

January, 2024

JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA



An old psalm for a new year

Democracy Dreams for 2024

A silhouette of a person in a dynamic dance pose, with one arm raised and the other bent, set against a vibrant sunset background of orange and red. The dancer's dress is flowing and detailed with splatters. The overall mood is energetic and inspirational.

Out to dance

- *By Christine Evangelou*

And that's the thing about hope
She springs out of nowhere
At the glimpse of possibility
On the breeze of a belief
The faint chatter of faith...
'Cause hope is far mightier
Than a passing pause
And when you are sunk
And think there is no chance,
She'll hum to you a message,
As she ventures out to dance.

Courtesy: The Motivation Angel

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PUBLISHED BY
Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B. No. 70,
St. Xavier's Road, Anand-388001, Gujarat.

PRINTED AT
Anand Press, Gamdi, Anand-388001,
Gujarat.

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The Publisher, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash,
P.B. No. 70, Anand-388001, Gujarat.
Cell : +91 94084 20847,
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US \$25 (Or
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GSP AC details
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Cover Design: AMCF - CATHOLIC COMMUNICATION CENTRE Cover Picture: in.pinterest.com

As a service of information for the South Asian Jesuit Conference, 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.

“Brother, when you become a Father, please...”

On the eve of Diwali, as I was reading the newspaper, an interesting news item grabbed my attention. It was about a businessman, Mr. P Siva Kumar, who gifted Royal Enfield bikes, each worth Rs. 2 lacks, to his employees as a Diwali bonus. (*The New Indian Express*, 03-11-2023) I was profoundly impressed. He understood the problems his employees face while travelling by public transportation and he responded by offering motorcycles. His employees must have been deeply grateful.

This made me reflect on a conversation that I once had with our driver, while we were coming back to our formation house after dropping a Jesuit at the railway station. There was a huge traffic jam. Our Bolero could not move. To break the silence and pass the time, I asked the driver, “How is your life and how all are at home?” He responded immediately: “I am fed up with my life and with this work.” I was shocked and didn’t know what to say. He continued, “I have been working for 20 years and my salary is only Rs. 10,000. My two daughters are studying in government schools. Although I work for the Fathers who run famous schools and colleges, my family stays in a rented house. My bank balance is zero. Neither my family nor I have any insurance.”

I was deeply sad to know how much he and his family suffered. He continued saying, “Fr. Minister calls me in the middle of the night and tells me, ‘Come fast. We need to go to the railway station to pick up a guest.’ What can I do? Leaving my family I have to rush. Those priests who give such orders don’t think I have a family whose members need my presence to feel secure at night.”

I wondered what I could say. “In addition to driving, Fathers give me other works like sweeping and cleaning, painting, plumbing and repair work. Should someone who

gets a driver’s salary do all these works? After working for hours if we rest for a while, the Fathers presume that we are whiling away our time, because we don’t have enough work. None of the Fathers acknowledges our hard work. Ten years ago, I asked the Fathers to sanction a loan to build a house on a small plot of land given by the government. They did not. This is why we are still living in a rented house.”



“In my 20 years of service, no Father has visited my house. Most of them don’t even know where I stay. This is the plight of many workers in our campus, but nobody helps them, although they are all priests and brothers.” Seeing my face he understood that I was shocked, sad and helpless. He looked at me and said, “Brother, please take care of the co-workers when you become a Father.” For a long time that night I kept thinking of what he had shared. I thought of Mr. P. Siva Kumar, who understood the struggles of his employees and decided to donate motorcycles to them.

We eat, without ever thinking of the struggles and problems our cooks face. We call our drivers anytime during the day or night and give them orders, without thinking what it would mean for them. We sleep peacefully in our comfortable rooms but never bother to find out what our watchmen have to go through to guard our houses in the cold winter. We often talk of the poor but forget that most of our workers are very poor.

■ B. Madan Babu, SJ (AND) | Calcutta

Timely reminder

I liked the article by Fr Victor Edwin SJ on the complex relationship between the Indian Catholic Church, Islam, and the perceptions of Muslims in India. I found the article to be a thought-provoking and insightful piece that raises crucial questions about the understanding of Muslim identity in India, and how it is viewed by different segments of society, and particularly within the Christian community.

The article helps us comprehend the diversity and multifaceted nature of Indian Islam. Fr. Edwin’s observation that Muslim perceptions and practices do not adhere to a monolithic pattern is a reminder of the rich tapestry of traditions and beliefs that exist within the

Muslim community. The article is a timely reminder for all communities to engage in open and empathetic dialogue with one another, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

■ Fean Almeida, SJ | Mumbai

55 – not 66

I had ended the article on the life and vision of Tony D’Mello, SJ, published in the October ’23 issue of *Jivan* with this sentence: “His life of 66 years was a search for freedom that enables us to be fully human.” It was a mistake. Fr Tony expired at the age of 55 years. Actually he was 55 years and eight months old.

■ Br. Mario Correia, SJ (BOM) | Mumbai



WHAT DO YOU SAY?

STANY D'SOUZA, SJ
President, JCSA

Shall we begin a renewed journey?

Have you had the experience I had recently? I was taken aback when I heard the word 'sexy' while flying on the Indigo Airlines for the first time.

After the initial uneasiness I realized that it was not 'sexy' but 6 E. The in-flight magazine of the Indigo Airlines is called, *Hello 6E*. I found something interesting in the latest *Hello 6E* magazine. It recorded the philosophy and practice of Indigo family: '...We believe the soul of our service lies in details: the professional greetings at the check in counter, a cabin crew member's genuine smile, eye contact, or the spontaneous act of holding an elevator door open... Cleanliness, a crucial cornerstone of our service, is never compromised. ... We shape more than just skill sets, we mould the very ethos that becomes synonymous with Indigo... We believe in fostering a culture where constructive criticism paves the way for continuous growth...'

As you know, cleanliness, courtesy, and punctuality are not mere slogans for Indigo. They are ingrained and nurtured in their staff. It is a culture. As the writer observes: 'while we sculpt ambassadors of the Indigo spirit, we also ensure they champion our core values...' I think Indigo walks the talk and hence, it has monopolized the aviation industry in India.

This made me think about us, Jesuits. Could we also say, like Indigo, "While we sculpt ambassadors of the Jesuit spirit, we also ensure they champion our core values"?

In fact, GC 34 Decree 26 titled 'Characteristics of Our Way of Proceeding' gave a list of Jesuit attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour: Deep Personal Love for Jesus Christ; Contemplative in Action; An Apostolic Body in the Church; In Solidarity with Those Most in Need; Partnership with Others; Called to Learned Ministry; Men Sent, Always Available for New Missions; Ever Searching for the Magis. Do you think that we are ambassadors of these attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour?

There was a time when we had luminaries among the missionaries, social workers, pastors and, of course, in the field of intellectual ministry.

I think times have changed and so also has the Society of Jesus. Don't you think it is time for us to foster a culture of continuous growth and self-improvement?

Fr General has shared the *De Statu Societatis Iesu* with us to read, reflect and renew our life-mission. In 2024 shall we begin a renewed journey to render a signal service to God and God's people? What do you say?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

M.A. JOE ANTONY, SJ
Editor

For hope when it is hard to hope

Have you come across people who seriously think that these are the end times? But why would they think so? If you ask them, they will be ready with a long list of recent catastrophes, which they think should make anyone lose hope.

We were all praying that the Russian war against Ukraine should end soon. Well, the war has gone on for more than a year. It will be two years in February. Till now 10,000 Ukrainian civilians and about 315,000 Russian soldiers have been killed. Thousands of soldiers of both countries have been grievously injured, but there is nothing to make you hope that the war will end soon. So we continue to pray.

Before that prayer is heard, another bitter, brutal war started in October '23 in what we call the Holy Land. It was started by the Hamas militants, who killed about 1,400 and kidnapped about 240 Israeli civilians. In the retaliatory attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces, about 19,000 Palestinians have been killed. A shocking 6,150 of the dead have been children. Defying the entire international community, Israel continues its indiscriminate airstrikes.

It is reported that the Churches in Bethlehem have cancelled all Christmas celebrations. Make a note of it: The birthday of Jesus cannot be celebrated in his birthplace. In a heartrending video, a pastor in a church in Bethlehem shows the nativity scene they have made this year. The baby Jesus, all alone, is surrounded by rubble – pieces of rock, brick or stone. Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds are at a distance looking for him. He says it is meant to show the plight of Palestinians, rushing to buildings which bombs have just reduced to rubble and desperately searching for survivors.

What about the disasters that climate scientists predict?

Here in India, despite the bright predictions, the Congress Party has lost all the three northern States. Does this mean that the BJP will easily win the parliamentary elections in May 2024? If they come back to power once again with a thumping majority, what will they do? Will they change the Constitution? Will the democratic, secular India become a Hindu rashtra? How will the religious minorities fare in this country?

In order to counter the cynicism born of hopelessness we need to pray for large doses of hope. In her poem (*See 'Garden' on the inner front cover*) Christine Evangelou suggests that just a glimpse of possibility, just a breeze of belief, even a faint chatter of faith is enough to make hope appear and hum a message to you and venture out to dance. May 2024 bring us the good news that our world will be safer and more peaceful!

Coordinators of school education meet in Ahmedabad

The annual meet of the Province Coordinators for school Education (PCEs) was held at St. Xavier's High school, Loyola Hall, Ahmedabad on 22-25 October '23. All the coordinators, including the one from Sri Lanka, participated in the meeting. The meeting started with the Eucharist presided over by Fr. Antony Pitchai, the rector of St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad. He welcomed the delegates and urged the delegates to make our education more relevant.

At the formal inauguration in the school the students and the alumni welcomed the delegates with flowers and shawls. Fr. Francis Parmar, director, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, presided over the inaugural ceremony as the provincial's representative. In his inaugural address, he invited the delegates to look deeper into the meaning of discipline in Jesuit education. It is not just punishment but rather a formation for a change of behaviour and attitude. Fr. John Ravi, Conference Secretary for School Education (CSSE), interacted with the students asking, "Are you happy with the educational system in India?" The students expressed their dissatisfaction and that paved the way for our discussions and deliberations.

On the first day we had a session on 'AI and its ethical implications' by Dr. Jitendra Bhatia from Nirma University, Ahmedabad. Although AI offers various benefits to the humanity, it has its ethical implications resulting in biased information, lack of accountability and responsibility, fears related to data privacy and security, plagiarism and job replacement. He guided the delegates to audit and limit the power of AI when it is used. He also insisted that sources had to be shown to the students and the staff needed to be trained to responsibly use AI tools for education.

The second session was on 'Online Data and Cyber Security' by Dr. Akash Thakar from Rashtriya Raksha University, Gandhi Nagar. He shed light on various cyber crimes such as hacking, phishing, spoofing, cyber stalking, morphing, skimming, social engineering, data theft and so on. He made us become aware that any crime begins with our permission. He suggested ways to keep our data safe, such as creating strong passwords, two factor authentication, keeping software updated, using secured Wi-Fi networks and websites etc. He also educated the group about how to lodge a complaint on cybercrime.

The third session on the first day was on 'Social Media in Learning' by Dr. Richa Mishra from Nirma University. She explained how digital platforms could be effectively used in classroom situations and in guided sessions at home. Gamification in education makes learning easy



and enjoyable. In the evening, the delegates visited Gandhi Ashram at Sabarmathi and enjoyed a sumptuous dinner offered by the community of St. Xavier's School, Gandhinagar.

On the second day, Fr. Jose Alberto Mesa, SJ, the International Secretary for Secondary and Pre Secondary Education of the Society of Jesus, presided over the Eucharist and invited all the delegates to work in unison and get globally connected. In the first session of the day, he presented an overview of the educational scenario in the Society. He also spoke of the various documents of the society on Education. Then the province delegates presented the reports on the PAP, new educational initiatives and best practices in the schools. The delegates became aware of various possible ways of forming the students and the staff. In the evening the delegates relished the hospitality of St. Xavier's College.

On the third day the Eucharist was presided over by Fr. James, SJ, the PCF of Gujarat Province. In his homily, he deliberated on the effectiveness and importance of Jesuit education in today's context. Fr. Stanislaus D' Souza SJ, the President of the Conference of South Asia, encouraged the delegates to impart the Jesuit ideals through the tool of education in his online address to the delegates. Fr. John Ravi SJ, the Conference Secretary for School Education, presented the annual report of CSSE.

In the afternoon, the delegates had an interactive session with the Educate Magis team and clarified their doubts in getting our schools globally connected. The annual meet ended with a grand dinner. The delegates thanked Fr. Durai SJ, the provincial of Gujarat, Fr. Francis Macwan SJ, the local organizer, and all the members of the Loyola Hall community. They appreciated Fr. John Ravi, SJ, Secretary, CSSE, for the meticulous planning that made the annual meeting so effective.

- Paul Benedict, SJ (CEN)



An old psalm for a new year

Psalm 23 is the world's favourite psalm. With just 6 short verses it is simple and beautiful. It has won hearts for two and a half millennia. It has found its way into century upon century of literature; ship captains in movies have recited it at burials at sea, children have recited it at school prayer assemblies...

And if St Ignatius too used the Psalms for his prayer, surely this psalm must have taken pride of place, especially when he was attacked for his avant garde initiatives. The verses, 'He guides me along the right path for his name's sake... Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life...' and the rest, were surely prayed many a time by him, and by innumerable other saints, canonized and anonymous.

A look at Ps 23 is therefore opportune at the start of this New Year.

The psalms are, of course, poetry, songs born from the spirit (*pneuma*), which St. Paul distinguishes from the psyche, the faculty for knowing, that is, the rational intellect (see 1 Thess 5:23). With the psyche we can study philosophy, mathematics, science, etc., but it is only with the *pneuma* that we can enjoy music and create poetry. The psalms were born from the Spirit of God touching human spirits!

As with all great poetry and music, there are meanings within meanings, and a variety of interpretations. Psalm 23 contains two distinct metaphors. First, there is the simple and touching image



Pic courtesy: Pxtuel.com

of God as the faithful shepherd who guides the believer to nourishing pastures and good water. Like shepherds in old Israel, he carries a stout staff to ward off wild beasts that sometimes crept in when darkness fell.

The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want, fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose. Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit. He guides me along the right path for his name's sake.

But soon there is an abrupt change of metaphor – for no shepherd sits his sheep down at table, nor anoints them with oil, nor fills a cup for them! So the second metaphor is about a Chieftain God, and it comes from the customs of the desert Bedouin tribals and their strict laws of hospitality. When a Bedouin chief invites a stranger into his tent, he has a meal served to him, and anoints his head with oil. This means the visitor is no longer a stranger. He is a member of the chieftain's clan during his visit.

This custom, which the Israelites knew from their primitive Bedouin days, is the basis of the psalm's second section. *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are there with me; your rod and your staff comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows!*

The scenario is of a fugitive who rushes into a campsite of Bedouin tents and asks for asylum from



Psalm 23 helps us to find consolation and inner peace by entrusting our lives to the Good Shepherd. Can there be a better prayer when we begin a new year? 🙏

his pursuers hell-bent on violence and hot on his trail. The chieftain listens to his story, believes he is wrongly pursued and takes him into his tent. There the fugitive is given a meal and anointed with oil. This is a hospitality ritual symbolizing acceptance into the clan. At this stage the enemies arrive and look for him. (*"You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies"*). They know they will have to fight the chieftain and his whole tribe, if they attempt to capture or harm their quarry.

So the Shepherd God who leads us through dark valleys to sustaining nourishment and refreshing water is also the Chieftain God who admits us into his tribe and who will fight on our side when enemies seek us out to destroy us.

Is Psalm 23 too primitive for our 21st century? No, this psalm has a saving message for our secular society, whose newspapers are full of bloody wars and broken homes. Our era's child prostitution rivals the worst excesses of the Roman Empire. Historians also

point out that in Imperial Rome there were more slaves than free citizens. What proportion of our citizens today is truly free, free to be fully human? Many politicians are not free to resist bribes, nor journalists to resist sensationalism and rigged articles, nor priests and tele-evangelists to resist the temptations they preach against.

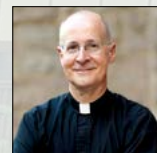
We, like the OT Jews, find freedom within a violent society when we find our way to the tent and clan of the Chieftain God. He will fight for us and teach us how to fight evil. He anoints us with the oil of covenantal baptism, making us members of his people, and feeds us with His Son's flesh and blood.

Psalm 23 helps us to find consolation and inner peace by entrusting our lives to the Good Shepherd. Can there be a better prayer when we begin a new year? ❖

Fr Fio Mascarenhas, SJ is a retired Bible teacher, and is available for retreats and seminars. He can be contacted at frfiomas@gmail.com.



Pic courtesy: christianity.com



My experiences at the Synod

-Interview with Fr. James Martin, SJ



Jim, thanks for talking to Jivan about your experiences at the Synod. We were happy to hear you were invited by Pope Francis to attend the Synod. How did it begin?

We began with a retreat at the Fraterna Domus retreat center, led by Fr Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., the former Master General of the Dominicans, and Mother Maria Ignazia Angelina, an Italian Benedictine Sister.

What were the main takeaways from the retreat?

“We preach the gospel of friendships that reach across boundaries,” said Fr Timothy during the retreat. This image informed and illuminated my experience of the entire Synod. “So the foundation of all we shall do in this synod should be the friendships we create. It does not look like much. It will not make headlines in the media. “They came all the way to Rome to make friends. What a waste!” But it is by friendship that we will make the transition from “I” to “We.”” To my mind, that was the most important thing that occurred at the synod: Friendships were built across boundaries, within the boundary of our love for Christ, whose love knows no boundaries.

Unlike most retreats, it included not only prayer and presentations, but also an introduction to the main

way of participating in the Synod, called “Conversations in the Spirit.”

This is what we Jesuits call the Spiritual Conversation, right? It was practiced at the last GC and recommended for the entire Society.

Yes. Although many Jesuits would know the methodology followed, let me describe how it was done here at the Synod. The first step was prayer. Everything we did was grounded in that, and we frequently paused to reflect. Each module - or section of the synod - began with a Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica. We also found it helpful to ask everyone what name they wanted to be called at the tables. So many Eminences and Excellencies, as well as Professors and Fathers, usually said, “Call me Jim.” “Call me Chito.” “Call me Cynthia.”

Next, everyone went around the table and for three minutes (strictly timed) shared their response to the question at hand. Our questions came from the working document, or *Instrumentum Laboris* - for example, “How can a synodal church make credible the promise that ‘love and truth will meet?’” No one could interrupt and everyone had to listen. That meant that the cardinal-archbishop of an ancient archdiocese listened to a 19-year-old college student from Wyoming. Or the patriarch or primate of a country listened to a woman

theology professor. No interruptions, responses or talkbacks at this stage.

These conversations, more than anything else, were the main contribution of the Synod to the Church. It took me a while to understand that the Synod on Synodality was less about issues, even important ones, and more about how we discussed those issues. Thus, the most powerful message of the Synod was the image of 350 delegates sitting at round tables, talking to one another and, more important, listening to one another.

What was the second step?

In the second round, after more prayer, we shared what we had heard, what moved us and what resonances we felt in the discussion. Where was the Spirit moving? Again, no interruptions. I was at tables where the facilitator would say, “Cardinal, she hasn’t finished yet.” Finally, the third session was a freer discussion, where we could answer questions, share experiences and challenge one another.

The genius of this method lies in its ability to convey the complex reality of our discussions honestly. A secretary would write up the convergences, divergences, tensions and questions. Then a reporter (“rapporteur”) would present the table’s discussion to the plenary session. In this way, there was no need to force a false consensus when there wasn’t one; rather, any differences and tensions were honestly communicated. I found this refreshing. This method meant that everyone was listened to, everyone got a chance.

Usually at such gatherings the bishops would give formal speeches. You didn’t have them at the Synod?

We did. They were called “interventions” that happened at the plenary level. In other words, beyond the contributions by the tables as a group, individuals could address the entire Synod, including the Pope, who was often present. For the most part, these were fascinating, as you heard about issues affecting

Churches from around the world. I came to know about Catholics living as a persecuted minority in some countries.

Of course, there was the danger of people “banging on,” as one English member said, repeating what had just been said. As one Cardinal said to me, puckishly, “Jim, you have to remember the approach: It may already have been said, but not by me!” But it was radically equal: Every member could speak, and priority was given to those who had not yet spoken.

So this method, this process was what made this Synod radically different from the previous ones.

Yes. As we sat in the great Paul VI Aula and saw everyone discussing things on an equal footing, with even the Pope at a round table, I realized that the message of the synod is this method, which could help the Church immeasurably in a time of great polarization.

You have a ministry for the L.G.B.T.Q. people. So you must be disappointed that the Synthesis document does not have anything on this issue.

The L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics are explicitly mentioned in the *Instrumentum Laboris* twice. It was also mentioned in half of the reports submitted by episcopal conferences from around the world. Many hoped that the Synod would find ways to speak explicitly about reaching out to this community in new ways.

So the lack of any mention of the term “L.G.B.T.Q.” in the final Synthesis, called “A Synodal Church on Mission,” was, for many people, including myself, a disappointment. But after a month in the Aula it was not a surprise. We had frequent discussions of the topic at many tables - not only mine, but several others - and that there were several relevant interventions during the plenary sessions. The approaches fell along two lines: First, there were people, like myself, who shared stories of L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics struggling to find their place in their own Church, along with calls for the Church to reach out more to this community.



Pic courtesy: americanmagazine.org



On the other hand, many delegates objected even to using the term “L.G.B.T.Q.,” seeing it more reflective of an “ideology” foisted upon countries by the West or a form of “neo-colonialism,” and focusing more on homosexual acts as “intrinsically evil.”

From my point of view, I wish that the Synthesis was more reflective of the rich conversation around the topic and admitted our divergences, as was done in other controversial areas. Because of the fierce opposition the topic faced, the Synthesis instead spoke of “sexuality and identity.” Yet, critically, it asks the Church to hear the desire of L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics to be “heard and accompanied” and to make the Church a place where they can “feel safe, be heard and respected, without being judged,” after being “hurt and neglected”. Crucially, it says, “Sometimes the anthropological categories we have developed are not able to grasp the complexity of the elements emerging from experience or knowledge in the sciences and require greater precision and further study. It is important to take the time required for this reflection and to invest our best energies in it, without giving into simplistic judgments that hurt individuals and the Body of the Church.” So the text is an open door to further conversation by the Synod in our next session and the Church.

Did the Synod really create friendships?

Yes. Throughout the synod I kept remembering Timothy Radcliffe’s comments about friendship: People will say, “Just friendships? What a waste!” Yet friendships were the key to the synod. Of course it’s easy to be friendly with people on the same wavelength. At my tables, there was a great deal of laughter, support and genuine concern for one another. And the occasional eye-roll when someone took six minutes for a three-minute plenary intervention. Eventually

they began shutting down the microphones after three minutes. There were also good-natured rivalries. On the final day of the Synod, two of my table mates, whose countries were competing in the rugby World Cup that night, said that synodal friendship ended on the rugby pitch.

But what about those who had different opinions?

The most synodal moments for me were when I spoke with people with whom I disagreed, sometimes dramatically. After what I would call some severe interventions on L.G.B.T.Q. issues, I spoke with several delegates one-on-one, during our coffee breaks. By the end of our discussions, there wasn’t much common ground, but there was friendship and respect, and we greeted each other from then on. At one point, I met Cardinal Gerhard Müller, whose approach to L.G.B.T.Q. issues is quite different from mine. I was able to tell him sincerely that I admired his work with the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, and later that day we exchanged books and had our photo taken together.

What happens now?

This was only the first session of the synod. Moreover, our synthesis is what one member of the synod office called a “martyr document,” which means it will only last for 11 months and then die, to be replaced by a new one and then, perhaps, an exhortation from the Pope. In the coming months, we hope that Catholic parishes and dioceses experiment with conversations in the Spirit, that the faithful provide feedback to synod members and to pastors and bishops’ conferences in any way that they can. What is needed is for all to explore the recommendations contained in the synthesis.

Will anything change in the Church thanks to the Synod?

The Synod is consultative, not deliberative. The Synod does not have the power to change any Church practice; it can only suggest.

Will anything change? Perhaps not, but it’s a start. It is perhaps something good in a polarized world. Fr Radcliffe said that without friendship we shall achieve nothing. Then he quoted a beautiful line from St. John Paul II: “Affective collegiality precedes effective collegiality.” ❖



Jesuit Communicators meet in Chennai

The JESCOM Annual Meet 2023, a gathering of Jesuit communicators, took place on 23-25 October '23 at Dhyana Ashram, Chennai. Delegates from 15 provinces/regions participated in the three-day event, delving into the profound intersection of faith, communication, and the challenges presented by the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The event began with a Holy Eucharist led by Fr. Anthony Robinson, SJ, Rector, Loyola College, Chennai. In his homily, he urged the delegates to reflect on the Jesuit tradition in communication, citing the historical printing of nearly 30,000 books by Jesuits in 1773. He posed the question, "At this juncture, where are we in this age of AI, (Artificial Intelligence)?" a theme that echoed throughout the event.

The first day's focus was on the theme of 'Social Media – a Possibility to Evangelize'. Fr. Antony Pancras, Editor, *New Leader*, led the discussions on the dual nature of social media. Questions about rediscovering human connection in the digital age and addressing challenges like the digital divide and fake news were raised.

The second topic, 'Social Media, AI and Its Hurdles' presented by Fr. Ernest, SDB, explored the impact of AI on various aspects of life. Hurdles such as addictive technology use, censorship awareness, and the temptation of viralism were discussed. Fr. Ernest proposed practical solutions, such as the establishment of a Catholic Innovation Lab and the digitization of regional Christian/Jesuit assets.

Fr. Joe Arun SJ spoke on 'Implementing UAP (Universal Apostolic Preferences) and PAP (Province Apostolic Preferences) through Social Media' highlighting AI's role in augmenting human thought. He stressed the importance of conceptualization, channels, and

promotion in storytelling, reassuring delegates that they are the creators of the data AI requires.

The second day included a visit to Matha TV, the Catholic TV Channel run by the Catholic bishops of Tamil Nadu, offering delegates an exposure to the way a Catholic TV network operates. The day concluded with a dinner hosted by the Loyola College Jesuit community.

The final day's topic, 'Future of communication: A Random Reflection' by Fr. Sebasti L. Raj, Secretary of CSID (Conference Secretary of the Inclusive Development), urged the JESCOM team to understand modern communication and use technology for social, spiritual, pastoral, and educational communication. Privacy concerns, cyber threats, and digital addiction were acknowledged, emphasizing the need for collaboration and action.

The JESCOM members discussed the need to work together, formulate an action plan, establish network connections zone-wise, share data, and prepare younger members in the media field. As a result, coordinators for all four zones were chosen: Central Zone: Fr. Justin Tirkey, SJ. Western Zone: Fr. Vincent Moonnu, SJ. Southern Zone: Fr. Xavier Anthony, SJ. Northern Zone: Fr. Vivek James. SJ.

Fr. Vernard Antony, the Conference Communication Coordinator, extended heartfelt thanks for the collective efforts that played a pivotal role in making the event a success. The members collectively decided that the next JESCOM meet will be held in Kolkata in 2024. Fr. Michael Pugazhendhi, SJ, the JESCOM Coordinator for the Chennai Province, and Fr. Vernard Antony, SJ, the Conference Communication Coordinator, meticulously organized the three-day JESCOM Annual Meet.

James Vivekanandan, SJ (CCU)



The secret to keeping our New Year resolutions

As we draw the curtains on the year 2023, the last week of every year is the most challenging one. Whether we like it or not, we somehow seem to remind ourselves of the big and small resolutions that we made throughout the year, especially on the first day of the year.

If we have achieved the target, we are content and proud of our achievement; but most of us regret the targets we failed to reach. This may happen to us year after year. The promises that we make to ourselves are not kept. The resolutions we made with a lot of enthusiasm are quietly abandoned. This is what has happened to me.

When I was surfing the net about the Indian epic, Mahabharata, I found a saying which caught my attention:

"Morality says, 'Always keep your promises.' But Wisdom says, 'Never make promises, because you only know the present moment. You don't know how things will turn out in the future.' Morality binds you. Wisdom frees you."

If we are wise, we will not be hasty in making all sorts of promises to ourselves. While fixing targets, we will think concretely about if we will be able to reach them or not.

When the great scientist, Thomas Alva Edison was interviewed after he invented the first light bulb, the interviewer asked him whether he was frustrated about the ninety-nine times that he failed. He said, "I wasn't frustrated. Rather, I discovered ninety-nine ways a bulb wouldn't work!" We know the saying, 'failure is the stepping stone to success.'

During the Stations of the Cross we see Jesus falling down three times on his way to Calvary. But none of these had the power to deter his spirit. Yes, he did fall – but he got up, he didn't give up.

Therefore, let us not put ourselves down when we fail to keep our resolutions. If we fail, we should feel assured of Christ's mercy. If we fail in keeping our New Year resolutions, let us ask Christ for an absolution.

The reason why we fail may be the absence of God in our intentions.

St. Ignatius, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, exhorts us to ask God for the grace to order our intentions, actions and operations according to his divine will (cf. 46). Not only did he just write it on paper, but he etched these words in his own heart.

We read in his autobiography: "The

pilgrim saw the image of Our Lady with the infant Jesus, after this he was filled with deep loathing for his past life. Thus from that very hour he never gave the slightest consent to the things of the flesh." (cf. 10). Iñigo, who spent his youth running after the lures of this world, became a person who was so committed to what he saw as the mission God gave him, nothing would lure him away from it. He allowed his will to be conquered by the will of God.

Therefore let us wisely limit the resolutions we make when a new year dawns to just a few - doable few. Then let us bring God into our resolutions and humbly ask him to give us the strength we need and keep us determined to fulfilling them. ❖



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His warm smile and kind eyes...

Since I happen to be the President of the Xavier Board of Higher Education, the Vatican Dicastery of Education and Culture invited me to join their conference on “Time for Listening”. I was one of the 14 presidents of associations related to higher education from across the world who attended the meeting on 22-24 November ‘23. We had been asked to talk about the value of dialogue and communication in higher education.

The meeting began with introductory remarks by Cardinal Jose Tolentino, who highlighted the significance of the Pope’s statement, “what we are experiencing is not simply an epoch of changes but an epochal change.” Because of the profound changes taking place in our society and the need for higher education institutions to adapt and respond to these changes, dialogue among Catholic universities across the world becomes essential.

The Dicastery of Education has been newly established, it desires to establish a strong link between the universities and the Dicastery, fostering a mutually beneficial partnership. Participants expressed their expectation that the Dicastery would support Catholic universities worldwide.

The meeting concluded on the first day with a renewed commitment to fostering dialogue and listening in higher education. I left the meeting, feeling inspired and determined to implement the insights I had gained.

The second day started with a Mass at the Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, Borgo Santo Spirito. The meeting was held at the Jesuit Generelate. Around 200 Vice Chancellors and University chaplains from across the world attended. The speakers highlighted the crucial importance of dialogue between the Church and the cultures of our times. They also explored ways in which pastoral care could be integrated into this dialogue.

On the third day, Cardinal Jose Tolentino celebrated the Mass at Piazza del Sant Uffizio, which is next to the Palace of the Holy Office. Over 100 priests participated. After the Mass we were escorted to the Consistory Hall, where Pope Francis addressed the delegates. His message of inclusivity, compassion, and the importance of embracing diversity in education struck a chord in my heart. Three key themes emerged from his speech: respecting diversity, acting bravely, and providing careful accompaniment.



After his address, we had the rare privilege of meeting the Pope personally. His warm smile and kind eyes instantly made me feel at ease. I shared a few words of gratitude and appreciation for his inspiring words, and he graciously blessed me. Later I had an opportunity to greet Fr. Arturo Sosa, the Jesuit General and Fr Vernan D’Cunha S.J., one of the two Regional Assistants for South Asia.

Visiting the spectacular St. Peter’s Square in Vatican City was truly a cherished moment. As I approached the Square, the grandeur and magnificence of St. Peter’s Basilica took my breath away. The intricate details of the sculptures and the sheer size of the basilica left me in awe.

After my visit to Vatican City, I embarked on a journey to explore the universities and cultures of several European countries. Milan in Italy, Zurich in Switzerland, Innsbruck in Austria, Paris in France, Cologne in Germany, and Amsterdam in the Netherlands were all on my itinerary. I was grateful I could visit the historical landmarks that make these places so special.

I also had the chance to learn about the quality of education in these countries. It was fascinating to see how each country had its own approach to higher education, and the insights I gained are invaluable. Overall, my trip was a perfect blend of cultural immersion, educational exploration, and awe-inspiring sightseeing. It was an experience that will forever hold a special place in my heart. ❖

Fr. L. Joji Reddy, SJ is President, Xavier Board of Higher Education, and Principal, Loyola Academy, Secunderabad, Telangana.



Democracy Dreams for 2024

It is widely accepted that it was the Greek city-states, particularly Athens, which gave to the world, as early as the 5th Century BC, a political system which is the forerunner of modern-day democracy.

The United States became a democracy, after its Constitution was ratified in 1789. So it is the oldest, and in continuity the longest, of modern-day democracies. On the other hand, India, which gained freedom from colonial rule in August 1947, effectively became a democracy in January 1950, when its Constitution came into force.

According to the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) 'State of World Population Report, 2023', India's population is estimated at 1,428.6 million or 1.42 billion. So, for world's oldest democracy and the world's largest democracy, the year 2024, is going to be a special one indeed, as both will have General elections: in May, for India; in November, for the United States.

It will be a defining moment for the democratic ethos of both nations. In the recent Electoral Democracy Report for 2023 released by the V-Dem Institute, India was ranked at an abysmal 108th position, whereas the US, which for years has been regarded as the flagship of democratic nations, was placed at a measly 26th position. In various global indices, both India and the US are regarded as 'flawed democracies'

India today faces a myriad of issues, which include shrinking democratic space, the abrogation of Constitutional guarantees, increasing hate, violence, and denigration of the minorities, xenophobia, exclusivism, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the corporatisation of almost anything, dehumanising consumerism, environmental degradation, climate change, exploitation, and anti-people policies. Then we have human trafficking, the denigration of women, the plight of LGBTQIA communities; the annihilation of the 'other' from Haryana to Manipur. There is blatant

misuse of government agencies, draconian laws like the UAPA and the incarceration of human rights defenders.

Above all, there is a systematic denial of human rights to large sections of the population which include the right to life and livelihood (*jal, jungle aur jameen*), freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion. At the receiving end are the poor and vulnerable sections

of society like the Adivasis, the Dalits, the casual labourers, migrant workers, small farmers, women and other genders and all those who take a stand for truth and justice.

There are systematic efforts to change the character of Indian democracy from a secular state to one based on the 'Hindutva' ideology. The Hindutva brigade is pulling out all stops to ensure that the 2024 Elections will give them the required mandate to make the Constitutional amendments that are needed for India to become a theocratic state.

Democracy has also been on the decline in the United States. Many are dissatisfied with the way the American democracy is being run, particularly the more liberals among the Democrats; they feel that the Republicans (particularly the Conservatives among them) are threatening the democratic fabric with their autocratic tendencies. The U.S. will never forget of how supporters of Trump attacked the US Capitol - the heart of American Democracy - on 6 January 2021 to prevent President-elect Joe Biden from assuming office.

The US has plenty of issues to deal with including the state of their economy (growing inflation), racism (particularly against the blacks and migrants), increasing islamophobia and antisemitism, gun laws, increasing domestic violence, the role of the arms and ammunition industry, partisan foreign policies which have hurt American interests, abortion rights and the liberalisation of LGBTQIA rights.



Pic courtesy: brookings.edu



Pic courtesy: bloomberg.com

Interestingly, in his address to the Assembly of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU) on “Discerning the Present to Prepare The Future of the University Education of the Society of Jesus” in Boston US on 4 August 2022, Fr Arturo Sosa, the Jesuit Superior General, said, “A recent essay by Moisés Naím asks this question: Do those of us who come from a “democratic culture,” feel convinced that citizens are the source of political power, governed by a system with checks and balances, understand the growing tendency everywhere toward autocracies that claim unlimited life-long power? Are we prepared for that? I think I am not mistaken in affirming that the members of the IAJU are committed to political democracy and that you are also convinced that democracy needs the Humanities, because a democratic society seeks not only material prosperity but the integral development that comes from pursuing the common good. We are witnessing a tendency that seeks to reformulate the basis

of political legitimacy, diluting its democratic component.”

Naím classifies these forces as the three “Ps”: populism, polarization, and post-truth. “They are expanding in the most diverse nations of the world to such an extent that this can be considered a tendency with hegemonic possibilities”.

On 25 November 1949, in a passionate speech in the Constituent Assembly the visionary Dr. Ambedkar warned the nation of three things that could destroy the democratic structure and fabric of the nation, “If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives.... where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.”

“The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested

in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not “to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enables him to subvert their institutions in politics. Hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.

“The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it, social democracy”.

India and the U.S. – the oldest and the largest democracies - certainly dream that in 2024 the voters will elect to power leaders, who will strengthen the vibrant, pluralistic, people-oriented, secular democracies their countries are meant to be. Will this dream become a reality? ❖

Fr. Cedric Prakash, SJ (GUJ) is a human rights, reconciliation and peace activist and a writer. He can be contacted at cedricprakash@gmail.com.

2024: Dreams and fears

Four young Jesuits in formation share their anxieties, dreams, and plans for the year 2024

I'll look for those moments



Denver Pushpam, SJ

Sch. Denver A. Pushpam, SJ (KAR) is currently pursuing his undergraduate degree at the Jesuit St. Joseph's University, Bengaluru

The Greeks speak about two different 'times': firstly, *chronos*, the time that keeps moving, whether you are aware of it or not. The term 'chronology' comes from this. The second category is *kairos*, this is the time of growth, change and transformation. During the new year, I plan to examine the entire day and look for the *kairos* moments during the day.

I am a student, and so the desire for excellence and the tough competition I face keep me on my toes. I am aware that it is very easy to get carried away by the lures of the world. However, I believe that there is a cure for every lure: Jesus. Amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, I plan to strive for union with Jesus through inner silence.

The year 2024 is significant for all Indian citizens as our nation goes to the polls. It is a call for us Jesuits – priests and scholastics alike. We ought to play a role in shaping the future of our country. We cannot be silent spectators.

A call for resilience

Dinesh Arulanantham, SJ

Dinesh Arulanantham, SJ (SRI) is a student of English literature at St. Joseph's College, Trichy, Tamil Nadu.



My dreams for 2024 are woven with hopes for global harmony and compassion. These help me envision a world where peace and justice replace war and discrimination - where shared values of compassion and justice prevail over conflict and discord.

Yet, within the fabric of these dreams, anxieties arise. The ongoing wars in Ukraine and Israel weigh heavily on my heart. The challenges faced by the marginalized communities everywhere affect me. What will the future bring?

Yet amidst this chaos, I can hear a call for resilience- a call to actively contribute to peace, justice, and equality. I realize I need to balance my aspirations with anxieties caused by life's realities. Yet, in confronting these anxieties, resilience grows. Recognizing setbacks as stepping stones, uncertainties as opportunities, and challenges as catalysts for growth, I aim to face the New Year with hope. Personally, I aspire to contribute to positive change, fostering inclusivity and bridging divides, wherever I am. My goal is to cultivate a mindset that transforms challenges into opportunities.

A dream that transcends resolutions



Gladson Awungshi, SJ

Sch. Gladson Awungshi, SJ is a Jesuit Junior at Mumbai.

Thinking about the New Year, I asked myself, “Should I formulate any resolutions?” Last year, I pledged to follow the time-table strictly, confess sins regularly, maintain a consistent prayer life, eliminate procrastination, control anger, and more. Regrettably, my success was only partial. I faltered in several aspects.

Now, a year older, I realize my primary concern revolves around the conduct of my life. A new dream emerges - one that transcends mere resolutions - a vision to diligently work towards a more intentional and purposeful existence. As the New Year unfolds, I embark on a journey to actualize this dream, hoping that, with steadfast dedication, I can navigate the challenges ahead and witness a transformative growth in the chapters of my life yet to be written.

Simultaneously, I find myself contemplating the potential impact of AI tools like Chat GPT on the human mind. I harbour a genuine concern that it may soon replace my cognitive functions and become my small god. But I resolve to put this worry aside and pray to the big God for a life-enriching year ahead.

Waiting with hope

William Santhosh, SJ

Sch. William Santosh, SJ (GUJ) is an undergraduate student at St. Xavier's, Ahmedabad.



The year 2024 is a ‘make or break moment’ for India. The parliamentary elections will decide if the Indian Constitution and the four pillars of democracy will remain intact or not. Having seen the conflicts and the violence that have shaken our country, I feel greatly anxious for its future.

What will happen to the psyche of children born in Ukraine, Israel and Palestine in 2024? Right from their first moments in this world, they will see a world torn by hatred and conflicts. Nothing could be done by anyone, or any organization the whole of last year to stop the Russian war in Ukraine. Will 2024 bring peace?

One of the few good things that 2023 brought was the Synod. The Church seems to have taken for the first time a new path – the path of synodality. This path will take the Church to refreshing changes. I am waiting with hope to see them. I feel inspired by the renewal of the statutes on the vow of poverty in the Society of Jesus. May the upcoming year be a moment of grace for us Jesuits, and for everyone else!



The Synod says: “Understand and accompany women!”



The recently concluded Synod on Synodality is historic on many counts. However, what stands out for me, as a woman, is the way the Synod participants experienced the reciprocity between men and women during that time. They made sincere efforts to listen to women and to understand their identity, role and mission in the Church and their place in God's plan for humanity and for the whole Universe. The Synthesis Report that came at the end of the Synod bears witness to this.

The Report comprises of twenty chapters, placed under three main headings. Each chapter includes three subdivisions namely, 'Convergences', 'Matters for Consideration' and 'Proposals'. The ninth chapter, 'Women in the Life and Mission

of the Church,' comes under the heading, 'All Disciples, All Missionaries'. The points under Convergences, succinctly brings to the fore the shared nature, calling and destiny of both men and women and their baptismal equality and dignity.

The Synod recognized the difference between men and women as having 'two distinct experiences of being human' (9, a). Since women's experiences are different, their contribution, not only in the life and mission of the Church but also in society at large, becomes paramount. This awareness enabled the Synod to unanimously affirm that women and men are 'called together into a communion of loving, non-competitive relationships in Christ and to a co-responsibility to be expressed at every level of



church's life' (9, b). In continuity with the voices that came from Diocesan and Continental stages of consultation, the Synod participants endorsed the need to 'understand and accompany women from a pastoral and sacramental point of view' (9, c).

For many centuries, Christianity, under the influence of dualism coming from Greek philosophy, identified woman primarily with body and man with mind /soul /spirit. Consequently, women were not considered spiritual beings and were not allowed to be mediators between God and humans. Since man was identified more with spirit, everything that pertains to spiritual life was taken to be his responsibility. Contrary to such dualistic and patriarchal assumptions, the Synodal Assembly recognized women as spiritual beings when it says

that 'women desire to share their spiritual experience of journeying towards holiness in the various stages of life...' (9, c). It is up to the local communities - family, parish and diocese - to take up this and create space and time for women to share their spiritual experiences.

“What is needed is to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together.”

This is also an invitation for more women to get trained and engage in spiritual direction, retreat direction, and pastoral care and thus enriching the spiritual life of the Church and her holiness through their unique spiritual experiences. It is also an invitation

for all, especially seminaries, formation houses and other religious institutes to make conscious efforts to appoint women as spiritual guides and retreat directors.

During the consultation process and in the Synodal Assembly, women spoke of a Church that wounds them. The Assembly noted that 'Sexual abuse and the abuse of power and authority continue to cry out for justice, healing and reconciliation' (9, f). Women cry out for justice in their families, relationships, workplaces, in the Church and in society at large that treats them as sex objects. That is why the Synod makes a pertinent observation when it says, 'Pastoral accompaniment and vigorous advocacy for women must go hand in hand' (9, c).

However, the Assembly asks that we avoid talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, what is needed is to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together (9, h).

In sum, it is worth to study chapter nine of the Synthesis Report so that one can take positive steps to bring about justice and healing for women and a change of mindset which sees men and women as human persons with distinct experiences who can enrich life with their unique contributions. ❖

Shalini Mulackal, PBVM, has been a professor of Theology at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, New Delhi. Currently she is the Coordinator of Formator's Programme at UISG (International Union of Superiors General) in Rome.



Ms. Candice Pandit



#XplodUrCreativity

Ms. Candice says, “It was back in 2000 that I met Fr Cyril Desbruslais, SJ, a charismatic yet simple Jesuit. Little did I know that he would become a friend, philosopher and guide to me and my family. I was part of the SSU, which organized public speaking events and plays. What inspired me to know him better was his passion for the young. He could connect with young people, irrespective of their religions and belief systems. Moreover, he would respect and inspire others in the group to respect each other.

“He was different from the other priests. A simple yet striking difference was that he would ask us to chuck the honorary title ‘Father’ when addressing him. It made an impression on me. While many priests held on to the ‘titles,’ here was one Jesuit giving up his so-called ‘right’ to be called ‘Father.’ He made it a point to get down to us and help us ascend.

“The best time for interactions was during drama practices. The scripts he would write or choose to direct were terrific. It would subtly but firmly highlight the Ignatian values of Cura Personalis, Magis and Social Concern. He was so creative that his radical ideas always dumbfounded us. He was, in short, ‘different.’ And I came to like the ‘different.’ He inspires me to be different as an educator at St Vincent’s High School in Pune.

“Years have passed, and I am no longer the youth I was back then. But the values I learned then have stayed with me. I wouldn’t have grown if not for all the events that I was part of. I have worked with Jesuits for a long time now. Your hallmark is to be creative in whatever you do. In addition, you also need to encourage creativity from your collaborators and other stakeholders. If you fail to be creative and encourage creativity in your institutions, you miss an opportunity to accompany the young. Our creative efforts might

make this world safer for everyone to co-exist.”

Ms Candice Pandit teaches at St Vincent’s High School, Pune. Without Cyril’s creative efforts, Ms Candice wouldn’t have found a safe community at SSU.

Fr Cyril Desbruslais is a Jesuit of Pune province. He is a renowned Professor of Philosophy and a public intellectual. He founded ‘Searching and Service in Unity’ (SSU) in 1971 to help the young. He has written and directed plays that tackle subjects including but not limited to nuclear disarmament, globalisation, terrorism, consumerism and religious dogma. Through his involvement in theatre, he has demonstrated that creative endeavours can help build a loving community of diverse individuals passionate about improving the world.

Nithin Monteiro, SJ, (KAR) is currently pursuing his Ph.D Studies in Ethics & Artificial Intelligence at XIM University, Odisha. Contact: m.nithin@jesuits.net.

Jesuit office publishes book on Pastoral planning in a synodal way

The Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning of the Society of Jesus has published a new book on pastoral planning authored by Dr Christina Kheng, a Singaporean laywoman and planning consultant of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific.

Titled “Welcoming the Spirit: A Communal Approach to Pastoral Planning”, the book was launched on 6 December '23 as part of the Society of Jesus' apostolic planning conference. It integrates planning and communal discernment, offering a practical guide for communities and organisations to become more effective collaborators in God's mission.

Dr Kheng, who teaches theology and pastoral leadership at various institutions, including the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, says that the book is an invitation to view pastoral planning not as a mere task to be hastily accomplished but as an integral part of a collective journey towards openness, synodality, unity, and discernment.

“I hope this book will help many communities to experience a journey of spiritual and apostolic renewal,” she says, stressing that the work goes beyond the mere creation of a strategic plan. “It's also about building up the community through the process and fostering a synodal culture.”

Dr Kheng has extensive experience in communal discernment and leadership accompaniment for a wide range of organisations in the Ignatian tradition, as well as for dioceses, parishes, and religious congregations. She has served as a member of the Methodology Commission and various task forces of the General Secretariat of the Synod at the Vatican, particularly in relation to the Synod on synodality.

Welcoming the Spirit is structured into two parts. The first part lays the theological foundations for planning, offering readers a crucial orientation on why planning is essential and how it aligns with a faith-based perspective. It aims to instill a mindful and meaningful approach to

the planning process, providing material that can be used for preparatory reading or in planning retreats. Various quotations from diverse sources are included to foster reflection and meditation.

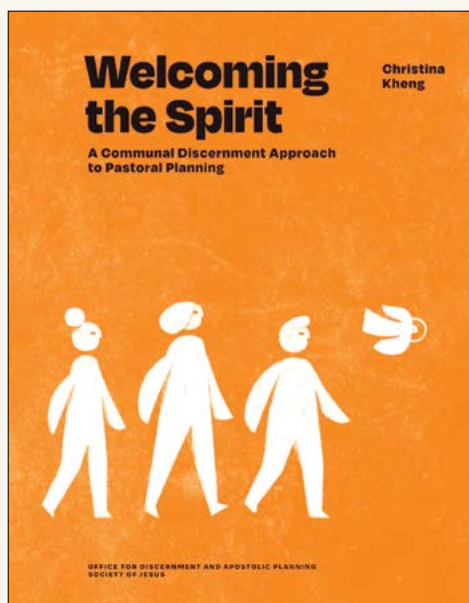
The second part provides a suggested process for planning and offers a general framework that each particular organisation or community can adapt according to its own contexts and needs. All steps in the framework include templates and worksheets that can be used in the process. Some of the proposed exercises are rooted in the methodologies that have been refined over time through the contributions of Jesuits and mission partners.

Dr Kheng suggests that the readings, reflections, and activities contained in the book can extend beyond pastoral planning. They can be useful in orientation programmes, year-end reviews, community gatherings, and ongoing formation sessions. She hopes that the publication “will aid many communities and organisations to experience an invigorating renewal of their identity, charism, and vocation”.

In his foreword to the book, Fr General Arturo Sosa SJ underscores the indispensability of a communal discernment approach, asserting that the mission is undertaken not in isolation, but as a collective effort. He notes: “We need to discern together how God's Spirit is moving. This calls for the participation of everyone and is an opportunity to exercise synodality, mutual listening, and building communion amidst diversity.”

He adds: “I am especially struck that this book is written by a layperson who has worked closely with the Society of Jesus and who has also been a professional in the organisational field. This is perhaps a sign that our charism and spirituality are taking root beyond traditional boundaries and brought into fruitful dialogue with contemporary disciplines so as to better serve the world today.” ❖

Courtesy: Jesuits in Asia Pacific eNews



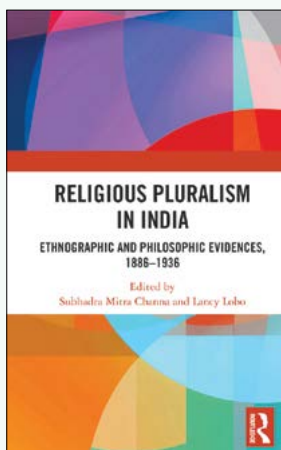


Indian nationalism is inclusive

Lancy Lobo, SJ, talks about his new book Religious Pluralism in India: Ethnographic and Philosophic Evidences 1886 – 1936.

What made you write this book?

I have edited this book to which many have contributed. Contemporary India faces two major contradictions: first Hinduism and Hindutva and secondly majoritarianism and minoritarianism. Both are inter-connected. Hinduism is a religious ideology while Hindutva is a political ideology. This political ideology builds nationalism based on including Hindus and excluding other religions. Hence Hindu nationalism makes a paradigm shift from the Indian nationalism which is inclusive and promotes the Constitutional values.



Religious Pluralism in India
Lancy Lobo, SJ
Routledge India
222; Rs.4,592.20/-

Why is this book important at this juncture?

The idea of India promoted by the architects of modern India has been of a plural and composite Indian culture that accommodates all religions. India strove to live in unity in diversity and not unity in uniformity which Hindutva promotes. Countering Hindutva ideology is a must to promote a secular, democratic, liberal and inclusive India. One of the effective ways to counter Hindutva is to counter it intellectually. Hence the birth of this book.

What does the book try to do?

This edited book explores the inherent pluralism of Hinduism through ethnographic and philosophical evidence as presented in the Journal of Anthropological Society of Bombay, 1886- 1936. This volume shows that Hinduism has been analyzed by social scientists in many ways like Brahminic and non-Brahminic, sectarian Hinduism and non-sectarian Hinduism etc. This volume also highlights how religions have influenced each other and appear to have mingled beliefs and practices from multiple sources. It shows how tolerance and inclusiveness along with syncretism have been part of India's religious and social history.

Who will benefit more by reading this book?

This book will benefit students and researchers of religions, history, anthropology, sociology, political science, philosophy, theology and inter-religious dialogue. ❖

Lancy Lobo, SJ (GUJ) has been director Centre for Social Studies, Surat; founder director of Centre for Culture and Development, Vadodara, and now is Research Director, Indian Social Institute, Delhi; as well as Forum Coordinator for Jesuit Social Scientists of south Asia.



Evolution of our spiritual lives

Learoy Rodrigues talks about his new book Reimagining Your Faith Journey.

What made you write this book?

In the last few years, I have seen my spiritual life evolve in various ways. My approach to ministry has also taken on a different quality. For instance, from being more work-centric or action-centric I can see how the Lord is calling me to be more person-centric and God-centered. Hence this book. It contains musings on how God invites us to constantly personalise and reimagine our fascinating journey with the Lord.

Will you share two or three insights you have written about in this book?

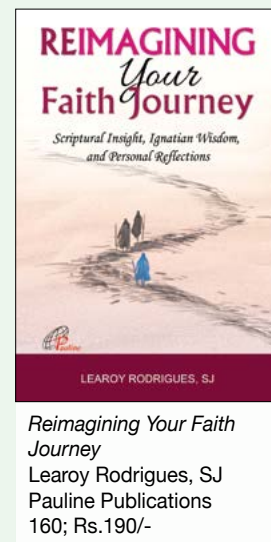
The book is built on the premise that a faith journey evolves over time. It is never static. It has movement. It has dynamism. In the book, I have tried to explore variables that can possibly impact our journey of faith. These include, understanding creative tensions we must

grapple with, appreciating the process of spiritual evolution, knowing where healing lies, cultivating a spirituality of involvement, letting perspectives unfold, etc.

Who, do you think, will benefit a lot from this book?

Lay people I think will benefit the most. The language is simple, mostly conversational in style, and hopefully accessible. I have used a lot of Jesuit terms but have also tried to explain these with illustrations from daily life. Religious priests, seminarians, and sisters will also relate with a lot of the content. ❖

Fr Learoy Rodrigues, SJ (BOM) is currently the Dean of Studies here at the Mumbai Juniorate.



The only Jesuit institution in China celebrates 25 years

To mark the 25th anniversary of the only Jesuit institution in mainland China, the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies (TBC) gathered friends and alumni on the evening of 28 November '23 to cherish the sweet memories of the past and look forward to the bright future.

TBC had seven brave students in the inaugural class of 1998, but now alumni and friends number in the thousands. The centre is proud to be involved in a legacy of engagement, conversation, and global change that sprouts from encouraging educational exchange.

At the 25th anniversary kickoff party, Board of Directors Chairman and JCAP President Fr Tony Moreno SJ spoke about the dual values of courage and creativity that will continue to take this mission—and centuries-old tradition of East-West friendship—far into the future.

This silver year will be celebrated by offering unique opportunities to get engaged with China, more anniversary gatherings, special dialogues and forums, and more. It also heralds a new era with Fr Stephen Tong SJ being selected as the new Chair of the Board of Directors. Fr Tong also serves as the Provincial Superior of the Chinese Jesuit Province.

"The magic of TBC is that in learning about other cultures, you come face-to-face with a greater understanding of your own," said Dr Simon Koo, TBC Executive Director. "No matter where you're from, engaging with TBC brings you closer to yourself. And in that process, it also brings you closer to the friends you make along the way, whether they be from your own culture or not. We're so excited to celebrate 25 years of this magic and look forward to the uncertain future of more friendship and exchange with Fr Tong at the helm."

The anniversary kickoff party brought old and new friends together from over 10 countries, some of whom travelled across oceans and continents to join the celebration. TBC was especially pleased to welcome longtime friend and board member Fr Joseph



Christie SJ, Secretary for Higher Education of the Society of Jesus and Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Jesuit Universities, to China for the first time.

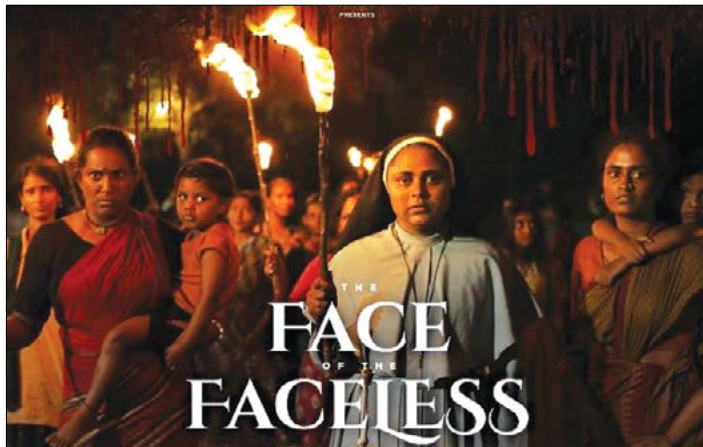
Features of the night included international cuisines that reflected TBC's commitment to diversity and gifts of reusable cutlery as a statement on *Caring for Our Common Home*, a Jesuit-influenced movement towards sustainability. And, of course, a cake to represent the sweet memories that 25 years of cultural dialogue have brought about.

TBC thanks all the guests, alumni, visitors, family, and friends for their contributions to TBC's continued existence as a bridge between China and the world. Together with them, TBC looks forward to 25 more years of excellence and beyond.

- Jesuits in Asia Pacific enews



‘The Face of the Faceless’ - a powerful film on Sr. Rani Maria



The way the film opens is intriguing. It highlights the water crisis faced by the villagers. The director's deliberate choice to start the film with this scene is a clever way to emphasize the context in which Sr. Rani Maria worked and died - the oppression and mistreatment of the tribal community by the affluent. The film goes on to delve into various challenges faced by the tribals, including resource scarcity, illiteracy, internal divisions, and even instances of suicide.

The Face of the Faceless marks an impressive directorial debut of Shaison Ousheph. The film is rooted in the life of Sr. Rani Maria in Udaynagar, Madhya Pradesh. The film takes care not to put Rani Maria on an unreachable pedestal. Instead, it emphasizes the reality of the place, the struggles of the impoverished, and the mission she embodies. By employing top-angle shots in the initial sequences, the film emphasizes its intention to avoid hero worship and focuses on the people's plight and the difficulties faced by those who want to serve them. Therefore, the early life of Rani Maria before she came to Udaynagar, is only briefly referenced.

Gradually, the villagers themselves become crucial characters, highlighting that the film is not solely about Rani Maria, but also about women empowerment, battling injustice, and discerning God's will in religious life.

In its exploration of tribal life, the film also provides glimpses into their culture, showcasing aspects of their lifestyle, customs, and culinary habits. Clearly, the film is a result of extensive research. It skillfully

portrays conflicts at multiple levels: within the tribal community, between the community and the village elite, and within the community of nuns.

These conflicts are interwoven with Rani Maria's internal struggle regarding the continuation of her work and its alignment with God's will. Her visits to her spiritual guide, Swamyachan, offer her rays of hope.

The film also showcases the community life of Catholic nuns. It is depicted realistically, acknowledging that women who choose this life are ordinary humans, who inevitably have their imperfections, and conflicts. The film does not shy away from exposing the inner conflicts that some nuns experience. This adds authenticity, reminding viewers that nuns and religious are ordinary human beings seeking to discern God's will.

The film beautifully portrays the struggle to achieve reconciliation and the challenges of loving an enemy. How difficult it is to love an enemy who just wants to hate and threaten! Is it easy?

Vincy Alosious delivers a commendable performance in the lead role, conveying the grace, the inner turmoil and conviction of a committed religious nun. The supporting cast, particularly Sonali Mohanthy as Karali, shines in bringing out the nuances of a tribal woman.

While the film is not without its flaws, it stands out as a religious film that avoids overt hero worship and religious melodrama. Instead, it offers a genuine portrayal of a Catholic Sister who worked for the poor in contemporary India.

As there are hardly any films that depict the lives and struggles of Catholic religious who spend their lives in service, the Indian Christian community should happily welcome and promote this film. It is a rare film that encourages film makers to take bold risks in depicting the Christian mission in contemporary India, where there is a sinister attempt to portray Christianity as a foreign religion and the service of priests and the religious as attempts to convert people to Christianity. ❖

Sch. Alam Parmar, SJ (GUJ) is doing his first year of theology at Vidyaajyoti, Delhi.

The Shrine of St. John de Britto is Now a Minor Basilica

The shrine of St. John de Britto, erected at the spot where he was martyred, at Oriyur, Tamil Nadu, India has been declared a Minor Basilica by the Church. Bishop Lourdu Anand of Sivagangai read out the official letter on 5 December '23 at the cathedral in Sivagangai.

John de Britto hails from Portugul. He was born on 1 March 1647 as the son of a duke, who was close to the king. Together with his two brothers he was chosen to be the companions to the prince in the court. When he was eleven, he fell seriously ill. When all hope of recovery was lost, his saintly mother prayed fervently to St Francis Xavier: "If my son gets cured, I will make him wear a cassock like St Francis Xavier." John recovered miraculously and his grateful mother fulfilled her promise and made John wear the Jesuit cassock for a year.

Wanting to become a Jesuit just like St. Francis Xavier, John joined the Jesuit novitiate in 1662 in Lisbon. He was sent to the theologate in Coimbra where Fr. Balthazar de Costa, who had earlier worked in India, explained about the mission in India. Britto was inspired to set out to India as a missionary. In Goa, India he completed his theological studies and was ordained in 1673.

John wanted to work in the poor, barren, perennially sun-scorched area of Marava in Tamil Nadu and was sent there in 1686. Arul, being the Tamil equivalent of John, the local people called him 'Arulanandar Swamy'. While he tasted initial success in his ministry, he had to face the wrath of the chief minister of Marava who had him arrested and tortured. He was ordered not to preach his new religion.

He was, however, set free later with a severe warning by the King of Marava, Sethupathi. On 8 September 1687, he went back to Portugal but returned to India three years later.

Thadiya Thevan, one of the Marava princes, who was down with a deadly disease, had come to know of Britto's power to heal the sick. He wrote: "Please send me at least one of your disciples, even if you are not able to come." Britto sent a knowledgeable catechist to pray for him. The prince, who was miraculously cured, asked to be baptized. Since the Christian faith does not allow a man to have more than one wife, Thadiya Thevan, who had four wives,



was ready to keep his first wife and send away the other three. One of the three was Kadalayi, the niece of King Sethupathi. She complained to the King who ordered the immediate arrest of Britto.

Fearing an uprising from Christians, now led by Thadiya Thevan, the prince who had become a Christian, the King said Britto will be exiled but secretly had him taken to Oriyur and beheaded. After his martyrdom it was reported that the sand in the area became red. Pilgrims began to come in large numbers to the spot and reported they were cured after praying to the martyr-saint.

Britto was beatified by Pope Pius IX on 8 April 1862 and was canonized by Pope Pius XII on 22 June 1947. His feast is celebrated on 4 February, the day he was beheaded. Hundreds of pilgrims come to the shrine throughout the year to pray for healing or the gift of a child. Seeing that a large percentage of these pilgrims are non-Christians, the Tourism Department of the Tamil Nadu State Government has recognized this Shrine as a sacred tourist spot.

Fr. Albert Muthumalai, SJ, superior of the Shrine, said the news has made all the Jesuits very happy. He thanked all those who had worked in the past to have the Shrine raised to the status of a Minor Basilica.

- Our Correspondent



The Archbishop who was shot while celebrating Mass

Film: Romero (1989)

Director: John Duigan

Run time: 105 minutes

Producer: Ellwood Kieser

On 24 March 1980 Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador was shot while celebrating the Eucharist in a hospital chapel. Pope Francis canonized the martyred Catholic prelate in 2018. This movie depicts the last three critical years of Romero's life, beginning with his appointment as Archbishop of San Salvador.

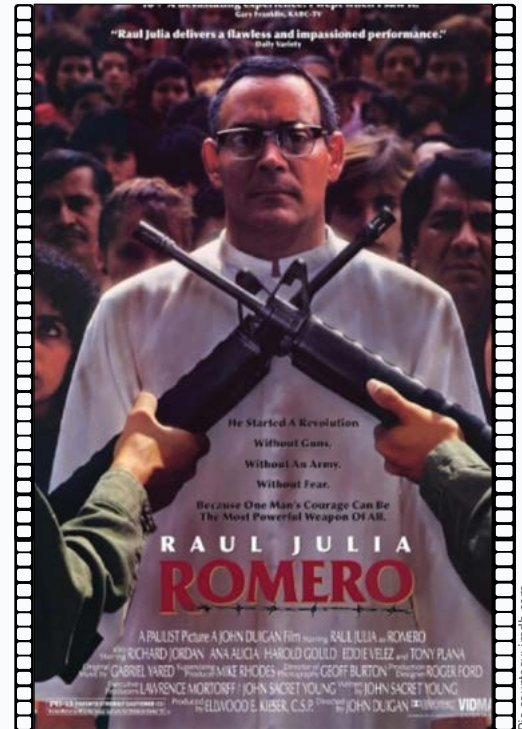
Coming from a working class family, Romero joined the seminary. After his ordination he worked among the poor in El Salvador when El Salvador was in the throes of bloody confrontations between the military junta and Marxist rebels. Initially perceived as a conservative, he was acceptable to the regime. However his protests against the State's brutal violence and blatant violations of human rights and advocacy of peaceful solutions to socio-political issues made him the enemy of the regime.

The film shows the heinous and barbaric violence that was routine in Sal Salvador. When Romero assumes office, El Salvador is caught in a web of violence and terror unleashed by the clashes between the ruling junta and communist guerillas.

The assassination of Romero's close friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit social activist, is also recalled. Romero's pleas to the government to bring to justice Rutilio's killers were ignored. He also has to face some members of the clergy as well as the Communist guerillas who seek armed resistance. Romero championed free and fair elections, land reforms and just wages for the working class.

But he saw elections being subverted by use of force and intimidation. Those who were even suspected of opposition were abducted and tortured. Even girls, children and women were not spared, and thousands were made to 'disappear'. When one of his churches was desecrated and turned into a military barrack, he celebrated Mass, despite the destruction of the altar and the tabernacle. He did it as a sign of protest.

The fraudulence and insincerity of the regime makes it clear that he cannot expect anything except violence and deception. One of his priests is murdered. Sent to prison, Romero directly experiences the heartless cruelty and violence that his people are subject to. In prison his loud and passionate pleas for mercy for a tortured fellow prisoner are ignored. He writes to the



U.S. President asking him to stop supplying arms to the government of El Salvador, because they are used against the citizens. His enemies brand him a Communist, though he makes it very clear that he is a man of faith and not a Marxist.

The day before his assassination Romero openly appeals to the military, reminding the soldiers that the people they kill under orders are their own brothers and admonishes them to remember the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". No soldier is obliged to obey a law contrary to God's commandment. The final scenes show how he meets his martyrdom. He is shot on the altar in the middle of the Mass.

Prof. Gigy Joseph Koottummel, former Head of the Department of English, SB College, Changanacherry is a sought after writer, translator, columnist and actor-director of Shakespeare productions.

Joe Velinkar, SJ (BOM)

For me, Fr. Joe Velinkar's, life had three strong dimensions. Dr. Joseph Velinkar the Scholar, Prof. Velinkar the teacher, and Fr. Joe the pastor. He was 93 years old and 77 years a Jesuit.

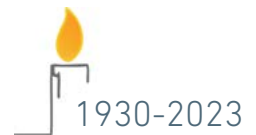
Quite often, I would see Velinkar, in his 80s, sitting in front of the computer for hours with books and notes spread around him. Velinkar produced 6 books and countless articles in the field of history. He had an admirable work ethic and was committed to research.

Velinkar the teacher, was known both for his strictness and compassion. He would push his students to do well, not tolerate any laziness or lack of punctuality, but if they were ill or in need of special care, he would even visit their homes to teach them! He taught mostly in two places – St. Xavier's College, Fort, Mumbai and Gonzalo Garcia College, Papdy. He was Principal at Gonzalo Garcia in its infancy (1985-95) and helped it build its deep foundations.

As a priest, Fr. Joe enjoyed celebrating the Eucharist and visiting his parishioners. Besides working in Manickpur and Papdy parishes while he helped at Gonzalo Garcia college, every summer he would take off to the U.S. to substitute priests who were going for their holidays.

I always wondered what drove him to do such a lot of rigorous work on the history of the Portuguese encounter with India. I realised that Joe wanted every Indian with a Portuguese history to accept and incorporate this into their identity with a sense of pride albeit with a critical analysis of its positive and negative traces. His was thus a nationalism that opened itself to wider horizons, of an acceptance of pluralist influences that went beyond one's narrow ghetto.

|| Trevor Miranda, SJ



Lalith Chrishantha Fernandopulle, SJ (SRI)

Born in Katana, Sri Lanka, on 9 January 1971, Bro. Lalith entered the Jesuit Novitiate in Dalugama, Kelaniya, on 1 July 1998. Taking his final vows in Negombo on 5 January 2020, he served as a minister at the Tertianship in Arrupe House, died on 16 November 2023, leaving an indelible mark on all who crossed his path.

His dedication to simplicity, warm disposition, and exceptional commitment inspired and guided those under his care. His service as the minister at the Tertianship at Arrupe House in Lewella showcased his exceptional qualities. All those who stayed there were deeply influenced by his unwavering commitment and remarkable dedication to his entrusted responsibilities.

Br. Lalith's influence transcended the confines of

the Jesuit community. He extended a helping hand to numerous individuals when they found themselves most in need. Gifted with an exceptional ability for public relations, Lalith embraced his vocation as a Brother in the Society of Jesus with profound joy and sincerity.

What set Lalith apart was not just his work but his greatest mission was to make others happy. This selfless commitment to the happiness of those around him became the hallmark of his life. His legacy of compassion, dedication, and joy in service will forever remain etched in our hearts. We will carry forward the lessons he imparted and strive to emulate the spirit of selfless service and genuine joy that defined his life and mission in the Society of Jesus.

|| Milroy R. Fernando, SJ



Vijay K. Kachhap, SJ (JAM)

Fr. Vijay K. Kachhap was born at Sindri in Dhanbad District, Jharkhand on 4 September 1956. He joined the Jamshedpur Province and went for his Novitiate to Newman Hall, Ahmedabad in 1976. He did his philosophy at Satya Nilayam, Chennai and his theology at Tarundoay, Ranchi and Vidya Jyoti, Delhi. Fr. Vijay was ordained as a priest at St. Xavier's School, Lupungutu, Chaibasa on 29 April 1989.

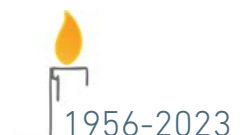
Fr. Vijay K. Kachhap was a simple, calm, disciplined, and responsible person. He was a man of few words and needs with no complaints whatsoever, always open, available, and approachable. He was a musician and singer who never showed off his talents. He was a faithful and committed religious.

He served as the Hostel Prefect, Asst. Coordinator

Total Literacy, Asst. Director, Vivek Sadan Daltonganj, Rector of St. Paul's Minor Seminary, Jatni, Odisha. Headmaster, De Nobili Hindi School, Digwadih, Chancellor and Coordinator of Youth for Jamshedpur Diocese, Deputy Director, CSWC, Amda, Vice-Principal, De Nobili School, Chandrapura and a teacher and Asst. PP at St. Xavier's School, Tangrain, Odisha.

On 18 August '23 Fr. Vijay had a fall while coming back to the Jesuit community after minding the studies of the hostel children. Since then, he was in and out of hospital. Fr. Vijay breathed his last on 13 October 2023 due to cardiac arrest. He was 67 years old, having spent 47 years in the Society and 34 years as a priest. May his soul rest in peace!

|| Augustine Surin, SJ





Living simply so that others can simply live

Madam Ibu Gedong Bagoes Oka was a prominent Indonesian intellectual, who established the Ashram Gandhi Canti Dasa in 1976. Internationally acknowledged as a devotee of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, she dedicated herself to finding ways by which Gandhi's teachings could be applied to daily life in Indonesia. She felt that Indonesia could progress in peace only by following the principles of Mahatma Gandhi.

She wanted the Gandhian ashram to be: "A powerful and culturally significant bridge between worlds — the spiritual world, the religious world, the Western world, the Balinese world and the material world. The ashram breathes long momentous breaths, one day at a time. And with each breath it exhales adversity and negativity, purifying those who choose to be in its midst."

After prolonged private studies of the Christian scriptures and spirituality, she said she reconciled her Hindu-Balinese tradition, "with the inspirations she has gained from her encounter with Christianity by discovering the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, and of Swami Vivekananda as her life inspiration." Christian spiritual, ethical and democratic values challenged her, forcing her to rethink her own Balinese Hindu traditions. She promoted a more spiritual approach in the local Balinese Hinduism.

Ibu Gedong championed inter-religious dialogue. Twice, at my invitation, she came to Australia to lead ecumenical yoga retreats. In letters between us, we also sought to have Father Bede Griffiths visit Bali in April 1992, while on his way to Australia.

Ibu Gedong lived as a strict vegetarian, basing her lifestyle "on the Gandhian principles of 'non-violence' and 'living simply so that others can simply live'." Ibu Gedong learnt three important concepts from Mahatma Gandhi: *satyagraha*, *ahimsa* and *swadeshi*. This attitude opposing the use of violence is what Mahatma Gandhi passed to Ibu Gedong. An educationalist, she

gathered young adults around her on retreats and camps, especially at Indonesia's only Gandhian ashram which served as a religious community. Her dream was to "empower people to become truly independent and free through living and practicing the Gandhian lifestyle and simplicity and also refusing to harm anyone or any creature in our daily life."



Ibu Gedong

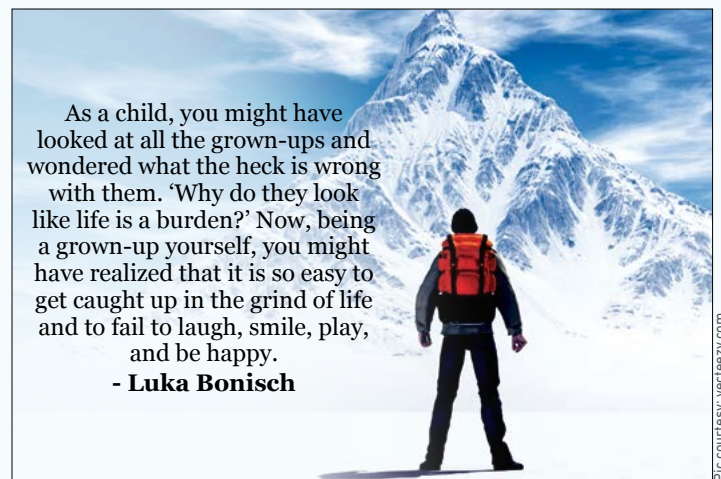
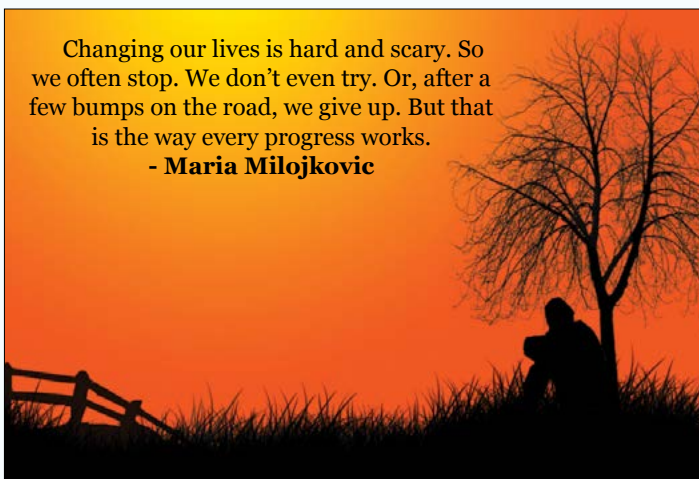
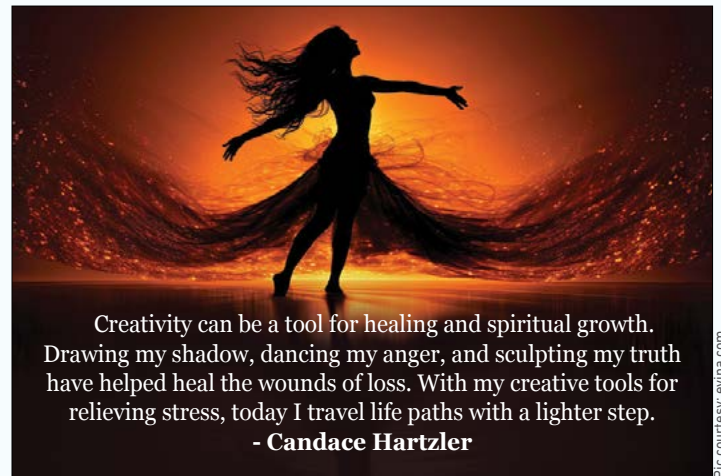
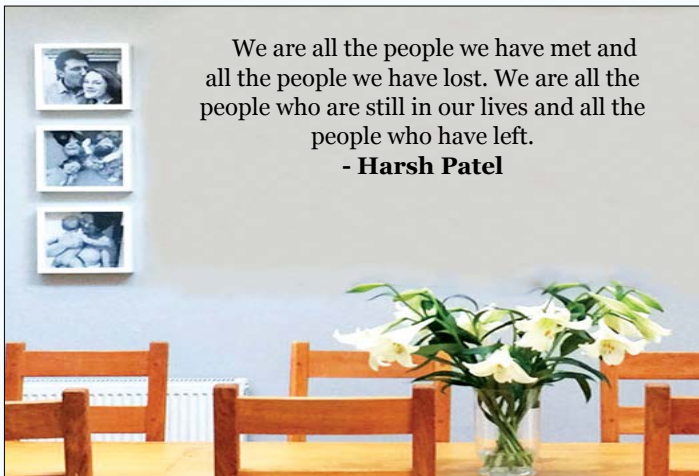
Ibu Gedong practiced daily pujas (ceremonies) and gave lectures on the Vedic scriptures, the Balinese religion, and Gandhi's pacifism. Ibu Gedong's daily religious practice consisted of common prayer and chanting, yoga, meditation, and a simplified form of the Vedic fire ritual, the *agnihotra*. Students attended spiritual lectures and were encouraged to study the sacred literature in the library.

During my visits to the Ashram, I was fascinated by the Vedic chants drifting through the palm trees of this beachfront ashram. Simple palm cottages facing the sea are provided for guests — not far from an elementary school that Ibu Gedong runs for the village children.

Guests are free to worship, meditate, work, and study with the several dozen young Balinese who make up the permanent ashram community. She said, "I encourage Balinese seeking a closer relationship with their religion and the teachings of Gandhi, to come to practice with me, but especially students, who can undertake programs of religious study, meditation, and thoughtful discussions on how best to be of service to their local community."

Ibu Gedong translated Gandhian ideals of living into action. I witnessed her personal commitment to living a life of simplicity, self-sufficiency and service to the community. *Ahimsa* (nonviolence), *satya* (truth) and *karuna* (compassion and universal brotherhood) are her guiding principles as taught by Mahatma Gandhi. It is *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) that shaped and blessed Ibu Gedong's life with altruism and true joy. ❖

Rev. Dr. Meath Conlan is a Counsellor and Adult Educator. He travels frequently to India. He can be contacted at meathconlan@icloud.com

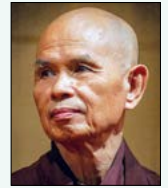


Intention
for
January, 2024

FOR THE GIFT OF DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH:

We pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to recognise the gift of
different charisms within the Christian community and to discover
the richness of different traditions and rituals in the Catholic Church.





Beginning Anew

Eight years ago I organized a retreat for American veterans of the Vietnam War. Many of the men and women at that retreat felt very guilty for what they had done and witnessed, and I knew I had to find a way beginning anew that could help them transform.

One veteran told me that when he was in Vietnam, he rescued a Vietnamese girl fighter who had been wounded and was about to die. He pulled her into his helicopter but he was not able to save her life. She died looking straight at him and he has never forgotten her eyes. She had a hammock with her, because as a guerilla, she slept in the forest at night. After she died, he kept the hammock with him and would not let it go. Sometimes when we suffer we tend to cling to our suffering. The hammock symbolized all his suffering, all his shame.

On the last day of the retreat we had a ceremony for the deceased. Each veteran wrote the names of those he or she knew had died and placed it on an altar we constructed, and I took a willow leaf and used it to sprinkle water on the names and all the veterans. Then we did walking meditation to the lake and held a ceremony for burning the suffering. That veteran still did not want to give up his hammock, but finally he put it

on the fire. It burned, and all the guilt and suffering in his heart also burned up.

Another veteran told us that almost everyone in his platoon had been killed by the guerillas. Those who survived were so angry that they baked cookies with explosives in them and left them alongside the road. When some Vietnamese children saw them, they ate the cookies, and the explosives went off. The children were

the life of five or six children today? Children everywhere in the world are dying because of war, malnutrition and disease. You keep thinking about the five children that you killed in the past and what about the children who are dying now? You still have your body, you still have your heart. You can do many things to help children who are dying in the present moment. Please give rise to your mind of love and, in the months and years that are left to you, do the work of helping children.” He agreed to do it, and it has helped him transform his guilt.

Beginning anew is to change your mind and heart, to transform the ignorance that brought about wrong actions of body, speech, and mind, and to help you cultivate your mind of love. Your shame and guilt will disappear, and you will begin to experience the joy of being alive. All wrong-doings arise in the mind. It is through the mind that wrongdoing can disappear.

- from his book, *Teachings on love*

rolling around the ground in pain. Their parents tried to save their lives, but there was nothing they could do. That image of the children rolling on the ground and dying because of the explosives in the cookies was so deeply ingrained on this veteran’s heart that now - 20 years later - he still could not sit in the same room with children. He was living in hell. After he told me the story, I gave him the practice of beginning anew.

I said to him, “You killed five or six children that day. Can you save



pic courtesy: etsy.com

Thich Nhat Hanh was a Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist monk, peace activist, prolific author, poet and teacher, who founded the Plum Village Tradition. Known as the “father of mindfulness”, Nhat Hanh was a major influence on Western practices of Buddhism.

WELL SAID

**“Each new day is a blank page in the diary of your life.
The secret of success is in turning that diary into the
best story you possibly can write.”**

- Douglas Pagels

