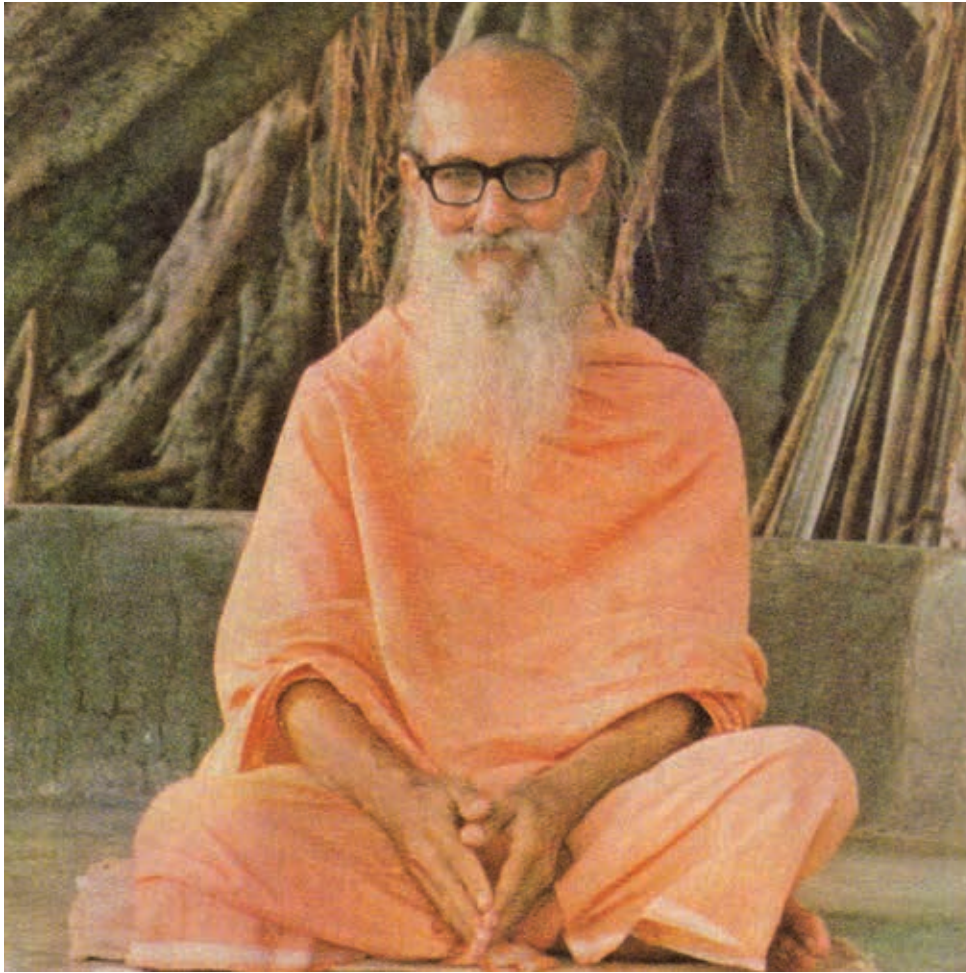
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# Fr. Angelo Benedetti, SJ Swami Shubhananda



Swami Shubhananda was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1928 and named after an Austrian Jesuit priest, Fr. Angelo Barbaria, who was his father's spiritual guide. Angelo attended a flourishing Jesuit school in Barcelona in 1938. He joined dozens of other young men who entered the noviciate in 1943 and completed his classical studies in 1948. He volunteered to come to India and was joined on the journey by several young Jesuits - some from Belgium others from Spain. Angelo was always outstanding in his studies and soon learnt Sanskrit, Gujarati, Marathi and Hindi.

He was sent to Shembaganur for his philosophy studies. Then he taught for two years at St. Mary's High School, Mumbai, before proceeding to JDV, Pune, for his theological studies. He was ordained in Mumbai in 1959. He took a degree in Indian Classical music and also studied Maharashtrian social reformers of the 19th century at Pune University.

Angelo was made Principal of a high school in Dhule and later helped in a mission in Vasai. He was then attracted by the Movement for a Better World of Fr. Lombardi where he worked over four years and began to preach retreats till 1978. He then got permission from his Superior to go to a monastery in Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges to be initiated into Hindu asceticism. For quite sometime he had felt an urge to live the life of a hermit or sanyasi.

This call of the Lord was confirmed by an invitation from Bishop Jonas Thaliath of Rajkot to open an ashram. Bishop Jonas had a dream of establishing ashrams all over his Diocese. When Angelo, now known as Swami Shubhananda, decided to settle down in a small valley, an hour's walk from the village of Bhandaria, there was no need of buying land, gathering funds, or putting up a building. A small hut made



Shrine of the Mother of Salvation built by Swami Shubhananda in 1998

Image Courtesy: Mathew Kalathoor, CMI

of branches was built by three villagers. It was replaced later by another one made of mud and tiles. As the monsoon rains had been good there was sufficient water in a small river nearby. When it dried up in summer the villagers dug a well.

The Lord led Swamiji into the wilderness so that he might learn to be completely dependent on Him and not on human resources. There was no fear or anxiety about food, drink, housing, etc. No fear of snakes and other wild animals either. The Lord became his sole support and refuge. The villagers supplied his needs. Even when people did not come he was content to be alone with God and worship Him. Later, a few more ashrams were built for people who wanted to spend time in solitude. Later, Swamiji built a small temple dedicated to the Mother of Salvation.

It was in this atmosphere of solitude and reflection that the idea of starting an institution for the education of children from the poor areas of Saurashtra germinated. While moving from village to village Swamiji realised that the children were getting very poor education in the village schools. Hence, some land was bought on the outskirts of Sihor to start a school. Fr. Mathew Kalathoor took an interest in this educational project. Initially a hall and

two rooms were built to accommodate 25 boys. This was the beginning of the boys boarding which now has 200 boys. There is a boarding for girls 50 girls and is looked after by Sisters.

To improve the quality of education we started a school that reached the 10th class in 1998. In order to give a religious and devotional atmosphere a beautiful and spacious temple in honour of the Mother of Salvation was built in traditional Indian architecture and sculpture. Great importance is given in this school to character formation – moral and religious. There are regular morning and evening prayers with readings taken from various religious books in Sanskrit and Gujarati. On Sundays time is given to Raja and Hatha yoga. Karate, sports and cultural activities are also stressed. Children are taught music, drama and dance. Later we got permission to move up to the 12th class with a Bakshipanch Ashramshala.

Swamiji remained in Sihor till 2005, entrusted the whole Gurukul to the Diocese and returned to Tapovan Ashram, Bhandaria, for prayer, meditation and satsang. In 2010, when his health gave way, he went to the infirmary at Vinayalaya, Mumbai. On 17th September he peacefully breathed his last and on the following day he was buried in the Holy Family cemetery

at Chakala, Andheri. Bishop Percival Fernades was the main celebrant with over 40 priests concelebrating. Fr. Joe Abreo, SJ, preached a touching homily on the life and achievements of Swamiji.

In his little booklet *Opening New Frontiers* Swamiji wrote, “The Lord led me through many and unusual ways to be his messenger to near and faraway lands. St. John of the Cross reminds us that God is close to us in nature inviting us constantly to greater intimacy with him. He expresses it in the Canticle of the Beloved: ‘My Beloved, mountains, the solitary valleys full of trees, the strange faraway island, the sound of the rushing rivers, the whistling of the winds, brings us LOVE.’ We are invited by St. John to see God loving us everywhere. I always saw in my life God’s hand guiding me in every step I took.”

St. Ireneus said: “The glory of God is a person fully human and fully alive.” In Swamiji we see this reaching perfection.

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The author worked with Swami Shubhananda in establishing the Saccidananda Gurukul Ashram in Sihor, Gujarat. He is currently the parish priest of St. Mary’s Church, Palitana.

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## JIVAN creative writing (Short Story) contest - 2019

We are happy to announce the Jivan Creative Writing Contest for this year after a short inadvertent break. The cash prizes to the winners come from a generous grant offered in 1997 by the family of Fio Mascarenhas, SJ and his brother, Frazer Mascarenhas, SJ in memory of their beloved parents – Francis and Flora Mascarenhas. The contest for short story invites all who love creativity and imagination- Jesuits, non-Jesuits, men, women, young or senior citizens. The short-story should be original, unpublished elsewhere, in English and within 1800 words maximum. It must be set in contemporary Asian context; highlighting its people, events and ethos that offer us hope for the future.

There are three prizes:

The first prize:  
**Rs 4,000**

The second prize:  
**Rs 2,500**

The third prize:  
**Rs 1,000**

Rules:

1. Send your entries to [jivaneditor@gmail.com](mailto:jivaneditor@gmail.com) with a subject title ‘Short story contest’.
2. The entries should reach us by 15 Nov 2019. The results will be announced in the Feb 2020 issue of Jivan.
3. All entries shall be the property of Jivan.
4. A person can register only one entry therefore send only one short story in your name.
5. The decision of the Jury will be final.

- Editor

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# Ministry of fostering integrity and integration



Nowadays the ministry of inter-religious dialogue is referred to as the ministry of promoting inter-religious relations which enhance mutual understanding, co-operation, peaceful co-existence and communal harmony among people of different religions living side by side in a multi-religious society. In my understanding this ministry could be rightly called the ministry of promoting integrity and integration in society! Some might ask why it should be called so.

To answer this question we need to ask ourselves, “What is the true purpose or goal of any religion?” Or, “Why did religions originate?” Though many answers could be given, one universally accepted answer is that religions originated as a helping mechanism to cope with the ups and downs that human beings encounter in life. And therefore, the main purpose and goal of any religion is to prepare a person and/or a community to face and surmount the difficulties and vicissitudes of life and to experience peace in one’s heart, enjoy reconciliation in the community, gain harmony with nature and thus to attain liberation or salvation in eternity.

## Promoting honesty and integrity

And we all know that peace, reconciliation and harmony comes as a result of the value system, principles and attitudes (spirituality) we hold in life, and our behaviour (morality) patterns in society. It is true that our spirituality has a direct impact on our character, behaviour and morality. In other words, our spirituality and morality determine the peace in our hearts, reconciliation in community and harmony with nature. All religions are founded and designed to promote the moral and spiritual development of the followers. Hence the most appropriate answer to the question I raised earlier, namely, ‘what is the main purpose or goal of any religion?’

is nothing but the helping the followers to grow and develop morally and spiritually to a higher level. Spirituality is nothing but helping a person to grow in purity, honesty, righteousness, truthfulness and integrity. The duty and responsibility of every religious leader who leads a community of believers is to promote honesty and integrity in the individuals and in the community.

When a religious leader strives to promote honesty and integrity among the people under her/his care by developing their morality and spirituality, and when s/he interacts and dialogues with the religious leaders of other faiths, there emerges a common understanding and responsibility to promote integrity and righteousness among all the faithful under their care. The advantage is that if all leaders remain open to the spiritual wisdom and the resources of one another they could use this combined inter-religious wisdom for the benefit of all their followers.

This wisdom becomes an additional spiritual resource to enhance morality, spirituality and integrity among people of different religions in society. Therefore, according to me the first and the primary mission of religious leaders is to strive for the growth of honesty and integrity using their integrated inter-religious spiritual wisdom gained through an open-hearted and humble dialogue with the followers of other religions. Hence, I prefer to call the ministry of inter-religious dialogue as the ministry of fostering moral and spiritual integrity among people of all religions.

## Fostering of integration

In our multi-religious society where divisions, conflicts and violence based on religious differences is a common feature,





Image Source : Google

building trust, respect and unity among people of different religions is a must. In this context, when religious leaders of different religions join together and promote honesty, truthfulness and integrity in society, then people will begin to experience and appreciate the spiritual richness of other religions. This will give rise to unity and integration. This will further foster social, cultural and spiritual integration among people. Thus, inter-religious dialogue which promotes honesty and integrity in society is also a meaningful process that fosters integration in society at all levels.

Since one strives to promote integrity and integration we could term the ministry of inter-religious dialogue as the ministry of promoting of integrity and integration. This is what we are practicing and promoting in our inter-religious initiatives at Bodhgaya, Bihar.

## Bodhgaya inter-religious initiatives

At Bodhgaya, we have integrated the Biblical spirituality of God's love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and peace with the psycho-spiritual wisdom of Buddhism to promote the moral and spiritual development of persons in all ages. We aim at growth in honesty, integrity and integration in the multi-religious society of Bodhgaya and Bihar. We integrate the intra-personal spirituality (meditation; self-awareness and self-purification) of Buddhism with the inter-personal spirituality (growth in relationship with God and humans leading to purity, freedom, reconciliation and peace) of theism (Christianity and other religions). We offer integrated spirituality retreats, recollections, seminars and workshops for priests, religious men and women, and the laity.

Further, we have formed here an Inter-religious Friends'

Association with a few selfless and compassionate Buddhist monks and a few people of good-will from different religions. We have various activities among students, teachers, professors and youth to enhance their moral and spiritual development. We popularize meditation in schools and colleges so that students and teachers develop their concentration power as well as their moral character.

### Some of the important programmes we conduct here are:

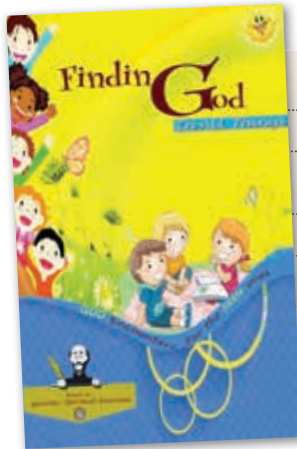
- Retreats, recollections, seminars and workshops for Church animators on transformative spirituality (integrating Buddhist and Biblical spirituality)
- Meditation to grow in inner purity, peace and prayerfulness.
- Teaching the importance of inter-religious dialogue
- Value orientation and character formation workshops for students of schools and colleges, and the youth.
- Peace education workshops for teachers and professors.
- Training of meditation masters for schools, colleges and formation houses

In conclusion, I am convinced that if we form inter-religious associations for every 10000 people in India to promote morality and spirituality, integrity, integration, peace and harmony will flourish. We can then become lights in the world that is ridden with all kinds of divisions, conflicts and violence.

The author is the director of Dialogue Ministry in Bodhgaya Jesuit Mission, promoting Buddhist-Christian Understanding, Friendship and Collaboration.  
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# Ignatian Sprirtuality for Children



TITLE: Finding God in all things  
 AUTHOR: Mary Saldanha, Marietta Azavedo  
 PUBLISHER: Holy Family Church, Chakala, Mumbai  
 PAGES: 40  
 PRICE: ₹ NA

A publication for children titled Finding God... in All Things was released by Holy Family Church, Chakala, on the Feast Day of St. Ignatius of Loyola 2019. This

adaptation has been put together by parishioners

Mary Saldanha and Marietta Azavedo under the guidance of Charles Rodrigues, SJ, and Vincent Vaz, SJ. This concise guide with its short chapters, child friendly size, colour and appealing font is an ideal introduction of Ignatian spirituality to children from the age of 4 to 10. The book divided into 10 Chapters follows a simple style of writing intended to help integrate Ignatian spirituality, imaginative prayer and the Examen into the everyday lives of kids. Each chapter includes a prayer and an activity to help children cherish and express their spirituality.

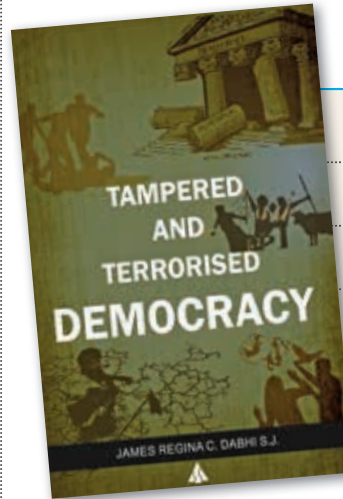
# The Story of a Jesuit Goa

TITLE: Jesuits of the Goa Province: A Historical Overview (1542 – 2000)  
 AUTHORS: Gregory Naik, SJ  
 PUBLISHER: Cinnamon Teal Publishing  
 PAGES: 182  
 PRICE: ₹ 350



Jesuits of the Goa Province: A Historical Overview (1542 – 2000) covers a wide swath of Jesuit history as it relates to South Asia. The author weaves a Jesuit narrative of great fascination, with Goa as its centrepiece. The story of Jesuit Goa is really a global story, as it touches distant lands and mighty continents. Since Goa was the hub of the Portuguese empire in the East, it became a strategic player in the pioneering activities of the early Jesuits residing in Goa. This book will fascinate students of history, religion and cultures. It offers rich data for further exploring the colonial history of Goa and its connection with the Society of Jesus.

# Who has Jeopardised Democracy?



TITLE: Tampered and Terrorised DemocracY  
 AUTHOR: James Regina C. Dabhi  
 PUBLISHER: Indian Social Institute, New Delhi  
 PAGES: 46  
 PRICE: ₹ 100

This small booklet tries to capture the events

unfolding, not by themselves but as manufactured and created in recent times by the authorities. We look at these events on the larger canvas of Indian Secular Democracy.

Some may find the views and critique unacceptable and perhaps objectionable. In a democracy it is fine to have different opinions and views. Some may find them hurtful. As Indians we are oversensitive and sometimes rigid. One needs to realise that an aspect of democracy is the right to freedom of speech and the other's freedom to listen or not. But our democracy does not welcome intolerance and violence that arises just because one does not subscribe to a view.

In the last few years intolerance and violence of dissent has swept across many parts of the country. Social and political organisations have played a major role in this process, especially, right wing social and political organisations.

In this booklet the author shows that our democracy is tampered and terrorised by the Hindutva socio-political organisations and their manipulations in the last few decades. The booklet focuses on two aspects of the Indian socio-economic and political reality – the structural Economic Programme and the saffronisation of Indian politics.

The programmes and events around these two aspects have adversely affected people's participation in governance and decision making that shapes their lives. They have also facilitated the spread of saffron ideology and 'Hindutva' politics that is detrimental to the Constitution of India. These have seriously jeopardised democracy, democratic institutions and processes. The hope for endangered democracy is for the citizen to be awakened and made critically aware. This awareness will lead to action aligned with our Constitution so that rule of law is respected, the dignity and rights of citizens are upheld, the diversity and differences among us are seen as assets - something to celebrate and learn from – and not as liabilities.

# Sacral Interculturality: a visit to a Sufi Dargah



At the Library of the Innayat Khan Shrine

Cultural diversity has emerged as a key concern in the pluralistic context of our country. Culture embraces the totality of people's life - language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, art, etc. Homogenization of cultures has strengthened religious fundamentalism. Cultural diversity strengthens universality, opening up multicultural spaces for dialogue resulting into possibilities for interculturality.

Interculturality seeks rootedness in one's own culture, then into the culture of others, going beyond the social and religious boundaries. Intercultural theology demands profound respect towards other faith with the ability to listen and engage in dialogue. It challenges us to cross, or rather to plunge into unfamiliar waters.

With the study of Sufism we began our journey to immerse ourselves into the world of religious faiths and traditions. The lectures by Prof. Khurshid Khan, Dr. Herman Roborgh and Dr. Farida, besides our instructor Victor Edwin, helped clarify doubts and enter into the mystical worldview of Islam.

On 10th August we visited a Dargah, the final resting place of the Sufi mystic Hazrat Inayat Khan. It is situated in the midst of Delhi's Nizamuddin basti, not very far from the Dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya. A modern Dargah, quite unusual from one I had seen earlier, surrounded by beautiful gardens and complexes echoes the symphony of universal brotherhood. Dr. Farida, the director of the Hazrat Inayat Khan Trust helped us understand Sufism through her life experience and interaction with her Sufi mentor. When asked about mysticism and music,



Qawwali singers at the Innayat Khan Shrine

her spontaneous response was, "music is a prayer to the divine, which resonates in our very being, an effective conductor that transports the soul into universal worship." More fascinating is the fact that Hazrat Inayat Khan was instrumental in popularizing Hindustani music and spreading the word of what he called "Universal Sufism" in the West.

Every Friday evening there is a traditional Qawwali performance at the Dargah. We were blessed to witness how the sounds of a harmonium and compelling voices soaked in the aura of the place helps an individual to transcend all self-restricting boundaries. The Sufi way of life and music synergizes spirituality and culture in the interest of all humanity. It was a moment that led me into deep harmony and syncretism of beliefs. This memorable exposure brought sacred fusion to my understanding of different faith traditions.

Joy Fernandes, SJ

# North Zone Major Superiors Meet

The Major Superiors of the North Zone – Delhi, Nepal, Darjeeling, Patna, Kolkata and Kohima – met for their first meeting at Godavari Ashram, Kathmandu, on 10th and 11th July. The visitors from Delhi, Patna, Darjeeling, Kolkata and Kohima enjoyed the hospitality and comforts of the new building and facilities at Godavari Ashram. Our host, Fr. Amrit (NEP), along with the Socius Fr. Juel, had made special efforts to ensure that our travel, stay and recreation were memorable. As five of the six Major Superiors

had been in office for a little over a year, the first part of the meeting included personal sharing of consolations and desolations. In the second part the agenda presented by the Zonal Coordinator, Fr. Sebastian (DEL), was taken up. In addition to discussing the implementation of the UAPs at the zonal level (UAP prayer books for evening prayers), the Major Superiors also considered zonal retreats (following up on the positive experiences of REGAE I and II), leadership training programmes, regency exchange of scholastics, and zonal level meeting of vocation promoters. They also emphasized



the need for collaboration among Provinces and Regions in the zone during formation with a view to greater apostolic effectiveness, reorientation and, if need be, re-drawing of boundaries in the future.

The half-day trip to Pokhara included the Fewa lake boat-ride followed by a sumptuous dinner at 'Bygans', silent moments at the hill-top World Peace Stupa and an eye-catching hill-top view of Pokhara city, the amazing Devi Falls, St. Mary's School of the CJ sisters, the Contemplative and Active

wings of the MC sisters and the memorable Jesuit Shishu Vikas Kendra (school for the differently-abled Down's Syndrome children). The final evening at St. Xavier's, Jawalekhel in Kathmandu included a grand dinner at the CJ Provincialate in the company of CJ Juniors and tertians. Amrit has set the bar high for future Major Superior meetings!

| Courtesy: Donald Miranda, SJ

# First Lokpal inaugurates Xavier Law School

The law is supreme and even above the king, India's first Lokpal, Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose, told law students of Xavier Law School at St. Xavier's University, Kolkata on Saturday. In the Vedas and the Upanishads, law is treated as the "king of kings", he said.

Justice Ghose was speaking at the inauguration of the Xavier Law School. "Since the creation of the State, law comprised a set of rules that are supreme in nature... A king may possess the highest authority in the country but in the eyes of law a king and a simple person are the same... Law works in the same way for both of them. Hence it is... more supreme than the king."

The Law School at St Xavier's University



started functioning from 5th August. It offers a five-year integrated BA LLB (Honours) and BCom LLB (Honours) courses. The curriculum has been framed along what is followed by the national law schools. "The law of any country holds unlimited power over that country. The end objective of law is to regulate peace, harmony, justice and security," Ghose, a Xaverian, said.

"Everyone in the State is required to abide by the law."

The school's curriculum has been framed in such a way that graduates can practice in courts or work as consultants, the University Vice-Chancellor Fr. Felix Raj said. The Xavier Law School not only aims to produce legal experts but also students coached in "the important values of life", he said. "This will be our contribution to the entire legal system of India." The university has a law library, a moot court and a legal aid clinic for students.

Justice Ghose reminded students about the difficulties they could face if they practiced law. The formative years might not fetch adequate returns. "But I am sure the returns will be 100 per cent if you carry on (with the difficulties) in the first ten years," he said.

| Courtesy: Felix Raj, SJ



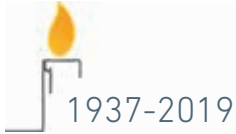
## Br. Selvaraj Sebastian, SJ (MDU)

Br. Selvaraj was my companion as a student of St. Mary's Higher Secondary School, Dindigul. He joined our novitiate at Beschi, Dindigul in 1957. He was always known to be a calm and unassuming person. To say that he was "calmness personified" would not be an exaggeration. While greeting him on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee (2007) the then General, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, referred to this point: "The Lord has blessed you during these fifty years of dedication to the Society's mission... Your companions admire your simple unassuming character and your tenacity in works entrusted to you. You present a gentle and cheerful image of the Jesuit Brother to all who encounter you, strengthening that image with your efficiency and charm in human relations. You have spent yourself in humble tasks like St. Alphonsus Rodriguez and Blessed Garate. May the Lord who sees the work done in secret, be your reward."

Except for the last few years of his life, Br. Selvaraj had been working in most of our institutions south of the river Cauvery. Whatever work was assigned to him he did quietly and to the satisfaction of his community. It is unfortunate that during the past few years he became a victim of a terminal illness which he endured with utmost resignation till the end came on 8th June at Dindigul.

Fr. Danis Ponniah, our Provincial, was the chief celebrant at the funeral Mass the next day. In the funeral homily, Fr. Vincent Britto emphasized: "Br. Selvaraj was a man of prayer and faith in God... Even at times of pain and suffering he was calm wearing a beautiful smile on his face constantly."

■ Paul C. Jesuraja, SJ



## Fr. Aloysius Murzello, SJ (BOM)

All of us who knew Fr. Aloysius as a friend will recall his patience, his ability to listen and the many small things he did to make us comfortable. At the end of a hard day, it was nice to have Aloo there, waiting to serve a hot meal and listen to our experiences.

Fr. Aloysius was a man of many talents. He was skilled at cooking, sewing, painting, music, photography, and film appreciation. He was a very obedient Jesuit. At 67, he said 'Yes' to go to Talasari. It was tough but in his own inimitable style he taught English and imparted other skills.

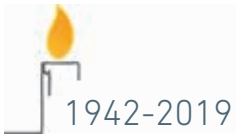
After Talasari, Fr Aloysius came to Xavier's College - a very sick man. After recovering, he took PHV classes, film appreciation sessions and was ever available to celebrate the Eucharist. Every Wednesday he would prepare a special dish, and the amount of energy and love that went into it was remarkable. His attention to

detail ensured that all the right ingredients got in; no 'chalta hai' attitude for him. I still maintain that his Irish Crème was better than the original!

Through his life Aloo leaves us three messages: a) sing in your own voice. Be who are you are; what God wants you to be; b) be ready to help. He always reached out to assist; c) keep doing what you enjoy doing. Aloo kept up his cooking and baking till the end. In fact, at the moment God called him, he was busy making a cake in honour of the Provincial who was on visitation. He suddenly collapsed. Which of us would not like to go with our boots on?

Fr. Aloysius, thank you for all you have been to us; you continue to remain in our hearts!

■ Roy Pereira, SJ



## Fr. Louis Xavier, SJ (MDU)

After almost fifty years of continuous, non-stop labouring as an administrator in educational institutions, mostly in Jesuit institutions, Fr. Louis Xavier moved in 2016 to Beschillam, Dindigul, where on 15th June 2019, he quietly surrendered his soul to his Creator.

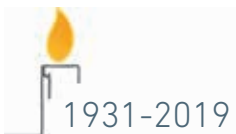
Administrator: Fr. Louis Xavier devoted most of his life to the education of the youth in Jesuit institutions. He was an able administrator. He was Principal of St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirapalli (1970-1972). He was a pioneer in starting institutions of Business Administration in Tiruchirapalli and Palayamkottai and gave a facelift to LIBA in Chennai as its Director. He got AICTE recognition for LIBA. He had a short stint of administration (2001 to 2004) as Correspondent of Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada, where he was also MBA Director for a year.

Actuator: He was a Professor of English, but when need arose he was ready to shoulder the responsibility of starting management institutes. He was a good actuator.

He made others work hard by goading them on with his motivational talks, and led by example. He was a member of the UGC National Curriculum Development Cell for Indian Universities. He was National Secretary of Jesuit Higher Education; Director, Jesuit Educational Research Institute; Secretary, National Jesuit Education Association (JEA); South Asian Coordinator of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference - Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy (FABC-OESC).

Alchemist: Anything that passed through his hands gained weight and importance. His life exemplified the core theme of Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*: 'If you have a special dream, Nature itself will conspire to bend itself and accomplish the desires of your dream.' This was verified in the life of Fr. Louis Xavier. The Madurai Province has lost a great administrator. May he rest in peace!

■ A. J. Thamburaj, SJ





**Note:** This new section covers gut-level views of someone in the position of governing and another of being governed. It is a platform that intends to bridge the gap between the two and eventually provide a healing touch.



**Sebastian Jeerakassery, SJ**

*Cura personalis and cura apostolica:* The primary responsibilities of a Provincial. A tight rope-walk indeed! One at the cost of the other is detrimental to governance of the men and mission of the Province. Obedient and committed Jesuits ever ready to dare it out in

challenging situations bring joy and consolation. I am blessed with many such Jesuits. A consolation indeed!

Spiritual conversation – a game changer: Do I miss the spirited arguments and counter arguments of 1980s in Patna Province? Maybe not. We still arrive at discerned decisions and are able to keep our BP under control. All are listened to with love and respect.

Universal Apostolic Preferences: A new benchmark against which our life and mission can be measured. These UAPs have not fallen from the sky. We arrived at them after a prolonged process of discernment. They challenge us to respond effectively to the global changes both locally and globally. I am happy we are taking baby-steps in this direction.

Go to the peripheries: Why are we shying away from moving out of our comfort zones? Maybe the fame, power, money associated with our ‘important positions’ in our ‘famous institutions’ are too much of a temptation. However, it is a consolation to see some young men daring enough to rough it out in difficult situations.

Manifestation of conscience: Often the Provincial is the last person to know about the departure of one of his men! Easy to share what one does but difficult to share who one is! Are we also falling prey to the popular saying – “I am alright until I am caught red-handed?” Is manifestation of conscience a casualty in the life of a modern Jesuit?

Am I my brother’s keeper: Yes Fr. Provincial, you are supposed to be one; not only you, all Jesuits are! We are called to love, care and foster the vocation, life and mission of our brothers. Yet often I hear, “He is mature enough to make his own decisions. I do not interfere in his life.” However, when one of my brother’s ‘mature decision’ is against the life and mission of the Society and I keep silence, do I not become partner in his downfall and am culpable as well?

Showing the door gracefully: It is a traumatic experience to guide a Jesuit ‘out’ who is well advanced in his formation. The current scenario of suspicion regarding ‘sexual misconduct’ by religious and clergy becomes a bane, a compelling force to act immediately.

Hello guys! I too am human! I do lose sleep over the critical condition of a sick brother of mine. I am sad when one of us leaves our fold. My blood pressure shoots up when I have to face a ‘difficult’ brother. Yet, no one asks me, “How are you?” Well that’s not fully true... My Socius enquires after my health if I miss Mass or go late for a meal. That’s the wisdom of the Society!

The author is the Provincial of Delhi Jesuit Province.  
Contact: provincial@delhijesuits.org



**SM. John Kennedy, SJ**

Having joined the Society in 1983 and been a Jesuit for over 35 years, it is a privilege to share some of my views and experiences of what it means to be governed.

Personally, I have enjoyed being governed. I must place on record that the understanding, companionship and accompaniment of my Provincials have been sources of strength for me to grow and to become what I am today. Whenever I confided in them, they respected my views, encouraged and guided me so that I could be effective and efficient in my ministry. I hope and pray my fellow Jesuits have had a similar experience.

Having said this, I must speak the truth though some may not like to face it. Today more than ever personal ambitions and aspirations dominate, careerism thrives, individualism rules and secular values greatly influence people not just in the world outside but in the Society as well. Hence, it is difficult to be a leader striking a balance between cura personalis and cura apostolica. Given the Society’s structure of governance, a Provincial has the power to make or break an individual Jesuit in spite of the latter’s efforts to be and do good, or otherwise.

Let me share my personal experience. At times when I shared my successes, struggles and sufferings through mails with some of my Provincials, I was disheartened at not receiving any response. I am still struggling to understand what cura personalis means. Some Provincials have found me very good and others, not so good, making me wonder what was behind their understanding of me. All of us are aware that a leader can conveniently find a hundred reasons to appoint someone to a position and another hundred not to do so.

My main expectation is that prejudice, rivalry, jealousy, alignment and allegiance to a caste or group should never colour the decisions of any Provincial. Such petty considerations should not interfere in the deliberations of the leader. Of course, it is hard to govern today; it is a difficult task. But a Provincial is not merely a temporal administrator; he is a spiritual leader and animator. Therefore, spirituality, and only spirituality, should be the guiding force and principle of governance in the Society. Let temporal considerations diminish and spiritual animation flourish. Otherwise, what is the difference between a leader in the corporate sector and one in the Society whether at the Province or community level!

The author is the Vice-Principal of St. Xavier’s Hr. Sec. School, Palayamkottai, and Director, JCERT (Jesuit Council for Education Research and Training).

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# Not All Crap! Selling waste Online



Image Source: thebetterindia.com

Hyderabadis, listen! Want to earn from your household scrap while helping the environment? This start-up not only offers a free pick-up service, it also uses part of the profits to educate underprivileged children.

Making money from scrap is customary in almost every Indian family. We have all inherited the hamster-like quality of storing things to sell to the scrap dealer at the end of the month.

Giving a modern spin to this traditional custom, three brothers from Hyderabad have started 'Crapbin'. The start-up allows you to book their services online for dry and recyclable waste like books, newspaper, magazines, cardboard, glass bottles, soft plastic, plastic, steel, iron, aluminium, copper, tin, brass and electronic items.

How does it work? Either book a service on their Website or give a call to book a slot on any day of the week. The company will assign an executive to the customers based on the location. The staff will visit the house, weigh the scrap and pay in cash based on market rates. The customer can also make an arrangement

for a pick up on a particular day every month. All the collected scrap is segregated and sold to waste management firms. Normally, people find it difficult to go to the local scrap dealer to dispose off their scrap. So, it ultimately ends up in dump yards, rivers and landfills.

Crapbin has a 1,700-strong customer base and has recycled 470 tonnes of dry waste. In terms of social impact, the company has generated employment for 20 people who have completed their senior secondary studies. A part of Crapbin's profits is allocated to fund the education of underprivileged children.

They now hope to scale up their operations by expanding to Pune and other cities. Currently they are doing research and conducting a few pilot projects to recycle wet waste. With start-ups like Crapbin coming forward and taking up the responsibility of managing garbage, the possibility of curbing India's mounting garbage crisis looks good.

Adapted from TBI

## THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Jerry Fernandes, SJ  
jestjerry@gmail.com

# Lessons from the Abkhasians with their incredible lifespan



Image Source: Google

In 1974 Sula Benet, a noted anthropologist, while working in Abkhazia, shared this anecdote. She once toasted a man who looked no more than 70 and said, "May you live as long as Moses to 120." He didn't like it. He was actually 119! Abkhazia, in southern Russia is known for the longevity of its people, like the Hunza tribe in the Himalayas or the Sardinians in Italy.

Researchers claimed that the Abkhasians had a lifespan of 150 years, marriages took place at 110 and men fathered children at 136! A certain Shirali Muslimov died when 168 and Russia even honoured him with a postage stamp. Scientists, epidemiologists, and anthropologists wondered. Was it the water they drank? Or was the soil extra rich in minerals? Or was it the rarefied air in the hills? Listed below is a summary of what the researchers discovered.

**Their cultural lifestyles:** Their cultural lifestyles make them both mentally and physically one of the healthiest aging groups in the world. Elders run up and down the hills and mountains often laughing and dancing like children. No chronic illness has touched them as yet.

**Healthy social relationships and a cooperative spirit:** The Abkhasians promote and nurture good relationships among themselves. They spend time being together sharing ordinary happenings in life and their cooperative spirit is fairly high.

**Their exercise regimen:** The Abkhasians spend time every day going up and down in the thin mountain air which keeps them fit. They all have one hobby: gardening.

**Their diet:** The Abkhasians follow a plant-based diet emphasizing 'picked-it-this-morning' fresh foods, whole grains, and nuts. Nuts are served at every meal, bringing in the antioxidant value. They never touch refined flour, oils, or sugars.

**A low calorie intake:** The Abkhasians have a low calorie intake that is well below the prescribed 2000 calories per day. Longevity researchers are not surprised as limiting calorie intake has been shown to increase life expectancy.

**Their longevity 'secret':** Their need to be needed is met. Culturally, the Abkhasians never 'retire' in the Western sense of the word. They remain active participants in serving their community until the end. They actually enjoy growing old since it bestows on them status, respect, and a sense of a place in the community.

These are lessons worth learning from them. Researcher Dan Buettner who studies these tribes for the National Geographic Society claims that they have some interesting common cultural lifestyles.