

November-December, 2023

JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA



To whom do God's angels sing?

- Julien C. Hyer

These are 'the shepherds' in His sight
Who keep watch over 'flocks' by night;
The milkman, watchman, paper-boys,
Who forego many of life's joys
To stay on watch beside their 'sheep',
And to their tasks devotion keep
The nurses, mothers, those who make
Our comforts real and never take;
It is to them God's angels sing.



PUBLISHER
Parmar Francis

EDITOR
M.A. Joe Antony, SJ

DESIGNED AT
AMCF, Catholic Communication Centre,
Mumbai

EDITORIAL BOARD
Astrid Lobo Gajiwala
Babitha Abraham, FMM
Cedric Prakash, SJ
Jerry Rosario, SJ
Jose Kavi
M.K. George, SJ
Marianus J. Kujur, SJ
Myron J. Pereira, SJ
Nithin Monteiro, SJ
Stanislaus Alla, SJ

CORRESPONDENTS
Victor Edwin, SJ (North Zone)
Patrick Pradhan, SJ (North Eastern Zone)
A. Irudayaraj, SJ (South Zone)
John Rose, SJ (West Zone)
Vivian Richard, SJ (Overseas)

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

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

CONTACT FOR ARTICLES & REPORTS
The Editor, JIVAN, St. Joseph's College,
Jesuit Residence,
Tiruchirappalli - 620 002, Tamil Nadu
Cell: +91 7305978801
E-mail: editorjivan@gmail.com /
jivanmagazine@gmail.com
Website: www.jivanmagazine.com

CONTACT FOR SUBSCRIPTION & CIRCULATION
The Publisher, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash,
P.B. No. 70, Anand-388001, Gujarat.
Cell : +91 94084 20847,
Ph. : 02692 240161,
E-mail : booksgsp@gmail.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES OF JIVAN



Jesuits:
₹ 1000 / yearly
Non-Jesuits:
₹ 750 / yearly
Foreign:
US \$25 (Or
₹ 1500) / yearly

GSP AC details
A/C Name: GUJARAT SAHITYA
PRAKASH SOCIETY
Bank Name: ICICI Bank
Address: Flavours, Nr Bhaikaka
Statue, Vallabh Vidyanagar,
Gujarat - 388120
A/C No.: 008501008925
RTGS / IFS CODE: ICIC00000085

Please share your transaction
details and postal address to
booksgsp@gmail.com or
+91 94084 20847

CONTENTS

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 2023



To script a new beginning
By Valan Antony, SJ 07

Christmas reveals God's disponibility
By Errol Fernandes, SJ 09

Did the synod succeed?
By M.A. Joe Antony, SJ 13

The Christmas I still cherish
Sharings by four Jesuits 15

Christmas in a world of war, death and grief
By Thomas Karimundackal, SJ 18

Relishing the ordinary
By Pushpa Joseph 21

"Tell me a Christmas story"
By Myron Pereira, SJ 23

Book Talk
By Delio Mendonca, SJ & Victor Edwin, SJ 26

Cover Picture: ipinimg.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.

Struck a chord in me

As I flipped through the pages of the September '23 issue of *Jivan*, I came across the article 'Embracing the wisdom of women' by Sr. Metti Amirtham, SCC. It struck a chord in me because in my younger days I had negative feelings about women, often considering them to be inferior to men. We, men and women, have become victims of certain stereotyped cultural myths of our time like 'men are rational and women are emotional'. Sr Metti has raised the issue of the place and the role of women in the Church. Pope Francis has appointed three women in the Vatican Dicastries and many women are voting members at the ongoing Synod on synodality in Rome. Let us hope and pray that the Synod ensures that the Church effectively uses women's wealth of wisdom and experience. All of us should ensure that this is done in our institutions and parishes.

| Fean Almeida, SJ (KAR) | Mumbai

Felt devastated

I felt devastated and deeply sad when I read the paragraph titled, 'Frightening Data' in the article, 'Saying Yes to Life' in the September '23 issue of *Jivan*, written by Fr. M.A. Emma, SJ. This article pierced my heart and made me ponder. As a Jesuit scholastic, I have been pampered with all facilities. When I feel miserable there are spiritual guides to go to. But who cares about the youth who have been suffering psychologically, emotionally and spiritually in today's society? So it is not surprising that the suicide rate is increasing every year? This article challenges me and encourages me to take this up as my mission - preventing premeditated suicides and saving lives. I express my gratitude to *Jivan* for making me reflect, realize, and respond.

| B. Madan Babu, SJ (AND) | Kolkata

A new avatar

I am delighted to see a new avatar of *Jivan*. I began reading it when I joined the Society of Jesus back in 2019. Titles like, 'What do you think?' and 'What do you say?' increase my curiosity to find out what is hidden in them. I am glad that the magazine has begun to offer space for other religious and lay people. I prefer cartoons by Jesuits on Jesuits and Jesuitness – not from the internet. I appreciate the hard work of Frs. Trevor Miranda, Myron Pereira and Fr. Aubrey Fernandes for coming up with funny cartoons. I don't favour reports on events in a Zone or the Assisntancy. Reviews of important Catholic/ Christian/ religious movies does not enthuse me either, as I can find them in other magazines.

| Denver A. Pushpam, SJ (BOM) | Bengaluru

Like my funny, mischievous brother, Jesus

The article titled, 'Jesus laughed,' by Fr. Fio Mascarenhas, SJ in the September 2023 issue of *Jivan* took me back to my second week of the long retreat, when we contemplate the hidden life of Jesus. During those days I had a personal encounter with the human Jesus whom I saw as my joyous brother, who is funny, mischievous, protecting and loving. "Any Christian without joy is either not a Christian or s/he is sick." Certainly, these words of Pope Francis are true. The article challenged me to look back at the different aspects of my life and examine them, in order to be a joyous human person, just like my mischievous and loving brother, Jesus!



After journeying with Jesus during the long retreat I truly believe that he was a "happy son of God" because he had a positive attitude. He was free from wrong ideas and wrong attitudes. Wrong ideas are what make us think that happiness is found in externals, and wrong attitudes could be exemplified in the belief, "Unless I get this, I won't be happy." When we get rid of these two things and see all reality with 'fresh eyes' that's when we will be "happy sons and daughters of God!"

| Brian Macwan, SJ (GUJ) | Mumbai

Give books as gifts!

Novelty and creativity and the humour in the cartoons make *Jivan* a page-turner. In the September 23 issue of *Jivan*, I read the two interesting columns, 'What do you say?' and "What do you think?" In the latter the Editor lists the reasons why all those who truly love this country are going to watch the coming months with anxiety and apprehension. In his column, 'What do you say?' the President of the Conference calls for a reading revolution in our communities. We have to imbibe the wisdom in the books on our shelves and then help our youth, addicted to the mobile phone and internet, to find it. Books are sure to expand their understanding and intellectual capacity. So, let us give books as gifts to the people we meet instead of electronic gadgets. It could be one small step towards the reading revolution.

| Anthony Jackson (KAR) | Bengaluru



WHAT DO YOU SAY?

STANY D'SOUZA, SJ
President, JCSA

Messengers and messages of peace

We are entering into the Christmas season again. The Christmas narrative tells us that the Lord was born in the darkness of a silent night, with animals for company. Was it only because his parents could not find room for him in the inn? Or rather, was the Christmas narrative making a theological point, as a lesson to all of us?

Jesus being born as a helpless child symbolizes both the history of human misery and also the mystery of God's compassion and care. It signifies human suffering and also a way to make it meaningful.

Look around the world today. It is being bruised. There is pain everywhere. Some parts of the world suffer from civil wars, some others from terror attacks, yet others from strife; some experience ethnic violence, some others, violence because of their gender.

There is much darkness. Thousands of properties are destroyed; homes, schools, hospitals and places of worship are pulverized, even more horrible! Millions of innocent people are deprived of water, food, fuel and power. And one place, as the UNICEF spokesperson said, 'has become a graveyard for thousands of children and living hell for everyone else'. The helpless babe of Bethlehem symbolizes all the human pain and misery.

The Lord comes in silence and in the dark to underscore a deep relationship. We are not alone in the universe. The Lord is with us. He accompanies us in our daily lives. He is part of our day to day experiences. He understands our sorrows, fears and pains.

He also knocks at our hearts so that he may be born and work in us. We may become like him the good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed.

The little babe of Bethlehem did not remain helpless. He became the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He inspires us to show concrete gestures of sensitivity and solidarity to brighten the lives of others, especially of those who suffer. He invites us to accompany the lonely, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and provide shelter to the homeless, and also work for peace, reconciliation and justice.

The Christmas story may mean different things to different people. But it is the foundation of our faith and identity. Let us celebrate this Christmas by imbibing the Spirit of Jesus, the presence of God to all. Let us become messengers and messages of peace, reconciliation and justice. Happy Christmas to you!



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

M.A. JOE ANTONY, SJ
Editor

Christmas ironies

Can you think of a sadder tragic irony than this? He is hailed as 'the Prince of Peace'. But the land, where he was born and brought up, where he wandered preaching God's fatherly love, healing the sick, and declaring, "My peace I give you", has become a land of hate and death.

In the New Living Translation, John 14: 27 is: "I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." He promised this priceless gift of peace to his disciples, his followers.

Those who started the war by killing and kidnapping innocent civilians and those who retaliate with no restraint may not be his followers. But their bitter fight is for this piece of land, sanctified by his life and death. Neither side cares for the message of non-violence embedded in his death on the cross. Non-violence? They would laugh you off and dismiss it as sheer stupidity in today's world. But, tell me, can anything else beget lasting peace?

His followers would love to be peacemakers. But who would give them that role? Pope Francis is our leader and brother, who has wowed the world from the moment he was elected the Pope, with his humility and heartwarming simplicity. In the wake of this conflict he asked people not to support any side except that of peace. He keeps pleading and begging to stop fighting and start talking. But his is a voice in the wilderness, which nobody on either side of the conflict bothers to hear. Isn't that another sad irony?

Pause to think of the ironies that abound in the Christmas event and celebration. A virgin becomes a mother. A carpenter gets chosen to be the foster father of the Saviour. There is no place for the Son of God who created this world. It is the poor shepherds who are honoured with an invitation to go and visit the new born King.

All these are connected to the Christmas event. What about the celebration? Is there anything ironical or paradoxical about it? Look at the back cover of this issue to read the words of that astute writer, G.K. Chesterton: "Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home."

If you contemplate the picture that accompanies this quotation, you'll discover another irony. A homeless woman and her child sell Santa Claus caps. Those who have nothing to give put on the garb of a giver – the loveable Santa who brings gifts to children.

What about you? What are the Christmas ironies you have noticed?

Equally competent

The article titled “If You Respect Women and Give Them a Role”, by Janina Gomes inspired me to reflect on the status of women in the Indian context. I realize we should not take women in our lives for granted, but respect them wherever we are. Living in a male-dominated society, we should not forget that women are equally competent as men. It is our duty to ensure a participatory role for them in our mission.

| Alen Madathaniyil, SJ (KER) | Thiruvananthapuram

If she can, why can't I?

“Jyoti Kumari inspires Jerry” by Jerry Rosario SJ was an inspiring and a challenging article. It proves the truth in the proverb, ‘Where there is a will there is a way’. Thousands of people lost their hopes during the COVID pandemic. Jyoti Kumari is one of the few who bounced back courageously. Her brave act has made me realize that I should delete the term ‘give up’ from my dictionary

| Jayanth Christy M (KAR) | Bengaluru

Jyoti Kumari inspires me too!

I was really edified by this article. This article tells the inspiring story of Jyoti Kumari, a young girl from Bihar, and her incredible journey to help her injured father during the COVID-19 lockdown. The author, Jerry Rosario, SJ, draws inspiration from Jyoti's determination and embarks on his own bicycle journey to visit his ailing mother. He reflects on the power of real-life experiences to motivate and transform us, encouraging readers to learn from such events and face challenges with sustained hope and a strong will. Jerry's article beautifully highlights the lessons we can extract from extraordinary life experiences.

| Princeton V. D'Souza, SJ (KAR) | Thiruvananthapuram

Let them fly!

The reflective and insightful article on women written by Janina Gomes in the October '23 issue of *Jivan* had a great impact on me. It made me reflect on the discrimination and abuses that many women have to face. The freedom and dignity of women who play the role of a mother, sister, wife, friend, and teacher, are snatched away by our structures and those who guard them. We, as religious, need to rise as a collective force and challenge everything in the Church or the world that deny women their rightful place. Let us not clip their wings. Let them fly high!

| Avin Fernandes (KAR) | Bengaluru

Jesus became our Emmanuel

- Lenora McWhorter

At Christmas, lights burn brighter,
and friendly hugs get even tighter.
The spirit of Christmas fills the air,
and people seem to really care.

All because God's love came down
and filled the earth all around.
So we celebrate at Christmas time
our Savior and Lord, holy, divine!

We honor Jesus throughout the year
so the Christmas spirit will linger near.
For the story of His birth is ours to tell -
that Jesus became our Emmanuel!





To script a new beginning

Christmas is upon us once again at a time when “the still sad music of humanity,” that William Wordsworth talked about has become a screeching scream. This is so obvious in the context of the war-torn West Asia, Russia-Ukraine crisis, and the global climate issues; in the milieu of the ethnic rivalry and killing, fake news, religious persecution, financial meltdown, blatant lies pushed down as truths and the perilous plunge into divisive polarization here in India.

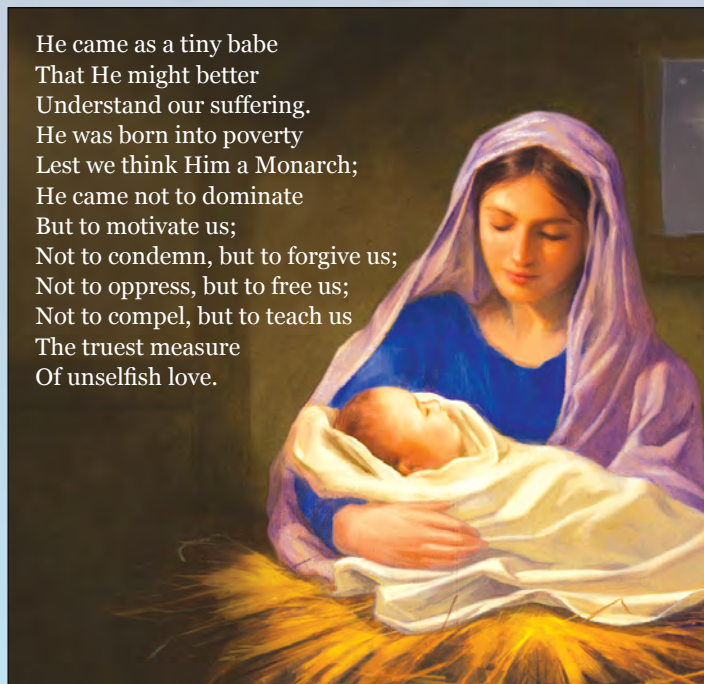
People, especially the poor and the marginalized, are haunted by poverty, afflicted by incurable diseases, swayed by the sweet-talk of politicians, trampled upon in the name of development, discriminated on the grounds of caste, creed and gender, and exposed to the whims of nature.

While many are wondering, “How can there be a God when things are so out of hand?,” Christmas celebrates the most profound memory of the God who became human in Jesus Christ to bring about healing and hope that is neither a naïve confidence nor foolish optimism: it is grounded on the character, nature and the promise of the living God, who is *Emmanuel*. Jesus Christ identified himself with a broken and wounded humanity as ours and showed the face of God to people. This is beautifully expressed in the anonymous Christmas poem, ‘He came as a... (see box).

Beyond the wreaths and wishes, cakes and carols, snowy scenes and Santa Clauses, special sales and shopping, Christmas is a metaphor for God coming to us in poverty and vulnerability to script a new beginning in us and in our world. It is “a state of awakening: to realize the Kingdom of heaven within yourself, to hold communion with the Lord in the chamber of your heart, to regain your lost divinity, to attain Christ-consciousness or cosmic consciousness, to love all, to include all in the warm embrace of your love is real Christmas” (Swami Sivananda, *The Times of India*, 25 Dec 2011). It is a perspective: “More than a day (Christmas day), it’s a frame of mind,” as the Santa-like Kris Kringle asserts in the film *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty presents this “perspective” aptly this way: Small was the cave/

He came as a tiny babe
That He might better
Understand our suffering.
He was born into poverty
Lest we think Him a Monarch;
He came not to dominate
But to motivate us;
Not to condemn, but to forgive us;
Not to oppress, but to free us;
Not to compel, but to teach us
The truest measure
Of unselfish love.



Pics courtesy: advocate-art.com

Small and graceful the young mother/ Small, against the cave, people, and animals, was the Baby/ Yet, immensity, eternity, and all the power and glory /were contained in his smallness!

We are living in extremely harrowing times, agonizing over the loss of lives, especially women and children, in Israel, Gaza, Ukraine and in other parts of the world; the numbers are appalling. Pope Francis’ stance is highly prophetic: “War is a defeat! Every war is a defeat... May the attacks and weaponry cease. Please! ... Let it be understood that terrorism and war do not lead to any solutions.”

The struggle between the forces of life and death, between good and evil, between right and wrong, between truth and untruth, is the struggle within our own hearts and lives as well. Set against this scenario, Christmas speaks of childlikeness and innocence, awe and wonder, silence and helplessness, love and forgiveness, faith and hope, family and community, all the while encouraging us to ‘be and do *this Good News*.’ ❖

Valan C. Antony, SJ is a Professor of Scripture at Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi. He is presently the Director of Post-Graduate studies at Vidyajyoti, writing, publishing and guiding PhD students. He may be contacted at sjvalan@gmail.com.



What will I do for Mary's babe?

His unfathomable love gently flowed
Among the least, the last and the lost
The shepherds and the Magi bowed
Before Mary's babe, the Lord of hosts
What have I done for the One who is born?

From heavenly realms to a humble abode
He came, changing to a human mode
The mighty God's infinite grace
Gushed in love to a lowly place
What will I do for this God of love?

Angels sang of glory to God
And, yes, peace to this world
Amidst this gory bloodshed where is glory?
When they hate and kill where is peace?
I will slog to bring His peace.

Anvil Mascarenhas, SJ (KAR) is at Vidyaniketan,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala



Pic courtesy: cdn.vox-cdn.com



Christmas reveals God's disponibility

By choosing the Incarnation as the way to involve themselves in the world, the three divine persons - the Father, Son and Spirit - placed themselves at the mercy of human beings. Of the many aspects that the Incarnation reveals, we can focus on four this Christmas.

The madness of God: The first is the “madness” of God. The Incarnation could only have been the brainchild of God. No human could conceive of it as a way in which God could involve in the world. The truth is that God had intervened in a variety of ways and on numerous occasions in the past. This was through prophets, kings, messengers and through natural challenges, but humans paid no heed.

Therefore, in the fullness of time, God himself would come - not in a miraculous way, not even in an extraordinary way - but as all humans come into the world, by becoming a child. This is the disponibility of God. The adjective “disponible” means “capable of being placed, arranged, or disposed of as one wishes”. In his letter to the Philippians (2:5-11), Paul explains the meaning of disponibility in the Christological hymn when he speaks of Jesus “emptying himself”, holding nothing back. Not only did Jesus become human in every way, he also became a slave and accepted willingly to die on a cross so that the world might be saved. God made himself such that he allowed himself to be spit upon, scourged, mocked and disposed of by humans in the manner that they decided. God would not retaliate or react in anger, but keep responding by loving unconditionally.

Dependent on humans: The second is that the disponibility of God made the very existence of God dependent on humans. If God wanted to be human in every way, it was necessary that humans bring God into the world. Without the consent of human beings, God could not be born. Joseph and Mary are not merely historical figures, but metaphors for the response of human beings to God's pleading – even to this day - to be born among us. The response of Mary, “Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) and of Joseph, “when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his

wife,” (Mt 1:24) made it possible for the second person of the Trinity to become human. If either Joseph or Mary had given a negative response, the incarnation would have remained an idea or wish in God's mind. That God could let God's very existence depend on the assent of humans indicates who God is in Jesus.

Among us and with us: Our God in Jesus is “Emmanuel” (God is with us). He wanted to be among us and with us. He wanted to teach us that genuine love is unconditional. This love expects nothing in return. Jesus kept giving until there was nothing more to give and then to give even more. This love was a practical love. It manifested itself in making people whole. It manifested itself in bringing people peace. Through this love the deaf heard, the dumb spoke, the lame walked, the blind saw and the dead were raised to life, and lepers were cleansed. The love was so pure that it did not condemn even those who condemned. It did not retaliate against those who crucified him, rather it pleaded with God to forgive, even making an excuse for the ignorance of his crucifiers.

To show all that is possible for humans: Fourthly, by becoming human, Jesus revealed to us all that is possible for us humans. Through his humanity we were able to recognize that our humanity was not a limitation, but an advantage. Because we are human we can love boundlessly, give unselfishly and live not only for ourselves and to satisfy our own desires, but we can live in such a way that will have made our time here on earth worth living. By assuming our humanity, he has shown us that this is possible.

When we celebrate Christmas, we need to remember that if the Incarnation is to become a reality, we need to respond like Joseph and Mary did. This enables us to realize that if Jesus could give unselfishly, live self-sacrificingly and love unconditionally as a human, we also can. Then our celebration of Christmas becomes meaningful because then Jesus is truly born today. ❖

Errol Fernandes, SJ (BOM) serves as the Superior and Chaplain at the Shrine of the Infant Jesus, Nashik Road, Maharashtra. He can be reached at errolsj@gmail.com.

Pic courtesy: twitter.com/catholicsham

To empower rural school teachers

In order to address the challenges faced by teachers in rural schools, CSSE (Conference Secretariat for School Education) came up with a new initiative, called TEEP (Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Program).

These teachers play a crucial role in shaping the future of rural communities by providing education to children who may otherwise have limited access to quality schooling. However, they encounter numerous difficulties that hinder their ability to deliver effective education and lead fulfilling professional lives.

Some of the challenges they face are inadequate infrastructure, lack of professional training opportunities, shortage of qualified teachers, socio-economic problems, and logistical difficulties. Teachers of rural Jesuit schools face the same problems.

Keeping this mind, CSSE felt the need of positive interventions in the life and mission of rural school teachers. By investing in infrastructure, attracting qualified teachers, training the teachers to enhance their competency levels, promoting community engagement through networking and collaboration, and leveraging technology, it is possible to empower rural school teachers to deliver effective education and positively impact the lives of their students.

The Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Program (TEEP) was specially designed as a Training of Trainers (ToT) program for a group of selected teachers from rural Jesuit schools.

TEEP was conducted in six different places – Trivandrum, Patna, Ranchi, Matigarha, Hazaribagh and Pune under the four zones (South, North, West and Central). TEEP was organized by the CSSE in collaboration with PORTICUS from July – September, 2023 with an objective to reach out to the teachers of rural Jesuit schools with a unique professional development module to facilitate personal transformation and renewal. Around 280 teachers took part in TEEP.

The main objectives were: to familiarize with the Ignatian legacy and Jesuit education - to improve the quality of education in rural schools - to facilitate and promote inspiring teachers - to develop lay collaboration and partnership in mission - to familiarize and implement the recommendations of NEP 2020 - to sensitize all stakeholders about the Universal



Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) - to promote human excellence rather than academic excellence for a hope-filled future.

The sessions were ably conducted with the help of PPTs by competent resource persons both Jesuits and non- Jesuits. During the sessions, enough time was given to the participants for questions and clarifications. The two and half day program was designed such a way that the participants could easily assimilate the concepts presented to them through introspection, group activities and reflective sessions.

A resource booklet in both English and Hindi was prepared by Fr. Norbert Menezes, SJ (PAT) for the training. Each participant was given a booklet at the start of the training program. The participants were also given all the PPTs used during the programs in order to facilitate their better understanding and implementation plans.

John Ravi, SJ (DEL)

JCSA meets at De Nobili, Pune

The biannual meeting of the major superiors of Jesuit Conference of South Asia held on 22 to 27 October '23 was hosted by the Pune province, and accommodation was provided by De Nobili College, Pune. The Regional Assistants, Fr Vernon D'Cunha and Fr M. K. George were active participants and mentors along with Fr John Dardis, General Counsellor, who contributed to the assembly with his expertise on discernment processes.

The main theme of the meeting, 'Reimagining and Restructuring the Society of Jesus in South Asia' on which the major superiors devoted three days of discernment, was animated by Fr John Dardis, Fr Prakash Louis from Patna Province and Fr Dionysius Vaz, the provincial of Karnataka. The major superiors intensely studied and reflected on external and internal context of our life, shared their dreams and narrated their challenges, and charted a roadmap for going forward in the mission. The methodology adopted for discernment was reflection on inputs, personal prayer, spiritual conversation in groups, gallery walks reading and highlighting points of group reports written on charts, and concluding with a plenary.

The process enabled a profound spiritual ambience and provoked depth level conversations. At the end of the discernment, there was a deep-felt feeling that this process adopted by the major superiors be extended to all the provinces/regions and to the common houses of formation and apostolic works.

Notable decisions taken were: establishment of a Conference-level resource team to facilitate similar processes in provinces/regions and province/region level taskforces, and revitalizing of the existing Conference-level Thinktank, and formation of province/region level taskforces in order to deal with burning issues of South Asia.

These preferences were listed: to increase spiritual and intellectual depth among us; to form mission-driven communities; to rebalance the apostolic efforts or to clarify what ministries to retain and reform, close, or transfer; to intensify collaboration with the laity, the



religious inside and outside province/region; to foster interprovincial collaboration in formation and other areas; to focus on project-based collaboration with other provinces and regions especially on burning issues; to create new provinces from the several existing provinces/regions.

In addition to the discernment process for reimagining and restructuring, the major superiors listened to the restructuring processes envisaged in West and Central Zones presented by Fr Agnelo, the provincial of Pune and Fr Jerry, the provincial of Jamshedpur. Fr Arjen, provincial of Calcutta, Fr Sujeewa, the provincial of Sri Lanka and Fr Amrit, the regional superior of Nepal explained the status of our apostolates in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal respectively. Fr Melvil, the regional superior of Kohima gave a brief appraisal of the situation in Manipur. Fr Arjen presented the guidelines for early formation before its approval by the house.

One whole session was dedicated to questions and clarifications on our commitment to safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults in our institutions and works. This session was facilitated by Fr Hans Zollner, the director of Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) and Fr Konrad Noronha, the director of the Center for Safeguarding and Human Formation, De Nobili College, Pune.

The JCSA is grateful to Fr Agnelo, the provincial of Pune and his team for hosting the meeting, and Fr Francis Pudhicherry, Rector, De Nobili and Fr Arun, the director of CISR.

Shajumon C.K., SJ (DAR)



Vocation Promoters & Prenovitiate Directors meet in Goa

The annual meeting of the Jesuit Vocation Promoters and Prenovitiate Directors (VPND), was held in Pedro Arrupe Institute (PAI), Raia, Goa, on 5-8 October 2023. Besides Fr Somy Mannoor (JAM), the new Secretary of the Conference Secretariat for Integral Formation (CSIF), and Fr Dinesh Braganza (GUJ), the resource person, there were twenty-three vocation promoters and prenovitiate directors representing sixteen regions/provinces.

The meeting started on the evening of 5 October, when Fr Menoy D'Souza, the Vocation Promoter of Goa welcomed everyone. Fr Pedro Rodrigues, the superior of PAI, gave us a glimpse into the history of the Goa Province. The next day began with the Mass by Fr Roland Coelho, the hosting Provincial, who stressed the need to listen to the youngsters to enable them to listen to the voice of God.

Formal sessions on all the three days began with a prayer led by Fr Rosan Roy (KER), Fr Menoy and Sch Swapnil Borges (GOA). The first day was spent on sharing the reports, the second day with Fr Dinesh Braganza's input and practical sessions on Emotional Fragility and Psychospiritual Integration; and on the third day we had a panel discussion, evaluation and planning. We found the time to visit Rachol Seminary and the Bom Jesu where we celebrated the Mass presided over by Fr Somy. He was present throughout the meeting. While Fr Ajit Soreng (HAZ), Michael Kerketta (RAN) and Brian D'Souza (BOM) were the moderators, Frs Wesley D'Costa (BOM) and Salomon Anthony (MDU) were the General Secretaries and Frs Dheeraj D'Souza (KAR) and Neelam Kerketta (JAM) were the secretaries for the first and the third day.

The presentations and deliberations highlighted the best practices and the challenges. Those participating for the first time said that they not only learnt new things but also were pleasantly surprised to know various types of Prenovitiates and Vocation Promotion methods. Scarcity of vocations, 'full-time' vocation promoters burdened with other 'full-time' responsibilities and poor knowledge of English of the candidates on their arrival were more or less important issues depending on the provinces. But other issues seemed to touch all the provinces: lack of personal involvement of the Jesuits other than the appointed main vocation promoter in vocation promotion, poor faith-background of the candidates, difficulty in understanding the candidates, and in the prenovitiate, emotional fragility and high dropouts.

These were days of great sharing, conviviality and deliberations, and that we enjoyed coming together to enrich one another with hope, amidst challenges, that it is the Lord who has begun this work and He will continue as He wills (Const #812).

We congratulate Fr Somy Mannoor on his leadership. We highly appreciate Fr Menoy D'Souza, Sch Swapnil Borges, the PAI and the Bom Jesu communities and the entire Goan Jesuit Province for their warm hospitality and care. And we, the VPND team, look forward to meeting again for a more in-depth meeting next year somewhere in Southern Zone. We wished one another a fruitful year back in our region/provinces doing everything, and, as Fr Michael Kerketta kept reminding us, with patience.

W.K. Pradeep, SJ (KHM)



Pic courtesy: wordonfire.org

Did the Synod succeed?

Although everyone understood the historical importance of the Synod on synodality that began in Rome on 04 Oct 2023, many wondered if it will succeed.

Well, the first Session ended on 29 October. Did it succeed? What really happened at the Synod? Has anything changed? Let me give you two images noted by two writers – both symbolic of what has changed.

The first one is what impressed Fr Daniel P. Horan: “One of the beautiful images that remains with me from this year’s synodal gathering in Rome is the circular tables set up for discussion that included a range of people, genders, races and roles in the Church — from the Pope to a college student to a religious Sister — all sitting together, all invited to speak and listen, all sharing one common baptism.” (National Catholic Reporter)

The second image is what struck Gerard O’Connell. “As I watched the procession at the opening of the Synod on Synodality,... my mind went back to the images of a similar procession for the opening of the Second Vatican Council on 11 Oct 1962... In 1962, the cross was carried at the front of the procession, as it was today, but then it was immediately followed by the council fathers: the bishops wearing miters, or crowns in the case of the Oriental rite prelates. Today, however, the “nonbishop” members of the synod - priests, nuns, lay men and women—processed immediately after the cross, followed by bishops and cardinals.” (America)

Alright, from images let us go to facts. On 28 October the Vatican released a 42-page ‘synthesis report’ on what happened at the Synod. It discussed various concerns from 4 October to 28 October in groups of about ten people. Finally they voted to indicate their support. About 80 proposals have won

the support of the majority –two thirds of the members who had the right to vote.

Four major issues – on which many people expected a forward movement – ordaining women as deacons, celibacy being made optional and so the possibility of having married priests, inclusion of LGBTQ people, ‘Eucharistic hospitality’ (holy communion) to interfaith couples – proved to be areas of disagreement that did not win the support of the majority. But the report clarifies that these are matters of consideration that need further listening, study and discussion.

What has succeeded is the process – the synodal process. “I won’t use the term successful, but it has been fruitful. It is a new state in the experience of synodality”, said Sr. Nathalie Becquart, Undersecretary of the Vatican’s Synod of Bishops office. “There was mutual listening and understanding from different people with different backgrounds and perspectives. So, in a sense, it was a true synodal experience.”

In his homily at the concluding Mass, Pope Francis said, “Dear friends, the general assembly of the synod has now concluded. Today we do not see the full fruit of this process, but with farsightedness we look to the horizon opening up before us. The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church.”

The second Assembly of the Synod on synodality will take place in October 2024, following the same process. By the way, a Synod does not make decisions. It submits proposals to the Pope, who, guided by the Holy Spirit, will take the necessary decisions, in the light of everything he heard at the Synod, where everyone had a chance to speak.



Courtesy: The New Leader

M.A. Joe Antony, SJ, is the Editor of *Jivan* and *INI* - an online magazine.

Opened: VJ's renovated library

Archbishop Anil Joseph Thomas Couto, Archbishop of Delhi and Fr. Stan D'Souza SJ, the President of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia blessed the renovated library of Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi on 18 September 2023. The library, now christened Lynn-Meagher Library, received generous funds from Lynn-Meagher Foundation for its renovation. The foundation was established by classmates and friends of Dr. John Lynn and Fr. Paddy Meagher SJ. Fr Paddy was a much-esteemed professor of Sacred Scriptures at Vidyajyoti. A former student of Fr Paddy said that Fr Paddy's doctoral thesis summed up his life and teaching: "You are a follower of Christ Jesus, all that matters is your faith, that makes you love others." (Galatians 5: 6)

Fr. Raja Kumar SJ, Principal of Vidyajyoti, said that the Lynn-Meagher library has a rich collection of



books on theology, history, social-political movements, mysticism, religions, and interfaith dialogue. The library subscribes to scores of theological journals, he said. The library also attracts doctoral scholars in the fields of history and 'tasawuf' (Islamic mysticism) from other Delhi-based universities.

Susai Pragasam, SJ (MDU)

Juniorate Staff meet in Mumbai

The annual Juniorate Staff meeting of the South Asian Jesuit Conference was held from Sept 19 to 21 at Vinayalaya in Mumbai. Twelve participants were present.

The newly appointed CSIF, Fr Somy Mannoor, unfortunately could not be present. On the first morning at the inaugural Eucharist, Fr Anil Pereira, the Provincial of the Bombay Province, invited the Juniorate Staff to be not only teachers, guides, and mentors but to be formators – to instruct, intervene, inspire and be role models.

At the first session there was an input on Empowering the Juniors in their Holistic Growth by Dr Nirmala Almeida, a renowned psychologist and Human Development expert. The input was interactive, very informative and interesting. It opened the eyes of the participants to a lot of issues and areas of intervention.

The second day was dedicated to sharing the activities in each of the Juniorates by the respective Deans. Each sharing was followed by questions, clarifications and suggestions.

On the third morning there was a sharing of the common concerns of the Staff and the difficulties they



face in their situation. At the end a list of concerns and suggestions was drawn up to be presented to the CSIF for further action. The participants also had a business session wherein they planned the upcoming activities (examination dates, dates for the Conference level competitions, place and dates for the next Juniorate staff meeting, etc). The meeting, which included evening outings, ended with a thanksgiving Eucharist.

The entire meeting was very meticulously planned and the logistics were superb thanks to Fr Learoy Rodrigues, the Dean of the Bombay Juniorate, and the Jesuit community. Everybody was very appreciative of all the facilities and the way the meeting was conducted.

Vincent Saldanha, SJ (GUJ)



“The Christmas I still cherish”

The star was hung and candle lit



M.K. George, SJ

M.K. George, SJ is one of the two Regional Assistants for South Asia. Earlier he was a professor and the Provincial of Kerala province.

This is an old memory. To be precise, five decades old. The setting was a village in central Kerala, where life was still centered around the parish. Those were times when Christmas stars were not bought but made with bamboo sticks and colour paper. No electric bulbs, just candles.

I happened to be at home because my widowed mother was in the hospital and two of my youngest sisters, below 12, were at home alone. They wanted a crib and a star.

We collected grass, reeds and bought colour papers and candles. And after a hard day's work the tiny crib was ready. The star was hung and candle lit. The star shone. The only missing element was baby Jesus whom we would place at the crib at midnight.

We three went to bed tired, but happy, expectant, and ready to see baby Jesus in our crib at midnight. What followed was a shock! Sometime before midnight we woke up to smoke and a fire! Our star and crib had gone up in flames. My sisters had tears in their eyes. My heart was heavy.

However, looking back, that Christmas remains my best. Simple, trusting, expectant hearts. A celebration that went up in flames. But that night my little sisters and I really met Baby Jesus, homeless and vulnerable, and yet loving and lovely.

A crib made with grass gathered from the hills

Ilanko Xavier M., SJ

Ilanko Xavier M., SJ (CEN), a former Director of Novices, is now the Socius to the Provincial of Chennai.



As a child, I celebrated Christmas by making a crib with lemon grass gathered from the hills and offering Christmas sweets and bananas to Baby Jesus.

The Christmas I celebrated during my Long Retreat (Tertianship) in August 2010 at Sitagarha, I experienced God's love for me which helped me wonder at the Incarnation Paradox: creator among creatures, eternity presenting itself in time, a virgin becoming a mother. The God who freed his people from the clutches of Pharaoh of Egypt found for himself a shelter in Egypt. That Christmas, by showing the self-emptying love of Jesus, cured me from my anxieties. When Jesus himself was such a great gift, I recalled the times when, with all the innocence of a child, I offered him gifts!

The Christmas celebrated with the Novices during the Long Retreat on 23 Oct 2011, at the small 'La Storta Tower' outside Beschi Illam, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, helped me realize how divine glory was confined to a humble manger.

Today I understand that if I can have a daily Emmanuel experience, then I can feel the Christmas joy every day of the year – not merely on 25 December.

I learnt to drape the saree myself



Melwin J. Pinto, SJ

Melwin Joseph Pinto, SJ (KAR) is the Rector of St. Joseph's institutions, Mangalore

I had an exhilarating Christmas experience as a novice in the Society of Jesus - an experience I cannot forget.

Back in 1982, we, the novices, were invited by the Mundgod mission in North Karnataka to put up an entertainment programme for Christmas with a message to the local villagers. In our enthusiasm we planned a comedy, a play on social justice and a typical Christmas play enacting the birth of Jesus. To my consternation, I was asked to play the role of Mary in the Christmas play. My initial anxiety kept waning, as I learnt to drape the *saree* myself, rather than get a woman to dress me up.

Getting into the mind and heart of Mary was my greatest challenge. It led me to the feet of Mary. I asked her to guide me while playing the role, which had a lasting impact on me. Despite being naughty and playful, I was distinctly different during the play. I would call it a meditation. Becoming Mary was my goal - nothing less. I began to forget that I am acting while living on stage what Mary should have felt, said and done. It was literally a transformation. Migrating to Bethlehem under difficult circumstances and going through the birth pangs was the best part of the act, as I didn't have the faintest idea of a mother's labour pain. My reward was the tears in the eyes of my audience.

But the best part was still to come. Some social workers in the village forcefully offered a baby - a tribal Siddi (descendants of Africans brought to India, a few centuries ago) baby for me to hold in my arms during the play instead of the doll that I preferred. The baby snuggled in my arms until the lights came on and it screamed for life! While many accused me for the baby's scream, I kept saying that Jesus would have come into this world with a cry. A memorable Christmas indeed!

That fateful night

Marianus Kujur, SJ

Joseph Marianus Kujur, SJ, is the Director of Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS), Ranchi. Earlier he was the Provincial of the Ranchi province.



It was Christmas 1994! That was the year I was ordained a priest and sent to Holy Family Hospital, Mandar for pastoral experience as the chaplain. The original appointment was in the Karondabera parish, where the Provincial had arranged for my stay. As I was about to leave Ranchi for Karondabera on 20 August, there was a change. I was now asked to go to the hospital in Mandar for two months, replacing a Belgian chaplain, who was abroad for treatment. After his return, I could go to Karondabera.

However, something dramatic happened, changing everything overnight. On 02 September night, some miscreants entered the Karondabera parish and brutally killed two priests and a Brother. According to the original plan, I was supposed to have been there that fateful night. I was safe as I was in the Mandar Hospital.

I continued in Mandar, where I celebrated the most memorable Christmas of my life. A week before Christmas, the carol group, led by me, visited the neighbouring villages of the parish, sharing the Good News, braving the cold. I was told this happened for the first time in the parish. The carols fetched a substantial amount, which we used for picnic on the New Year Day. I fell sick after Christmas, but was happy to see the children have a great time during the picnic.



#BelieveInUs!



“**S**ee, I can simply say Jesuits inspire me. But I don’t feel comfortable with it because what I am in love with is your ‘mission - the service of faith and promotion of justice.’ I grew up in a devout Catholic family with a strong inclination towards social concern. My time at St Xavier’s, Mumbai, shaped my choices in academics and life.

If I am pursuing my Ph D in Social Entrepreneurship, I owe it to my Catholic upbringing and the emphasis your spirituality laid on faith, justice and equity. Moreover, sharing my PhD journey with Jesuits here at XIM University is a joy. They say the best way to understand a community or organisation is to live with its members. I have lived with Jesuits. The Jesuit friends at Mumbai and Bhubaneswar ‘believed in me and my strengths.’

I felt I belonged to a community of friends. Never did I feel that

there was a distance between us. I have many friends, but none like this bunch of Jesuits. We discuss, play, sing, dance, share food, laugh, argue, and disagree on many issues, but in the end, we agree that we need to build a better world.

I sometimes feel that Jesus and his disciples must have lived a life similar to this: ‘believing in each other and belonging to each other.’ I shall cherish these moments in my life. I admire how your spirituality allows you to celebrate life, while resisting the temptation to reduce such celebrations to cheap pleasure.

In fact, I wish I could become a contemplative in action, aiming for Magis in my life and work. I would want you to be another Christ in this world that is embracing a culture of aggression and violence.

You Jesuits must believe in us and allow us to collaborate with you in your mission. People like me need to meet a bunch of passionate

Jesuits who are convinced of their mission and can communicate it to others through words and lived examples.”

Shaun Joseph challenges us to ‘believe’ both in our mission and in the youth who can collaborate with us in our mission. The question is, do we believe in our mission? Are we passionate about our mission? We cannot communicate it effectively to the young in our ministries unless we are convinced of our life-mission to serve faith and promote justice. We shall hope that the God who has called us gives us the strength to reflect, evaluate, and, if need be, change our lifestyles.

Shaun Joseph is a doctoral scholar at XIM University. His area of specialization is Social Entrepreneurship. ❖

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



As I write this, the media are full of the sad, shocking, sickening news of the Hamas-Israeli war in the very land Jesus was born. The Ukraine war is still going on, with no hope of it coming to an end soon.

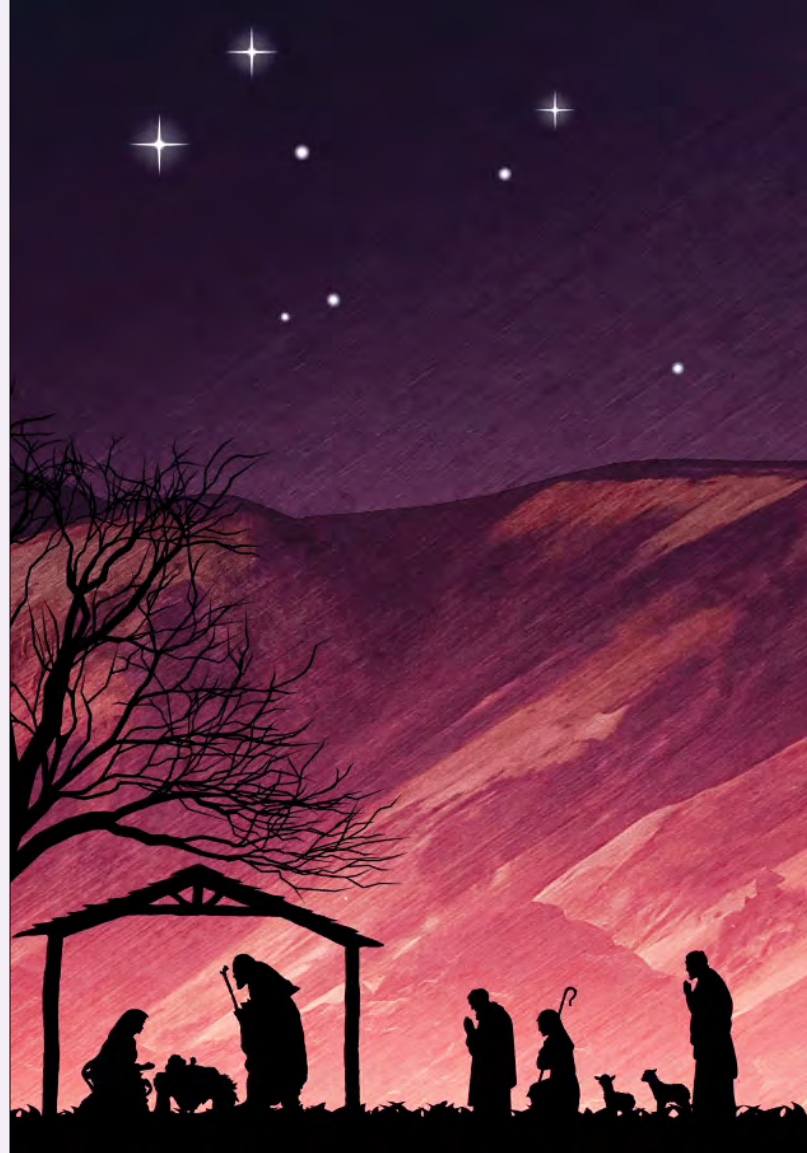
What does Christmas mean in this context? The Christmas story reminds us that God's response to injustice is not to turn a blind eye but to actively engage and bring about changes. It unfolds in a society that longs for liberation. The Jewish people of Jesus' time endured oppression and longed for freedom. Today, communities worldwide continue to struggle for liberation from oppressive systems and structures. The societal context in which Jesus was born parallels contemporary issues. The Roman Empire's dominance and the struggles of marginalized communities in Jesus' time are similar to the power dynamics and social inequalities we witness today.

At its core, Christmas is a reminder of "Immanuel," the vulnerable God who came into this world to bring hope and salvation to all. The Immanuel God, "God with us," (Mt 1:23), encapsulates the essence of Christmas – the divine presence amid human vulnerability. God, who is all-powerful and all-knowing, chose to enter human history as a vulnerable, helpless baby born in a humble stable. This image speaks to the fragility of life, a message that resonates deeply in a world marked by uncertainties and vulnerabilities.

As St. John says, this act of divine vulnerability underscores the depth of God's love and empathy for humanity: "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world... And so we know and rely on the love God has for us" (1 Jn 4:9, 16). Thus, the heart of the Christmas story lies in the notion of a vulnerable God who identified himself with the vulnerable humanity.

The vulnerability of God reflects the vulnerability of our society today. In the present context, as the world grapples with unprecedented challenges, the biblical narratives of the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:18-25; Lk 2:1-20) and the theological concept of "Immanuel" resonate more deeply than ever. Mary delivers her child in helpless poverty, lays him in a manger where the fodder for animals is kept, and wraps him in pieces of linen. The way the Son of God is born shows

Christmas in a world of war, death and grief



us how much he identifies himself with humans. Therefore, the birth of Jesus is a revelation of God's heart and character and a lesson in God's faithful love to humanity. The child Jesus in the manger is God's love for humanity in human form!

The way Jesus is born challenges our world that often prizes power, wealth, and strength. It teaches us



Mary and Joseph, on their way to Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-7), belong to the masses of people whose life depends on those in power. They are dragged into a mass migration that means misery for most people. They cannot find a place even in the inn.

Therefore, the message of Christmas is more poignant than ever in our present context, where vulnerability has taken center stage due to global crises.

Christmas is not just a heartwarming tale of a baby born in a stable. It is a powerful message that speaks to the heart of an unjust society. It was into this broken world that God sent only His Son as a beacon of hope and justice. This message transcends generations, offering comfort, guidance, and inspiration in the face of life's most challenging circumstances. By choosing to be born in a lowly manger, God aligned Himself with the marginalized, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. It is a call to us to care for the vulnerable in our midst.

The modern world is, in fact, a wounded society. We witness the devastating effects of poverty, discrimination, inequality, violence and war. Such immense challenges can make us feel overwhelmed and hopeless. But in 2 Cor 5:17, Paul speaks about the transformative power of God's presence in our lives and the world, offering the hope of renewal and restoration even in the face of brokenness: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

Christmas offers us a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness. It reminds us that we have the power to make a difference and bring healing to a broken world. In a world marked by conflicts and divisions, Christmas can be a time to emphasize the importance of coming together, resolving conflicts, and working towards a peaceful and harmonious world. For many people in vulnerable situations, Christmas can be a celebration of resilience and hope. It is a time to acknowledge the strength and courage of individuals and communities facing adversity and to support their efforts to overcome challenges. ❖

that God chose to enter the world not as a powerful ruler but as a vulnerable infant born in a humble stable. This act of divine humility reveals God's profound love for humanity and His desire to intimately connect with us in our human experience. It reminds us that God understands our struggles, pain, and joys because He experienced them firsthand.

Thomas Karimundackal, SJ (KER) teaches biblical theology and biblical languages at the faculty of theology at Jnana Deepa, Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune. He can be contacted at tomksj@gmail.com.

Jesuits organize Conference to protect the rights of minority schools

A Jesuit organization took the initiative to organize a Conference to demand that the State government of Tamil Nadu, India extend to the minority schools special schemes it offers to the government schools. JCERT (Jesuit Council for Education, Research and Training) of the MDU Jesuit province, in collaboration with the Federation of the Tamil Nadu Government Aided Private Schools, and Catholic religious congregations organized a massive protest conference on 28 September at St. Joseph's College, Trichy, Tamil Nadu. More than 2800 teachers, school administrators, priests, brothers, sisters and others participated in this conference.



Fr. SM. John Kennedy SJ, the main organizer and the director of JCERT, while explaining the demands of this Conference, said the 7.5% reservation being given to the government school students in the admission to medical colleges and professional courses, Rs. 1,000 monthly assistance given to women under 'Pudhumai Pen Scheme', breakfast for school students scheme, free English medium education and other such schemes, given right now only to the students of the government schools should be extended to the students of government-aided private schools also.

Fr Kennedy said that the state government should withdraw the new norms proclaimed under the Tamil Nadu Private School Regulation Act 2018 as these norms are against the rights of the minority schools. Madurai bench of the Madras High Court gave a verdict in favour of teachers regarding the appointment and deployment of teachers in minority schools. But the State Government has gone on an appeal to the Supreme Court against this verdict. The Conference demanded that the TN government should withdraw this appeal and implement the verdict in toto.

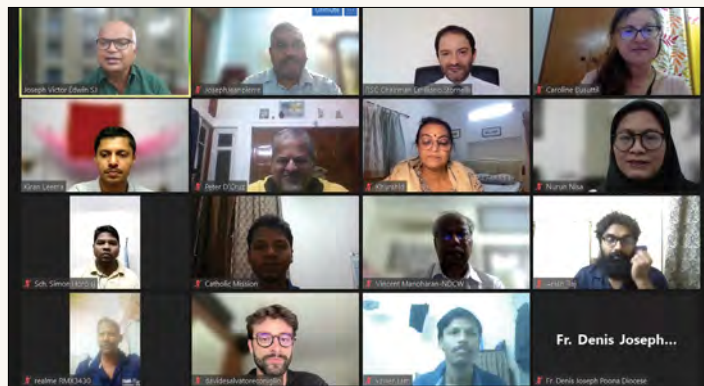
SM. John Kennedy, SJ (MDU)

ISA organizes webinar on HFD

Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of Religion and Security Council, Rome spoke at a webinar on 'Human Fraternity Document (HFD): In the Light of Interreligious Relations in West Asia' on 29 September 2023 organized by Islamic Studies Association, Delhi.

The Religion and Security Council promotes conflict resolution and cooperative approach to security through active engagement in the religious dimensions of international crises. The Council raises awareness on the means and guiding principles that religions can provide to support peace-making efforts and defuse confrontational situations.

Stornelli invited the participants, who were on-line from Europe to Asia-Pacific, to discover the great potential of HFD which constitutes an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all people of goodwill. He pointed out that HFD invites educators, peace activists and all people of good will to find ways to defuse tension,



facilitate mutual cooperation, create bonds based on trust and respect among groups that preserve in their memories malicious prejudices and hatred for one another.

The presentation was followed by a lively conversation based on establishing Human Fraternity Forums in Coimbatore (India) and Tripoli (Lebanon).

Victor Edwin, SJ (DEL)



Relishing the Ordinary

I have a vivid memory of the annual Christmas plays at my school, where I often found myself cast as one of the shepherds. On one occasion, I confided in my mother, expressing my desire to portray Mary or even Joseph. I still recall her gentle response, "Every small moment in life holds its own special significance. The Shepherds, after all, heard the eternal song of peace." In later years, I stumbled upon Coventry Patmore's poem, "The Toys," which pondered the idea that our joys are often crafted from the simplest of toys. During my doctoral studies, I read the renowned economist Schumacher's book, *Small Is Beautiful*, which presents the notion that 'small' could be a superior alternative to the pervasive belief

Pic courtesy: i.pinimg.com

that 'bigger is better.' In life's rich tapestry, it is often the unassuming threads that weave the most remarkable tales.

My mother instilled in me the art of treasuring the beauty of everyday moments, finding delight even in the seemingly mundane. Her own happiness seemed to stem from these apparently insignificant fragments, and it radiated to all who crossed her path. Even in my earliest memories, our home was a shelter for the struggling and those in pain, not because of its wealth, but because of the vastness of my mother's heart. Those who entered our doors found solace and joy in her presence. For me, it was this reverence for the ordinary and the small, along with a deep faith in the power of the present that guided me through life's most challenging trials.

Christmas, with its timeless narrative, serves as a reminder to savour the charm of life's unpretentious moments. Amidst the backdrop of an ordinary birth, what made Christmas extraordinary? Perhaps it was Mary's capacity to forgive, showcasing the remarkable resilience of the human spirit. She must have forgiven many, harbouring no grudges against those who shunned her and the society that ridiculed her for her unwed pregnancy. This transformed her into an epitome of grace and empathy, igniting a light of hope for future generations.

I recall a remarkable instance of forgiveness from a woman/mother who cared for her stepfather in his old age, despite enduring persistent sexual harassment from him during her childhood. To me, mothers embody the essence of forgiveness, much like Mary did.

What is striking in Joseph is his

“ I chose to favor both the institution and the individuals involved. When in doubt, I always favoured the individual who had less power. ”

ability to surrender, despite having to accept a woman pregnant out of wedlock and whose reasons he knew not. It stands as a poignant reminder of the power of letting go. He embraced the path of understanding and acceptance, paving the way for an extraordinary journey of self-discovery and enlightenment.

The lack of physical space during that pivotal moment of childbirth was transcended by the birth itself, symbolizing the boundless expansion of the heart. In the cramped confines of a stable, the arrival of the

child heralded a new chapter of infinite love and boundless possibilities, illustrating that even in the midst of limitations, growth and transformation can flourish.

Many of us hold leadership roles in different capacities, overseeing institutions, enterprises, organizations, or communities. During my tenure in a position of authority, I was advised to prioritize the well-being of the organization when faced with uncertainty. However, I always took this advice with a pinch of salt. Instead, I chose to favor both the institution and the individuals involved. When in doubt, I always favoured the individual who had less power. This approach presented challenges, but I remained resolute in my commitment. No person is insignificant, as there can be no greatness without the ordinary, no exception without the normal, and no institution without its people. Every significant accomplishment comprises countless small contributions.

Christmas calls us to cultivate a generous spirit that can elevate the mundane to the extraordinary, the individual to the exceptional, with a special emphasis on caring for the marginalized and the small. This is what set Jesus apart, and this is why Christmas, his birth, is so special. ❖

Pushpa Joseph is the Editor of *the Magnet*, the magazine of the CRI, published from Delhi. A feminist theologian, she writes on various topics. She can be contacted at raipush@gmail.com.



“Tell me a Christmas story!”

Once upon a time, as all good stories begin, a young man, displaced from his village, found himself in a strange town with nowhere to stay. He was anxious, and rightly so. He was from another place, “without papers”, and the police could easily pick him up and imprison him. Even worse, his girl-wife was with him, pregnant, and he worried about her health and the baby to come. If only he could find shelter for a few nights, until the pressure on him is off...

A rather unusual beginning for the most popular tale of the Christmas season, isn't it? But perhaps a certain kind of piety has blurred the sharpness of the Gospel narrative, and kept us from seeing how poignant and

how contemporary the situation of Mary and Joseph is with that of refugees and migrants everywhere.

The Christmas story is one of peace, joy and miracles. But it is also a story of violence, bloodshed and persecution. Of evil kings and infants divinely protected. Of mysterious portents and signs in the sky. Of extra-terrestrials, angels and exploding comets. And of kindness and helpfulness from the poor of this world – shepherds, stable-boys and innkeeper's wives.

Tell me a story! Christmas is a time for story-telling. Who are the story-tellers and minstrels today who charm us with their fantasies? Who speaks to our



feelings, addresses our deepest desires? Who keeps us hooked every night to tales of love and glamour, adventure, terror and intrigue? Television and film, of course; even as yesterday's stories came to us in novels and magazines. But television's predecessor is not print or radio – it is traditional religion.

It is religious stories which colour our earliest fantasies. They shape a mentality, and give a structure of belief to all that we think and feel and do. Story-telling makes the inner dynamics of life visible in dramatic form, for stories are nothing but our own personal experiences set in the larger context of history or society.

In recent years scholars have applied the form of story to Scripture and theology, and spiritual writers like the late Jesuit Fr Tony de Mello peppered his conferences with stories, jokes and anecdotes, “for we live our lives in terms of the stories we tell.”

A lot of church writing is found in books, scholarly articles and legal prescripts. This is good, but not enough. Books traffic in ideas and help us explain the world. But the challenge, as Marx astutely noted, is not to interpret the world but to change it. It is myths and stories which change the world – for better or for worse.

The nineteenth century was carried forward on the twin myths of “scientific progress” and the “white man's burden”. A hundred years and two world wars later, we realize that they were defective myths at best.

Our nation today is being force-fed on the myths of Hindutva, where truths are suppressed or manipulated to suit the fictions of a majoritarian ethos – *acche din, gau raksha*, black money, Ram temple and Sardar statue, demonetization and the digital economy.

Against these bogus fantasies promoted by the purveyors of “post truth”, what counter stories do we tell our people? The Church has hundreds of stories culled from the Bible and the lives of its heroic members – the saints. But they have to be re-told and re-interpreted in terms which make sense to the men and women of today.

It is the arrogance of mainstream culture – found sadly in the Church as well – to believe that only “important people” have got stories to tell, and that ordinary people must remain forgotten and “voiceless”.

Listen to Walter Benjamin, that astute commentator on modernity: “The only way to approach the great values of life in this troubled age is through the “micro-narrative” – the short story, the cameo, the memoir, the personal diary. It reminds us that each of us has a story, and that it is not insignificant.

Another falsehood is that we must only tell “good stories” – which do not shock or scandalize. People who speak thus obviously don't know their Bible, how the “word of God” churns and transforms the crooked ways of men, and brings ‘salvation’ out of death and destruction.

There are thousands of stories waiting to emerge from ordinary working people, if only they would be encouraged to tell them in words, song and dance, in images and in dramatic narrative. It is when these emerge from the collective imagination of a people that we can begin to build our Indian Christian story, set in a time of change, transition, persecution and survival. For what keeps our Catholic faith vibrant is not so much laws and synods, as the shared camaraderie of a fascinating story.

So let's conclude with the fragment of another story:

Sometime before Christmas, two young women gossiped by the village well: “Miriam, that old cousin you met, she-she's not pregnant, is she?”

“But she is! She is!”

“Bu-but it can't be. She's...soo..old!”

“I know. She too knows...but as we say, God knows!”

“Whewww. Can't believe it. It's...it's so upsetting...”

“I know. It is upsetting. Listen....I'm pregnant too!”

“Bu-but you're not married yet, Miriam. You mean... Joseph...?”

“No, not Joseph. Definitely not Joseph.”

“O my god...then who?”

“I know...and what's more, God knows!”



Myron Pereira, SJ, (BOM) lives at Campion School, Colaba, Mumbai, where he is writer-in-residence. He can be contacted at pereira.myron@yahoo.in.



The Jesuit mission to protect the Amazonian natives

Film: The Mission (1986)

Director: Roland Joffé

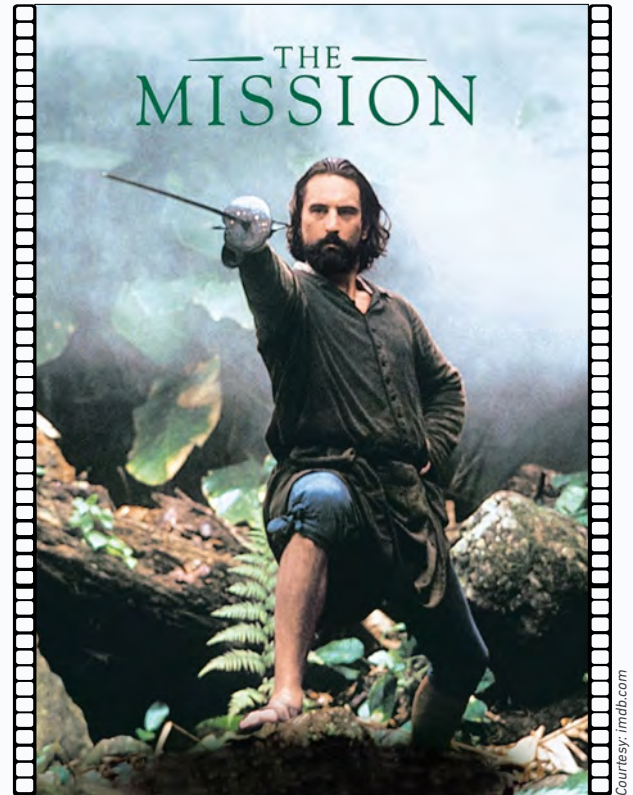
Cast: Robert De Niro, Jeremy Irons, Liam Neeson, Ray McAnally, Aidan Quinn Cherie Lunghi

Based on tragic historical events this movie tells the gripping tale of the Jesuit missionary martyrs who fought the colonialist exploitation of Amazonian natives in the 1750s. When the first Jesuit missionary was sent to start a mission among the jungle tribe of Guaraní in Paraguay, he was killed by the natives who hated and feared the enslaving European colonists. When Spain and Portugal were disputing over Amazonian territories, the Spanish Jesuit Gabriel reached the Guaraní village in a fresh attempt and wins them over with his music and builds his mission.

Rodrigo Mendoza, a kidnapper, slave trader and mercenary, murders his own brother over a failed love affair. He escapes punishment, repents and Fr Gabriel converts him. He participates in the Guaraní mission when the natives forgive him and accept him. Mendoza helps to build up the mission, providing education and a better life to the poor Guaraní, eventually becoming a Jesuit.

When the Portuguese take over the territory after 'The Treaty of Madrid', the natives are threatened with enslavement. The missionaries oppose this. The Vatican sends an emissary to decide upon the future of the missions in the area. He is politically manipulated; and the local Cardinal is caught in the intrigue. Though during his visit to the mission he is impressed by work of the missionaries, among the Guaraní, he declines to support the Jesuits in fear of persecution by the Portuguese. If he favours the colonists, the natives would be enslaved. The Cardinal orders to close the mission asking the people to move away, explaining it as God's will.

The Guaraní refuse to abandon their village. Risking excommunication, Gabriel and Mendoza join them. The two cannot agree on the method of fighting injustice. Gabriel believes that violence is against God; Mendoza believes in a 'just war.' He gives up his vow of peace to put up a fight. He trains the natives to battle the invading Portuguese army. In the climactic showdown, Fr Fielding, the head of the Mission, gets killed fighting the Portuguese commander. Fr Gabriel leads a procession of the unarmed villagers, with the Blessed Sacrament held aloft facing the invaders. Both Gabriel and Mendoza are killed in the massacre that follows. When Gabriel falls with monstrance in hand a little child picks it up and leads the procession.



Courtesy: imdb.com

Later the Governor offers his regret to the Cardinal, but the Cardinal's reply implies that it is a world of their making. As a tribute to the heroic missionaries who fought for the rights of indigenous people and as an exploration of the opposition between peaceful resistance and 'just war' for bringing about change, the film is outstanding.

Shot on location and starring top notch artists, the movie is regarded as the greatest Catholic movie of the recent decades. It won one Oscar (with 9 nominations), several international awards – BAFTA, Cannes, and Venice Festival awards. ❖

Prof. Gigy Joseph Kootummel was Head of the Department of English SB College, Changanacherry. After three decades of teaching English Language and Literature he worked as Principal of a College. He did his doctoral work on Narratology. He is a sought after writer, translator, columnist and actor-director of Shakespeare productions.



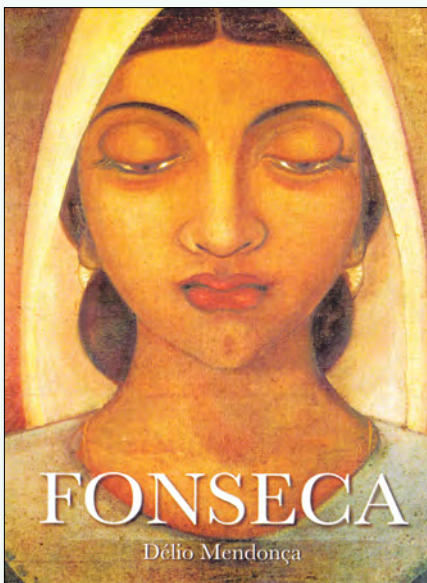
A pioneer of Christian art in the Indian style

Delio Mendonca talks about his book on the pioneering Indian artist, Fonseca.

What made you write this book?

A good, complete book on this great Indian artist, Angelo da Fonseca (1902-1967) and to his magnum opus should have been written a long time ago. This lacuna is what made me write this book.

Why is Angelo da Fonseca an Indian artist whom we cannot ignore?



Fonseca, Délío Mendonça, Architecture Autonomous, 2022, pp. 252, images 126. (www.angelofonseca.com).

Fonseca is the pioneer of Christian art in the Indian style. He stands out as one of the greatest artists of the last century. His art represents a confluence of various cultural, religious and philosophical traditions that have met in the vast Indian soil over the centuries and that should be cherished.

What is unique about his paintings?

Fonseca indianized Christian art. He bridged the Eastern and Western cultural and artistic traditions. His art came to represent a grand synthesis of various aesthetic and cultural movements. His paintings are exemplary representations of the best Indian and human traditions. ❖

Délío Mendonça, SJ is a Jesuit of the Goa Province. He teaches at Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

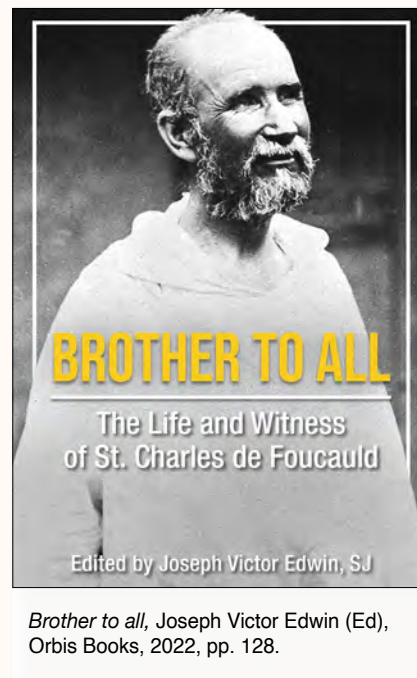


A model of fraternity and friendship

Joseph Victor Edwin talks about a book he edited on a saint who lived among Muslims.

Congratulations! Your book has won an award from the Catholic Media Association in the U.S. What is this book about?

Thanks. This book is about St Charles de Foucauld, who lived as a hermit and a contemplative and was killed by Sanusi raiders in Tamanrasset in 1916. St Foucauld lived a life of poverty and a silent presence amid Tuareg people as a friend, as their 'universal brother', adopting a poor, simple way of life.



Brother to all, Joseph Victor Edwin (Ed), Orbis Books, 2022, pp. 128.

It is a collection of articles on St. Charles Foucauld. Who are the writers?

The contributors to this volume include students and followers of Charles de Foucauld, both scholars,

missionaries, religious and lay people, all exploring aspects of his life and message, and attempting to assess his inspiration and meaning for our times.

What is the importance of this saint for our times?

I believe his model of contemplative life and 'presence' among Muslims makes him one of the great spiritual teachers of our time. St. Foucauld was beatified in 2005 and canonized as a saint in 2022. Even before this event, Pope Francis singled him out in 2020, in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, as a model of 'fraternity and social friendship'. ❖

Joseph Victor Edwin, SJ (DEL) is a lecturer of theology and Christian-Muslim relations at the Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi.

Avellino Remedios, SJ (BOM)

Remedios was a 'People's Person': friendly; one who enjoyed meeting and talking with people. He would always begin any conversation with 'What's Up?'. These two words had a beautiful alchemy of endearing him to others. By his ability to fluently speak in English, Marathi and Warli he created a circle of friends and well-wishers in the places where he worked. Children, youth or the elderly, he would connect with all with the same comfort and ease.

His ministry was based on the triad of Contact – Communication – Relationships. Connect with people, Converse with people and to Consolidate relationships. He approached and resolved the problems of the Parish with the active participation of the people. He showed by example that a priest has to be available for and identify with the people

24x7. In the true spirit of synodality, he instilled in the people a sense of belonging and ownership of the Church. With his perceptive observations he was able to contribute in the Pastoral, Education and Youth ministries.

He reached out to the poor and the Warli tribals with extra affection and concern. He supported ventures to promote and preserve their language, culture and art. He strived to spread the Gospel in their idiom and translated the Gospels in the Warli language. He co-authored 'Mythos and Logos of the Warlis', a book that is used as a reference book by many. He was a true People's Person: a 'Zinda Dil' missionary. St. Peter at the pearly gates must have said to him, 'Fr. Remedios, What's Up? You are welcome!'

|| Sanjeev Gonsalves, SJ



Dionysius Lobo, SJ (BOM)

Dion died as he lived - peacefully on the morning of Sunday 24 September 2023. Dion was 78 years old and 62 years in the Society. His entire priestly ministry of 48 years was in education - 17 years in Manickpur, Vasai, D.Ed. College as teacher educator and principal; 15 years in Talasari as teacher, head master and manager of schools; 12 years in St. Xavier's School, Nashik as teacher and Manager and 4 years in REAP with non-formal education as teacher educator.

No one would have thought this frail, unassuming man would give so much of his life for so many years and make such an impact. He was not one to show his feelings, but he had a big heart – especially for the poor. Hundreds of

tribal students in Talasari and teacher trainees in Manickpur will testify to his care and concern for them. He exuded humility. He was humble enough to opt to work in a non-formal set-up for four years. It was edifying to see a college principal, HM of schools teach simple slum and village teacher-trainees the basics of language and poetry.

Whatever he did, he did it meticulously. The new ICSE school is his brain child. He thought of every minute detail. As a pastor he will be remembered for his simple, short sermons peppered with anecdotes and stories that drove home a message. Nashik people called his sermons 'morning gems'.

|| Trevor Miranda, SJ



John Britto Bonaventure, SJ (MDU)

Fr. John Britto Bonaventure's association with Higher Education, first as a student and then as professor, research scholar and administrator, began and ended at St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli. His years of active ministry were mostly spent at St. Joseph's with short stints at St. Xavier's College, Palayamkottai (1977 to 1984), Clive House, Tiruchi (2017-19), St. Mary's, Dindigul (2019-21) and Beschi Illam (2021-'22), Dindigul. Back again at St. Joseph's in 2022, he continued with his research work and publications.

As an enthusiastic researcher in Botany, he became the chosen successor of Fr. K.M. Mathew as Director of the Herbarium and Anglade Institute of Research. He had proven leadership qualities. He was twice Principal of St. Joseph's College (1991-2001 and 2004-2005) and although he had been Rector there once (1988-1991), he had to become the Rector

again in difficult circumstances in December 2010. He continued to serve in that capacity till 2017. A visionary, he enabled St. Joseph's campus to scale new heights by taking some important new initiatives.

On 29 September, with his legs swollen and kidneys not working properly, Fr. Britto was admitted to the hospital for haemodialysis. When everyone thought he was getting better, his condition deteriorated suddenly and he was anointed. At 5.16 p.m. on the following day, October 13, he breathed his last. On 14 October, Fr. Thomas Amirtham, the Provincial, presided over the Funeral Mass and Fr. I. Arul, Fr. Britto's co-novice, was the homilist. Those who spoke after the Mass paid him rich tributes. Fr. Britto's mortal remains were then laid to rest in the crypt below the College Church of Our Lady of Lourdes.

|| A.I. Rajasekaran, SJ





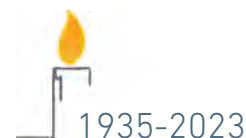
Joy John Arackal, SJ (DEL)

Fr. Joy John Arackal breathed his last at 5.00 pm on 7 October 2023, at Jivodaya Hospital, Delhi. Hailing from Thuruthy, Changanassery, Kerala, as a teenager, he had an intense desire to become a priest to serve God in North India. "His heart was on fire, and his feet were on the move. He entered the Society of Jesus on 4 June 1965. After his ordination, he had an unquenchable thirst for working in Patna mission. Later, when Delhi Province was established, he opted to work there. Physically, he was short and thin, but in reality, he was filled with energy and zeal. He was a committed parish priest in places like Bettiah, Marpa, Latonah, Jaipur, and Bhiwadi where he nurtured the faith of the people. He was always available, understanding, and compassionate

towards the needy. Through his simple and exemplary life, he made a great impression on the hearts of many people. He also served as an assistant treasurer at St Xavier's Schools in Patna, Jaipur, Bhiwadi, and Shahabad.

As a zealous missionary, he went through many hardships in life but never gave up. Just a few days before his death, he used a whistle to communicate when he lost his voice. Such was his creativity to adjust to adverse situations. Towards the end of his life, Fr. Joy John wrote his biography titled Joy to the World, An Autobiography of a Jesuit Priest. He continues to live in the memory of many who came into contact with him.

I Britto, SJ



Mani V. Nedumattam, SJ (DEL)

Fr. Mani V. Nedumattam, SJ was born on 18 February 1935 in a devout Catholic family. Wanting to be a missionary in North India, he joined the Patna Province in 1955. At Bettiah, northern Bihar, he learnt Hindi. He was ordained a priest in Patna on 12 March 1967. He was sent to study education from Loyola University, Chicago. He served as the principal of St Xavier's, Jaipur, and the headmaster of St Xavier's School, Delhi. He left his legacy as a capable administrator and mentor leaving an indelible mark on the lives of his students. As a pastoral guide and counselor, he contributed to the life of Jesuit brothers in training by being their teacher and spiritual guide. He also served as a capable retreat preacher.

He had a small stint as a spiritual guide and retreat preacher in Nairobi, Kenya and Allahabad.

He also served as an assistant to the Provincial Superior of the Delhi Province from 1998-2009. He was assigned to St Xavier's, Jaipur community to help the students as counsellor and a spiritual guide. He relished his life and complained about nothing. He had learnt to live as an ascetic because of the dietary constraints imposed by his long ailment of very sensitive inner walls of the mouth. In February 2023 he was diagnosed with the cancer of the mouth and the treatment was started. Ever a humble religious priest, he repeatedly requested that not much be spent for his treatment but obeyed his superiors. He breathed his last on 25 October 2023 at a ripe age of 88 years. He is much missed by his students, family and fellow Jesuits.

I Nelson D'Silva, SJ



Thomas Koyipuram, SJ (AND)

Born on 20 January 1929 at Pala, Kerala, Thomas Koyipuram entered the Society on 1 Aug. 1950. He was ordained a priest on 24 March 1962 and took his Last Vows on 2 February 1966. He died on 2 Sept 2023 at St. Ann's Hospital, Vijayawada. The first condolence message from a member of an Alumni Whatsapp group was "A saint is no more", followed by "he was a simple, gentle, humble priest". I would add: He was a mystic, artist, photographer, reader and a listener of international, national and local news through his small transistor in the past, and later, on TV.

Fr. Koyipuram came to Vinukonda, Andhra Pradesh, in 1966 and was appointed as the

Assistant Parish Priest. He used only a bicycle as he did not know how to ride a motor cycle nor how to drive a jeep. He had to cross small streams and a big water tank known as 'Gundla Kamma' in his pastoral journey. He was a true Jesuit: he dared to go where others would not go, and where there was greater need. Soaked in the spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises he used things in so far as they led to God and to the good of the people. As parish priest for 16 years and as spiritual guide for 36 years, he preached and explained the Word of God in a simple style. He lived the beatitudes.

I P.S. Amalraj, SJ

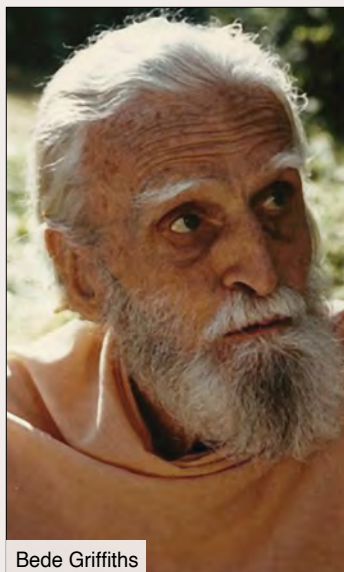


A garden can bring you God's messages

Once I turned for guidance to the late Dom Bede Griffiths, a British Benedictine monk, who lived for many years and died at Shantivanam, also called Saccidananda Ashram, near Kulithalai in Tamil Nadu, India. As a young man he had an experience of Nature that left him with a "feeling of awe," such that even the sky seemed "but a veil before the face of God."

Subsequently, the smallest details of nature drew him beyond himself, to the awareness: "We are no longer isolated individuals in conflict with our surroundings; we are parts of a whole, elements in a universal harmony," he said.

On my visits, I saw him daily sitting in his garden outside his hut at Saccidananda Ashram. He said he created this colourful space "because a garden provides spiritual opportunities for breaking the daily routine and of quiet listening. A garden is God's message bearer to the soul, as though a veil has been lifted."



Bede Griffiths

When, sometimes, he felt cut off and isolated from the world, Fr Bede said: "I sought ways of discovering a sense of unity and meaning in my day-to-day experiences. I would stop, and listen, watch and learn." Based on his own experience, he recommended: "When you are thrown back on self-doubt and confusion, live in the light of all you observe and feel part of it; shape your life by its law."

But it doesn't come cheaply, he said. "It calls for all our energies, and involves both labour and sacrifice; each one approaches it from a different angle and has to work out his own particular problem. I find meditation, prayer, spiritual reading and the daily Eucharist are the cornerstones of my day."

Some days around 2.30 AM, I would see him sitting deep in contemplation, which was his unfailing daily preparation for the Eucharist, the celebration of which was enhanced by his intoning Sanskrit chants

and Tamil songs, and adapting several Indian rituals such as waving of lights, scattering water and placing of flowers around the bread and wine.

When I sought a reliable way of contemplation, Bede Griffiths urged me to try what he had been using for years: "I strongly urge you to use the method I do - I call it 'Jesu-Abba' meditation." His instruction was simple: "Sit comfortably, relax, attend to your breathing. As you inhale quietly say 'Jesu.' On exhaling quietly say 'Abba'. Keep going like this for twenty or thirty minutes twice a day - or more if you can."

Bede Griffiths' spiritual journey began in his youth with a spiritual experience of nature, where "every step in advance is a return to the beginning." It finally led him to seeing Cosmic beauty everywhere, "which is truth and Love, for the divine is found, not only in Nature, but also in the minds and hearts of human beings."

Reminiscing on his life, he said: "I sought the divine in the solitude of nature, and in the labour of my mind." But eventually he found God in his community and the spirit of charity. Until then he felt he had been "wandering in a far country and now had returned home," that he "had been dead and was alive again;" that he "had been lost and was found."

Here in Australia and many parts of Europe, churches are empty. But the ordinary people seek new ways of thriving spiritually. Once I heard Fr Bede share with the Dalai Lama: "It is likely, because of the Tibetan diaspora, many Catholic Christians will find the roots of their own rich tradition of meditation." His words have come true. Many Christians have now discovered that what they thought were new ways of praying and meditating have indeed been ancient practices of Christian contemplation from the time of Desert Fathers and Mothers. ❖

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 December, 2023

For people with disabilities

Let us pray that people with disabilities may be at the centre of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusion programmes that value their active participation.



Pope's Worldwide
Prayer Network





In the inn of the world

“In the inn of the world there is room for everyone. To refuse entry to anyone, for whatever reason, is to risk irreparable loss.”

I arrived in Bali, Indonesia on the day before Christmas. December was a good month for Bali, with hot days, balmy nights, and long afternoons ending in spectacular sunsets. The palace of the Agung was less than an hour's walk.

The Agung sent me to the cottage where I liked to stay, saying, “Ratab will be there with you to take care of what you may need. Come to dinner at seven.”

Ratab was his servant. He was 17 years old, had a secondary school education, was neither shy nor aggressive, but had a simple, honest quality that was most charming. When we reached the cottage, I said, “It's beautiful here. It's a perfect place to spend Christmas.”

“Christmas? What is Christmas?” asked Ratab.

I started a simple telling of the Christmas story. I had never realized what an exciting, charming, and delightfully mystical tale it is.

When I finished, Ratab asked, “But why would not the people allow Mary and Joseph to share their bed?” I explained that neither Mary nor

Joseph knew anyone in Bethlehem, but this did not seem to make any difference to Ratab, who insisted that someone should have made room for them in their bed.

I said, “But they did not know that Mary was to give birth to their God, Jesus.”

“That is not important,” said Ratab. “If Mary was travelling, if she was going to have a child, they should have given her a place to rest.” I changed the subject, telling him about the significance of the Christmas tree.

After resting in the afternoon we bathed in the river. All the men, after their bath, gathered around Ratab, who began to talk. I didn't know their language, but I heard words like Jesus, Mary and Bethlehem. Later that evening we walked to the Agung's palace. The Agung took my arm and led me. “Ratab told me that you related the Christmas story to him. Yes, it will be Christmas. I have ordered a Christmas dinner for you.”

After a lavish dinner we left for the cottage. The sky was filled with stars. When we reached the cottage, I found in the doorway a banana tree

and on each branch several flowers of assorted colours had been tied. Scattered about the tree were small clay oil lamps like tiny stars. “Your Christmas tree,” said Ratab.

My eyes welled with tears. When we entered the cottage, the room was filled with boys who had met us while bathing in the river. Each of them had brought me a Christmas present – bananas, coconuts, papayas, pieces of batik, paintings and even oil lamps. I sat on the floor among them and the conversation never stopped. They all wanted to hear the Christmas story from me. When the story was over, I passed the fruits and went into the bedroom. What did I have to give them? I took everything from my suitcase, like T-shirts, socks and shirts and gave them away. They were all delighted with their gifts. They began to sing and dance and I joined them.

After a while Ratab announced that I must be tired and that it was time for sleep. Then he explained that several of the guests had asked for the honour of staying overnight. He chose six boys who would share with me the only small bed in that room. Like joyfully exhausted children they fell asleep instantly – one still holding my hand, another with his head on my shoulder, another with his leg over mine.

Ratab, who had taken the place of honor at my side, slid his arm under my head. He whispered, “I still don't understand why they could not make room for Mary.”

(adapted from 'No Room at the Inn' in his book, Seven Stories of Christmas Love)

Leo Buscaglia, also known as “Dr. Love”, was an American author, motivational speaker, and a professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Southern California.

WELL SAID

**“Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.”
- G.K. Chesterton**

